

**“Girlhood Trauma-Telling in Rachael Romero’s Series of Paintings and Visual Poem,
The Magdalen Diaries (2011)”**

by Dr Marine Berthiot

The Catholic Order of the Good Shepherd, founded in Angers, France in 1835, industrialised Magdalenism by systematising laundry work for women and girl ‘penitents’. Good Shepherd nuns opened their first Magdalene Laundry in 1863 in Melbourne, Australia. By the middle of the twentieth century, they had established seven convents across the settler colony (Kovesi). To these were added Laundries belonging to other Catholic Orders, Protestant denominations, and lay associations. Australians had to wait until 1980 to see the last Magdalene Laundry close its doors (Franklin). In 2013, the Taoiseach Enda Kenny made an apology to former Magdalenes for the abusive treatment they had received in Irish Laundries. The same year, Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard officially apologised towards single mothers and their forcefully adopted children who had survived Magdalenism. Magdalene ‘penitents’ could be confined for numerous motives, such as ebriety, homelessness, out-of-wedlock pregnancy, incest, rape, paedophilia, mental and/or physical disabilities, Indigeneity, and beauty (Jones and Record; Seal and O’Neill). Rachael Romero, a non-Indigenous Australian woman artist and activist, testifies in her art to the abuse she endured when, at age 14, she was incarcerated in a Magdalene Institute called “The Pines” in South Australia. Her series of paintings and visual poem, *The Magdalen Diaries*, depict the ‘penitents’ conditions of life under the nuns’ constant watch.

This paper will examine how Rachael Romero adapts life writing devices to convey Magdalene trauma in her paintings and visual poem. At first, I will explore how her paintings can be read as ‘limit-cases’, following Leigh Gilmore’s terminology. Then, I will study how Romero conveys the idea of pain via the use of the *Künstlerroman*. Finally, I will focus on the way she challenges the unrepresentable character of her girlhood trauma in the silence of her paintings and the words of her poem.

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Mini-Bio

Marine Berthiot holds a PhD in Aotearoa New Zealand Literature from The University of Edinburgh. She is an early career researcher whose research interests are trauma studies, childhood studies, Pacific literatures, decoloniality, Indigenous literatures, and Magdalene trauma-telling. Her new research examines the way genres, gender, and trauma-telling

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