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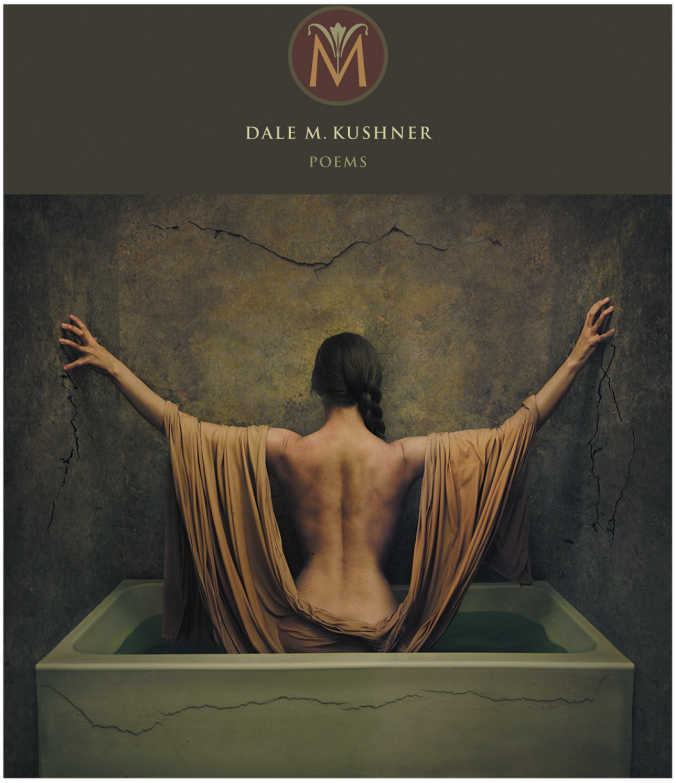

One of the most challenging ideas in Jungian psychology is understanding how an archetype, a content-free organizing principle in the collective unconscious, can manifest through various guises in myth, culture, and personal experience. For example, how can the gods Hermes, Mercury, Coyote, and Raven possibly relate to the same archetypal ground? Questions like this, daunting though they may be to answer definitively, are precisely the questions needed to illuminate the brilliance of Jung's understanding of psychic structure.

Poet Dale Kushner explores this enigmatic link between the archetype and its expression in her latest volume, *M*. In this beautiful work, Kushner dives deeply into the archetypal ground that I call "the Magdalene," an aspect of the divine feminine that is a constitutive element of psyche and world. The book seems to originate from the transcendent matrix of active imagination with the character and essence of Mary Magdalene. This is not surprising since the author, Dale M. Kushner, is a poet, novelist, and essayist with deep Jungian roots. Inspired by the traditions and teachings that flowed from the figure of Mary Magdalene, the book

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presents a triplicity of paths reminiscent of the triple goddess aspect of the Magdalene's stories. The three ways are called the "Via Desiderio," the "Via Dolorosa," and the "Via Transformativa," which depict relatedness through eros, redemption through sorrow, and the profound metamorphosis of the soul, respectively. The volume amplifies the potent expression of the archetypal feminine that the Magdalene has come to represent. Kushner's poetry illuminates this archetypal ground, giving voice to the richness that emerges from it, including passion, bereavement, rage, resilience, and the redemption and re-creation of the soul.

The first path, "Via Desiderio," or the way of desire or Eros, brings the reader from creation to emptiness, leading to whispers of promise and ultimate fulfillment. When all is lost after humanity's exile from the paradise of Eden, the poem "Expulsion" mixes imagery of wandering, regret, and amnesia, leading to ecstasy and ending with the enigmatic line, "sorrow ripening their minds." This ripening gives way, in the poem "Prophesy," to a promise heard by Mary Magdalene as she pondered her confusion:

> Then she heard him speak.
> *Your days of sorrow will end*.
> And saw under that mildness
> his dark face
> was bruised with shadows
> in which the broken world lay shattered.
>
> Later, she knew he was the one
> the seer had prophesied behind a tent,
> her childself squatting in the dried grass.
> *The caterpillar won't let go,* Magdalene had complained,
> as she tried to pry it from a stalk.
> *And so shall you cling,* the prophetess had told her.
> Forever, only him.

The imagery of this way of desire moves through passion, surrender, death, and ultimately to wisdom, replacing traditional resurrection imagery with the embodied realization of the "great secret: we are not separate bodies."

The poems included in the second part of the book, "Via Dolorosa," or the way of sorrow, present portraits of individual women from around the world, spanning the sixteenth to the twenty-first century, each of whom knew grief. These poems offer the reader an opportunity to view tragedy from the eyes and hearts of the mourners themselves. Kushner seems to be reminding us to be consistent in our witnessing, as the Magdalene was in hers: if we are not separate bodies, so we all somehow participate in each person's grief.

The poems in the third part of the book, "Via Transformativa," or the way of transformation, carry the reader beyond desire, loss, and mourning. The poems embody the fruits of profound metamorphosis, including everything experienced on the earlier paths of passion and sorrow. This section contains distinctly personal images, which are also unexpectedly universal

precisely because of the specificity of their content. In the poem "The Handless Maiden," Kushner reimagines the fairy tale as one of profound metamorphosis:

> … Tale of death and renewal.
> Of the handless maiden, her calculating father,
> and the devil, that loneliness, craving her beauty.
> And the king who fashions a pair of silver hands. Amputation
> is not always annihilation, a blunt
> but important fact. Remember,
> there is often a garden. Globes of potent fruit.
> And angels, sometimes in the form of a snake.
> I am not lying about any of this. Not just in fairy tales
> the hands grow back.

It is an auspicious time for this work to appear, given the increasing interest in the Magdalene from the perspective of biblical scholarship and cultural studies. There are many reasons for this, including ongoing literary and archaeological scholarship regarding so-called non-canonical writings such as the Coptic Gospel of Mary and the gospels attributed to Philip and Thomas. These "apocryphal" texts were deemed "uninspired" by the rising monotheistic, patriarchal perspective that banished the great feminine deities and their mystery cults. Yet these ancient texts elevate the feminine aspect of divinity and, in Mary Magdalene's case, highlight her profound position as the receiver and container of divine wisdom, knowledge, and understanding. Because of this scholarship, it has become clear in recent decades that the image of Mary Magdalene as the fallen woman—a prostitute, a reformed sinner, a penitent who drew her faith from her redemption through the kindness of Jesus, who overlooked her sinful past—is an all too familiar image solidified by the sixth century of the Common Era, but only in the Western branch of the early Christian movement.

In contrast, the Eastern branch of the Church has always taught that she was an important disciple who lived during Jesus's lifetime. The Gospel of Luke suggests that she was a wealthy woman who may have offered spiritual and material support to the early community of believers. Two of the other gospels present her as the first witness to the Resurrection. In the texts, it is reported that she brought that news to the other disciples. In the Middle Ages, she was referred to as *apostola apostolorum,* the apostle of the apostles. It would seem that, for some reason, the power structure in the Western Church seemed intent on denigrating her.

Nevertheless, a tradition of veneration for her persisted in the West and the East throughout the Middle Ages up to the present day. The persistence of this veneration reflects the vital role of the non-clerical faithful in sustaining traditions that the power-possessing patriarchy deem to be threats to its hegemony. Modern scholarship supports this traditional veneration with textual and archaeological evidence of the Magdalene's central role in the community of the apostles. Research on ancient texts is ongoing, as is archaeological field work, making it likely that new findings will bring even more cogent support for a new understanding of the feminine in the Abrahamic religions.

There is a tradition that when the Magdalene reached Jesus's tomb and saw that it was empty, she turned to a gardener to inquire where the body had been taken. The man she thought was the gardener said, "Mary, don't you know who I am?" She then realized she was speaking to Jesus. Similarly, Kushner's collection of poetry in *M* asks that we see the presence of the Magdalene in each of the women we meet through her exquisite poetic imagery.

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ABSTRACT

This is a review of a new book of poetry by Dale M. Kushner, entitled *M*. It contains poetry inspired by the mythos of Mary Magdalene.

KEY WORDS

Dale Kushner, Mary Magdalene, poetry