

ULRA Reflective Essay

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Prof. Wetmore's Theatre and Theology final project was to write a research paper examining an aspect of class not yet covered (minimum ten pages, minimum five sources where half could be web-based). I was interested in investigating Mary Magdalene, as all I heard growing up was the usual: repentant whore or Jesus' wife. As a theatre artist and screenwriter, I was curious about her media portrayal as she seemed taboo in public discourse. I was nervous about finding enough information about her to provide a three-dimensional view, until I accessed the library. I was able to find eight scholarly journal sources analyzing her historical background (Biblical and apocryphal texts, media portrayals); I was struck by how much information existed on her. They showed that historically, she's either a whore, a wife, erased, significant, or insignificant. This research process aided my thesis development immensely. Instead of writing a paper simply about her depictions in theology and theatre, I could now argue that due to her endlessly varied depictions and church patriarchy, she's fractured, and it's theatre that reaffirms or challenges who she actually was.

As this was an online course, I was home out of state; without the library's online research tools, I wouldn't have been able to support my thesis. Beginning with helpful LibGuides, I went through relevant topics (Theatre Arts, Theology) and focused on utilizing research databases, deciding OneSearch+ was most invaluable due to its efficiency and accessibility; this was my central research strategy. A main problem was having an overwhelming amount of articles, where some seemed promising, but off-topic. OneSearch+ allowed me to use the advanced search feature to promptly refine my results with different key words to ensure I was obtaining applicable findings. When a full PDF wasn't available, it

provided offshoot 'read online' or 'read text' links which I typically found successful, and bibliographies of results that didn't quite fit the topic led me to articles that did. Selecting varying disciplines (women's studies/feminism, drama/theatre arts, film, religion/philosophy), scholarly journals, and varying publication dates gave me a wide array of options, and I made sure to examine results for trustworthiness (author, publisher, date, peer-reviewed), applicability, and bias. I found theological information on Magdalene (analyzing both canon and gnostic texts), and media depictions. A chance discovery was an art journal describing a Magdalene art exhibition; though art history wasn't something I'd intended to research, it was recommended to me because it fit my search criteria. It reconfirmed other sources and elevated them because it applied Magdalene's depictions to a media form (just as I was going to do with the plays and film).

I did select non-scholarly articles to gauge the general public's view of Magdalene through Google: Time and Smithsonian articles, a blog in a theology journal discussing her feast day and church patriarchy, and the Vatican Bulletin detailing the feast day announcement. Though my research was mainly independent, Prof. Wetmore recommended plays and films from which I determined my three primary sources: two plays (Guirgis' from bookstore, Maeterlinck's I found only as an old copy scanned in Google books) and the film in LMU's streaming film library.

To avoid contradictions in sources, I gathered a variety of analyses and gave equal time to each, even if it challenged my assumptions. For example, I assumed Magdalene was romantically tied to Jesus, but upon further research, I learned this was yet another fragment of her depiction I'd grown up hearing; learning about gnostic texts, Bible texts, and church patriarchy, I was able to examine the plays and film to contribute a new idea, that of a

platonic/religious intimacy that can be seen in both plays, yet contested in the film. Most difficult was finding information from the Church; the Vatican Bulletin was its only clear statement, but this was solved by OneSearch+ where I gained critical insight through scholarly sources that interpreted her Biblical portrayals.

This assignment bloomed into a captivating research inquiry I applied and analyzed through the two plays and films to come to my conclusion. This line of inquiry was made possible through utilizing library resources, allowing me to try to piece together the fragments of who Magdalene was through research.