



Those bloody trees: the affectivity of Christ

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Chapter 9

Those Bloody Trees: The Affectivity of *Christ*

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The tradition of affective piety in both literature and art is usually seen as emerging in the high Middle Ages, and as flourishing after the Fourth Lateran Council made confession an annual requirement:¹

For more than half of a century now, scholarship on the history of medieval spirituality has drawn attention to a profound shift in the patterns of devotion that took place in western Europe around the middle of the eleventh century. In this era we witness the emergence of a radically new form of piety centred on compassionate devotion to the suffering of Christ. ... Suddenly, pious reflection turned to contemplate, with increasing fervour, the excruciating pains endured by Christ in the crucifixion, inviting the faithful to share mentally in the torment and sorrow.²

Meditation on the sufferings of Christ or his mother was thought to elicit contrition and lead to a deepened faith, thereby avoiding the passive and mechanical devotion that was likely in a church that dictated when and how one demonstrated repentance for one's sins.

This type of affective faith is not absent from Old English literature, though. Scott DeGregorio notes that,

¹ See, for example, T. H. Bestul, *Texts of the Passion: Latin Devotional Literature and Medieval Society* (Philadelphia, 1996); R. Kieckhefer, 'Convention and Conversion: Patterns in Late-Medieval Piety', *Church History* 67 (1998): 32–51; S. McNamer, *Affective Meditation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion* (Philadelphia, 2010); R. A. Powell, 'Margery Kempe: An Exemplar of Late Medieval English Piety', *The Catholic Historical Review* 89 (2003): 1–23; O. D. Watkins, *A History of Penance*, 2 vols (London, 1920).

² S. J. Shoemaker, 'Mary at the Cross, East and West: Maternal Compassion and Affective Piety in the Earliest *Life of the Virgin* and the High Middle Ages', *Journal of Theological Studies*, 62 (2011): 570–606, at 570–71.

Bede ... speaks of being ‘inflamed with God’s love until there is an effusion of tears’ (‘amore illius usque ad lacrimarum fusionem inflammari’), of being ‘enkindled with desire for things eternal and longing for the face of our Creator’ (‘aeternorum desiderii accensi atque eius quem nondum uidemus conditoris nostril faciem suspirantes’) and of what he calls ‘the opening of secret compunction’ (‘foramen secretae compunctionis’), which causes those who experience it to ‘become warm’ (‘incaluit’), ‘melt’ (‘liquefuit’), and ‘dissolve in tears’ (‘in lacrimis resolui’). Such language, and more so the range of emotional experience it seeks to trigger in the individual believer, should be all too familiar to scholars of later medieval devotion, who, bypassing Anglo-Saxon England, rush to make the eleventh and twelfth centuries the *terminus post quem* for the emergence of affective elements in western devotional literature.³

In this chapter, I shall focus on one specific passage and the startling imagery contained therein to shed new light on the way in which emotion is expected and practised in Anglo-Saxon England. I shall explore how *Christ* (and in particular what many editors consider to be the third of three poems) constructs an affective devotion in order to effect compunction in the audience. In particular, I wish to demonstrate how this poem evokes affective response not through images of human suffering (as we see in the later Middle Ages), but through the image of a tree as metonym for the cross.

A certain theological unity seems to underpin much of the Exeter Book. Exposition on salvation history – and, in particular, the end of days – receives a highly personalised treatment with the focus on the individual’s faith and his unique relationship with God. Whether detailing the effects of grace (as do *The Gifts of Men* and *The Wanderer*), charting the life of an individual working towards salvation (*Guthlac* and *Juliana*), or affectively depicting the apocalypse (*Christ* and *Judgement Day I*), there is a prevailing mood of penitence, and of mindfulness of the proximity of Final Judgement. It is, though, in *Christ*, that the soteriological themes are more fully realised, and the already-revealed salvific plan is designed to evoke a sense of compunction. Much attention has been drawn recently to the doctrine of compunction in Old English literature, with Sandra McEntire devoting an entire chapter of her book-

³ S. DeGregorio, ‘Affective Spirituality: Theory and Practice in Bede and Alfred the Great’, *Essays in Medieval Studies* 22 (2005): 129–39, at 131.

length study of compunction to the topic,⁴ and James M. Palmer⁵ analysing how the doctrine manifests itself in *The Wanderer*. Significant treatment of compunction in *Christ* has been lacking, however, and yet this poem presents an interesting take on the doctrine, using rich imagery and sophisticated rhetoric to establish a fresh and powerful way of both depicting, and indeed evoking, the emotive effects of compunction. In this chapter, I shall look at compunctive tears (on which much has already been written) in order to understand more about the comparatively lesser-studied motif of tears of blood in Anglo-Saxon literature.

Compunction is traditionally seen as a grace or charism by which the individual, through a pricking of the heart, may strengthen his relationship with God and effect his own salvation. It is often depicted as the physical condition of weeping ('Holy Tears' is the term that is most often used). As Sandra McEntire elaborates:

Compunction is a grace, gratuitously given, with which the beneficiary must cooperate. ... Tears are the exterior expression of the greater activity, prayer between the individual and God. The grace of tears is never sought for its own sake, but as the abiding sign of the deep interior sorrow one feels before the greatness and mercy of God. The interior attitude is expressed in the outward sign of tears; both tears and compunction are elements of grace being given.⁶

These tears are thought to be the most readily identifiable feature of compunction, and the written testaments to compunctive tears are manifold: in the *Vita Sancti Gregorii* the weeping of Gregory the Great for the soul of Trajan, for example, results in the baptism and spiritual cleansing of the dead emperor.⁷ Monastic mourning is a main theme of ascetic literature, with John Gale asserting that monastic life at the time is characterised by compunction and tears.⁸

⁴ S. McEntire, *The Doctrine of Compunction in Medieval England: Holy Tears* (Lewiston, NY, 1990).

⁵ J. M. Palmer, 'Compunctio and the Heart in the Old English Poem *The Wanderer*', *Neophilologus* 88 (2004): 447–60.

⁶ McEntire, p. 55.

⁷ 'Quidam quoque de nostris dicunt narratum a Romanis, sancti Gregorii lacrimis animam Traiani imperatoris regrigeratem uel baptizatam, quod est dictum mirabile et auditu.' (*S. Gregorii. Papae vita II, 44*(PL 75, cols 105-6)
[Some of our people also tell a story related by the Romans of how the soul of the Emperor Trajan was refreshed and

Images of tears abound in *Christ*, some compunctive, and some not: the tears shed by those on earth awaiting the *Paraousia* (ll. 150b–152); the tears of Joseph at the scorning of Mary’s reputation upon the revelation of her pregnancy (ll. 172–3); the tears of the damned who are exiled from heaven (ll. 530–540a). In the early stages of the development of the doctrine of compunction, according to McEntire, mourning was encouraged. Later, however, compunction is distinguished from other forms of weeping. McEntire quotes Chromatius’ distinction between compunctive and non-compunctive tears:

Quis nobis iste luctus intellegendus est salutaris? Vtique non ille qui ex rerum nascitur detrimentis, non qui ex amissione carorum, nec qui ex iactura saecularium dignitatum, quae utique omnia iam paper factus spiritu non dolebit.⁹

[What mourning must be understood by us as healthy? Surely not that which is born of the loss of things, nor from the loss of dear ones, nor from the loss of earthly dignities, all things which will not hurt a man who has been made poor in spirit.]

One of the most interesting examples of compunctive tears in *Christ*, though, occurs in an account of the day of doom at the moment when the trees recall Christ’s crucifixion, when he mounted one of their number in preparation for his death:

Da wearð beam monig blodigum tearum
 Birunnen under rindum reade ond þicce;
 sæp wearð to swate.¹⁰ Þæt asecgan ne magum
 foldbuende þurh frod gewit,
 hu fela þa onfundun þa gefelan ne magun
 dryhtnes þrowinga, deade gesceafte.
 (ll. 1174–9)¹¹

even baptized by St. Gregory’s tears, a story marvellous to tell and marvellous to hear.’] (*The Earliest Life of Gregory the Great*, ed. B. Colgrave (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 126–8)).

⁸ J. Gale, ‘The Divine Office: Aid and Hindrance to Penthos’, *Studia Monastica* 27 (1985): 13–30, at 15.

⁹ *CCSL*, 1953ff. Cited and translated in McEntire, p. 35.

¹⁰ Bosworth and Toller define *swat*, in sense II.2 as ‘blood’.

¹¹ All Old English translations are my own, unless otherwise stated.

[Then, many a tree became bedewed under the bark with bloody tears, red and thick; sap became blood. So that no one of the earth dwellers may tell, through wise understanding, how much those lifeless of creation, which cannot feel, sensed the suffering of the Lord.]

The startling prosopopoeia of this description of bloody tears is clearly affective in outcome: the contrast between the lack of feeling and understanding of the sentient *foldbuende* and the empathy of the *deade gesceafte* points to the failure of compunction among humankind in general. In fact, the passage is set in stark contrast against the refusal of mankind to acknowledge its salvation and to renounce sin:

Ða þe æþelast sind eorðan gecynda,
 ond heofones eac heahgetimbro,
 eall fore þam anum unrot gewearð,
 forhtafongen.
 ...
 Hwæs weneð se þe mid gewitte nyle
 gemunan þa mildan Meotudes lare,
 and eal ða earfeðu þe he fore ældum adreag,
 forþon þe he wolde þæt we wuldres eard
 in ecnesse agan mosten?
 Swa þam bið grorne, on þam grimman dæge
 domes þæs miclan, þam þe dryhtnes sceal
 deaðfirenum forden dolg sceawian,
 wunde ond wite. On wergum sefan
 geseoð sorga mæste: hy se sylfa cyning
 mid sine lichoman lysde of firenum,
 þurh milde mod, þæt hy mostun manweorca
 tome lifgan, ond tires blæd
 ecne agan. Hy þæs eðles þonc
 hyra waldende wihte ne cuþon;
 forþon þær to teonum þa tacen geseoð
 orgeatu on gode ungesælge.

(ll. 1180–83a, 1199–215)

[Those who are the noblest of earth's kind, and of the high edifice of heaven too, all because of that one became sorrowful, seized with fear. ... What does he know who has no understanding and is not mindful of the gentle teachings of the creator, and of all the misery that he suffered in the presence of men, because he wished that we might possess a heavenly home forever. Thus it will be miserable, on the grim day of the great judgement for the one who, with deadly sin, has to gaze upon the Lord's scars, wounds and punishment. In dejected mood they will see the greatest of sorrows: how the same king with his flesh released them from transgressions through his merciful spirit, so that they might live free from sins, and possess the everlasting abundance of glory; for that gentility they did not express thanks to their ruler; because of this they will see the inauspicious signs of affliction plainly visible on God.]

The bloody tears of the trees that are witness to Christ's passion, then, become a model for human compunction: a model that is not, at this point, emulated by the unfeeling earth-dwellers, but which, it is implied, should produce an affective response in the listeners of the poem itself – the lamentation of the inanimate is surely a reproach to those who do not feel. These tears are significantly different from those discussed by McEntire: the presence of the blood adds a new layer of significance to this emotive manifestation. If tears are a physical manifestation of a psychological state, then bloody tears are that state intensified. The body's shedding of blood is associated with physical injury, and the bloody tears absorb the significance from this, suggesting not only grief, but also wounding.

The Old English period reconceptualised the material world in most interesting ways. In the Riddles, inanimate objects speak to us, introduce themselves obliquely to us, reconfigure themselves in metaphorical relation to other objects (a chopping board may pretend to be a shield, for example, or a key a phallus), and then they ask us, as listeners, to locate and define their 'true' (and I use that word cautiously) identity. 'Saga hwæt ic hatte', or 'say what I am called', is the phrase that is most often used. In Riddle 30, for instance, one object takes on the form of three: a tree in a grove becomes a devotional crucifix and a symbol of Christ's cross. Arnold Talentino, writing on this Riddle (the solution to which was first proposed to be *beam* by F. A. Blackburn in 1901),¹² states:

I agree ... that the central idea of Riddle 30 is description of a cross; however, the imagery adds up to 'cross' in a way that makes the whole greater than the sum of its parts. In Riddle 30 we have a cross with a difference, for the poem

¹² F. A. Blackburn, 'The Husband's Message and the Accompanying Riddles of the Exeter Book', *JEGP* 3 (1901): 1–13.

goes beyond just projecting the symbol and lays the significance of the symbol bare. As well as calling to mind the cross, Riddle 30 adumbrates its qualities and power.¹³

Talentino reads the opening four lines as pointing towards what he refers to as the ‘cosmic transcendence of the world of men’: the potential power of the tree to effect salvation. The tree of the opening lines of the poem therefore points out beyond itself to the devotional cross that is passed from hand to hand, and both of these assumed forms of the riddlic object transcend the physical to denote the crucifixion and connote salvation. Into this one riddle, then, are packed layers upon layers of significance, and the riddle becomes a locus for the transference of meaning from one object to another, from the material to the spiritual, from the animate to the inanimate.

Prosopopoeia creates a further transference of meaning. Through this rhetorical device the interlocutor shifts shape, adopts the form of something else, points out beyond its own immediate signification, and compels the audience to interpret the metaphor that it has formed around itself. Aldhelm himself commented on the transformative nature of prosopopoeia when he wrote:

Quia nonnumquam rationabilis creatura irrationabilum gestu et personis utitur et a diverso irrationabilis sensusque vivacitate carnes intellectualium gestu et voce futitur.¹⁴

[For sometimes a rational creature adopts the behaviour and persona of irrational things and, on the other hand, an irrational thing is endowed with the vital force, behaviour and voice of creatures with the capacity of understanding.]

Prosopopoeia therefore relies on the vicarious identification of the audience with the object being described, and thereby invites the audience into participation in what Craig Williamson (writing on prosopopoeia in the Riddles in particular) describes as an ontological game:

In half of the riddles, the reader identifies with the ‘I’ of the human riddler; in half with the ‘I’ of the creature. The two narrative stances constitute poles of a perceptual game. Sometimes we escape the bone-house and embody the

¹³ A. Talentino, ‘Riddle 30: The Vehicle of the Cross’, *Neophilologus* 65 (1981): 129–36 at 130.

¹⁴ Aldhelm, *De metris et enigmatibus ac pedum regulis*, ch. 7, in *Aldhelmi opera*, ed. R. Ehwald, *MGH AA* 15 (Berlin, 1919, rpt 1961), p. 76.

world; sometimes we see what the world charged with metaphor means. This is an ontological game – the challenge is either, ‘Say what I mean’, or ‘Say who I am’. Meaning depends upon our manipulation in images of the Other.¹⁵

If effective, this device will challenge the reader to enter into a process of self-investigation and will intensify the emotive effect of the text, as Quintilian notes in his *Institutio Oratoria*:

His et adversariorum cogitationes, velut secum loquentium protrahimus: quæ tamen iqta demum a fide non abhorreant, si ea locutos finxerimus quæ cogitasse eos non sit absurdum: et nostros cum aliis sermones, et aliorum inter se credibiliter introducimus, et *sudendo, obiurgando, querendo, laudando, miserando*, personas idoneas damus. Quin deducere deos in hoc genere dicendi, et inferos excitare, concessum est; urbes etiam populique vocem accipiunt: ac sunt quidam, qui has demum *προσωποποιῆας* dicant, in quibus et corpora et verba fingimus; sermones hominum assimilatos dicere *διαλόγους* malunt, quod Latinorum quidam dixerunt *sermocinationem*. ... Commode etiam aut nobis aliquas ante oculos esse rerum, personarum, vocum imagines fingimus, aut eadem adversariis aut iudicibus non accidere miramur: qualia sunt *Videtur mihi et Nonne videtur tibi?* Sed magna quædam vis eloquentiæ desideratur: falsa enim et incredibilia natura necesse est aut magis moveant, quia supra vera sunt, aut pro vanis accipiantur, quia vera non sunt.¹⁶

[By this means we display the inner thoughts of our adversaries as though they were talking with themselves (but we shall only carry conviction if we represent them as uttering what they may reasonably be supposed to have had in their minds); or without sacrifice of credibility we may introduce conversations between ourselves and others, or of others among themselves, and put words of advice, reproach, complaint, praise or pity into the mouths of appropriate persons. Nay, we are even allowed in this form of speech to bring down the gods from heaven and raise the dead, while cities also and peoples may find a voice. ... With things which are false and incredible by nature there are but two alternatives: either they will move our hearers with

¹⁵ C. Williamson (ed.), *A Feast of Creatures: Anglo-Saxon Riddle-Songs* (Philadelphia, 2011), p. 25.

¹⁶ Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* in *Institution oratoire de Quintilien*, ed. C. V. Ouzille (Paris, 1832), IX.2.30–31 and 33.

exceptional force because they are beyond the truth, or they will be regarded as empty nothings because they are not the truth.]

Poems frequently participate in this ontological game in Old English literature. In *The Dream of the Rood*, for example, one object is clearly transformed into another: the tree becomes a cross, which in turn becomes a synecdoche for salvation. In fact, throughout the text, it straddles the distinction between the two. It even redefines itself metaphorically –

Ne þearf ðær þonne ænig anforht wesan
þe him ær in breostum bereð beacna selest.

(ll. 117–18)

[None of them will need to be afraid who bears before him in his breast the best of signs.]

– and it creates the double meaning of a cross that is carried on the breast (as material devotional object) and one that is carried in the heart (as a reminder of the promise of eternal life). But, of course, the most remarkable transformation is of that from the inanimate to the animate, the silent to the articulate. Margaret Schlauch asserts that,

to endow the Cross with the power of locution was to use a device of unexampled effectiveness in making a vivid event about which, for all devout Christians, the entire history of the world revolved. The object most intimately associated with that breath-taking moment when ‘the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks were rent’ might well be given speech with profound literary effectiveness. Yet this was not commonly done at the time.¹⁷

The tradition of anthropomorphised *beams*, though – whether trees or crosses – is clearly not uncommon to the Anglo-Saxon imagination, and enables the reader to investigate more thoroughly the relationship between spiritual and material, real and imagined, signified and interpreted.

But what of trees that shed bloody tears? The *beam* of *The Dream of the Rood* bleeds from its right side (ll. 18–20a), in imitation of the wound endured by Christ when his side was pierced by the soldiers.

¹⁷ M. Schlauch, ‘The “Dream of the Rood” as Prosopopoeia’, in P. W. Long (ed.), *Essays and Studies in Honour of Carleton Brown* (New York, 1940), pp. 23–34 at 24.

But the bloody tears of the trees in *Christ* are an entirely different sort of emission. They are not imitative of the blood of Christ, but rather a subjective response to the Passion. St Gregory of Nyssa writes of tears of repentance that they are like ‘blood from the wounds of our soul’,¹⁸ and the motif of an impassioned weeping that causes so much grief that it rends the soul has an interesting history in the western tradition, with images of bloody tears becoming a recurring trope in cultural artefacts such as literature, visual art, film, and so on. In *Ragnars Saga Loðbrókar*, when Queen Áslaug finds out about the death of her sons, Eirik and Agnar, she cries a single tear of blood:

Ok nú kvað hann þá vísu, er Eirekr hafði kveðit, er hann sendi henni hringinn.
Nú sjá þeir, at hún felldi tár, en þat var sem blóð væri álit, en hart sem
haglkorn. Þat hafði engi maðr sét, at hún hefði tár fellt, hvárki áðr né síðan.¹⁹
[And then he quoted the verse, which Eirik had spoken, when he had sent the
ring to her. Now, they say that she let fall a tear, and that it looked like blood,
and yet seemed as hard as a hailstone. No man had seen that, that she had let
fall a tear, either before or after.] (translation my own)

Here, the image of a single tear encapsulates the reach and complexity of Áslaug’s grief – the blood perhaps representing how harrowing the news, its hardness her resolve to seek vengeance. Interestingly, the motif of the heedless bystander (seen as the uncomprehending *foldbuende* in *Christ*), reappears, emphasising the singularity of her experience, and the individualised and experiential nature of its expression.

The *Annals of Ulster* recount the battle of Imlech Pich, culminating in a description of overwhelming, albeit hypothetical, grief:

Bronaigh Conailli indiu,
deithbir doaibh iar nUaircridiu,
niba ellmhu bias gen

¹⁸ St Gregory of Nyssa, ‘Funeral Oration on the Empress Flacilla’, in *Gregorii Nysseni opera* IX, ed. A. Spira (Leiden, 1967), p. 477.

¹⁹ *Ragnars Saga Loðbrókar ok Sona Hans*, ed. G. Jónsson and B. Vilhjálmsón, Perseus Digital Library, <http://nlp.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text;jsessionid=2A93873BC88772661AAEE61643DEFA56?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A2003.02.0029%3Achapter%3D10> [accessed 10 April 2013], Bk. X.

i nAird iar nDubh da Inbher.

Sirechtach

bronan file for tir Taidhgg

cen Dub Cuile cen macc mBrain,

cen Dub da Inber ar Aird.

Sirechtach

sella fria lecht leacca,

for coin, for milcoin, for mna

do buid la far n-echtrata.

Mona· icad dam amne

mac Crunnmael dom' siricht-sa,

roptis fula ocus cro

mo der do marb Imblecho.²⁰

[Sad are the Conaille today, fittingly indeed after the death of Uarchride; a smile will come to none too readily in Ard after the death of Dub dá Inber. Wistful is the grief which afflicts Tadc's land without Dub Cúile, without Bran's son, without Dub dá Inber in Ard. Sorrowful are your glances at their grave-stones, with your hounds, your hunting-dogs, your women in the possession of your enemies. If Crunnmael's son should fail to requite me thus for my yearning my tears for the dead of Imblech would be tears of blood and gore.]

Once again, tears of blood are representative of heart-rending grief and suffering. This physicalised description of mourning contrasts starkly with the internalised grief in the earlier part of the poem, and once again, the motif of the observance of the grief of others serves to intensify the emotion of the passage.

In the *Héliand*, Peter sheds bloody tears of compunction upon his realisation of the significance of his third denial of Christ:

²⁰ *The Annals of Ulster (to A.D. 1131)*, ed. and transl. S. Mac Airt and G. Mac Niocall, Part I: Text and Translation (Dublin, 1983).

Thes thram imu an innan môd
 bittro an is breostun, endi geng imu thô gibolgan thanen
 the man fer theru menigi an môdkaru,
 suiðo an sorgun, endi is selbes uuord,
 uuamscefti uueop, antat imu uuallan quâmun
 thurh thea hertcara hête trahni,
 blôdaga fan is breostun.²¹
 (ll. 5000b–5006)

[This swelled up in his mind, bitterly in his breast, and thus he went thence, swollen; the man went from the crowd in grief, with great sorry, and he lamented his own words, his misery, until hot and bloody tears came welling up from his breast through his heartbreak.]

Leslie Lockett, reading this passage, notes the intensity of the description of Peter's *hertcara* and *môdkara*:

Peter himself is also said to be swollen (*gibolgan*) as he goes away to weep in solitude. In this context *gibolgen* seems much more likely to mean 'swollen' than 'enraged,' since Peter's state of mind is more sorrowful and anxious than angry, as indicated by the words *môdkaru*, *sorgun*, and *hertcara*. ... The tears, in fact, are not only hot but bloody, emphasizing the severity of pain and injury that his heart endures during this crisis.²²

All of the aforementioned instances of bloody tears accompany depictions of profound affectivity: the tears representing grief, the blood signifying a wound. Such physical representations of an emotional state intensify the description of the experience and render it more palpable. Nevertheless, the fact that such images of bloody tears are not uncommon in medieval literature suggests that this was a depiction of intense emotion that was not unfamiliar to the medieval mind. The aforementioned examples draw on the image of haemolacria for both secular and religious purposes, but all are brought about by an awareness of death, whether past or impending. Bloody tears, then, in the medieval mind at least, seem to indicate some sense of grief, if not necessarily compunction.

²¹ *Héliand*, ed. J. E. Cathey, Medieval European Studies 12 (Morgantown, 2002). Translation my own.

²² L. Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies in the Vernacular and Latin Traditions* (Toronto, 2011), pp. 140–41.

The motif of bloody tears may also be familiar to the modern imagination, as it has permeated Catholic and Eastern Orthodox traditions, with haemolacria becoming an increasingly common feature of religious iconography. Much recent attention in religious communities has been given to sightings of statues (often of the Virgin Mary) that appear to weep blood.²³ The common interpretation of such bloody tears is that they represent moral censure for the plight of the contemporary church and of the corruption of the age. However one interprets these images, though, they are clearly a modern form of affective piety. An issue of the Medjugorje²⁴ newsletter, *Echo of Mary*, from the 1990s (a decade in which sightings of lacrimating statues were frequently reported) uses affective language to explain why one small statue of the Virgin, brought from Medjugorje to Rome, appeared to weep tears of blood:

Each apparition – or similar event – never brings anything new, but serves as a warning light, like that of a machine to say something is not working correctly. Warning lights from heaven are being sent to us; and happy are those who know how to read them.²⁵

The affectivity of the images of haemolacria has carried on through to modern Goth and Fantasy art, where depictions of young women (and, less frequently, men) weeping bloody tears is almost iconic. The figures who weep tears of blood in the portraits by Valencian artist Victoria Francés exhibit a duality of character: a vulnerability, but also a moral and spiritual darkness. When the vampires in Charlaine Harris's *Southern Vampire Mysteries* weep, their tears are of blood,²⁶ and Le Chiffre, in the most recent film adaptation of Ian Fleming's *Casino Royale*, is depicted as suffering from haemolacria (probably as a

²³ There are websites such as 'Visions of Jesus Christ' (<http://www.visionsofjesuschrist.com/weepingstatuesandicons.htm> [accessed 10 April 2013]) that provide a catalogue of sightings and locations, and even photographs of the statues in question.

²⁴ Medjugorje is a town in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where the Virgin Mary is first said to have appeared to six Herzegovinian Croat children in 1981. These children reported seeing daily apparitions of the Virgin Mary for several years, and the town became a pilgrimage site. Three of the former children claim that they still receive the daily apparitions. The Vatican began a formal investigation of the apparitions in 2010, but has yet to announce its findings.

²⁵ Fr A. Mutti, 'Why Does our Mother Cry Tears of Blood', *Echo of Mary, Queen of Peace* 118 (March–April, 1995): 1–2 (<http://www.medjugorje.ws/en/echo/echo-118/> [accessed 10 April 2013]).

²⁶ C. Harris, *The Southern Vampire Mysteries* (series) (New York, 2001–present).

sign of underlying moral corruption).²⁷ Furthermore, in Zadie Smith's novel, *White Teeth*, Dr Marc-Pierre Perret (known to the children in the novel as Dr Sick), a former Nazi collaborator who assisted in eugenics projects, cries tears of blood due to diabetic retinopathy.²⁸ These tears are, like those of Le Chiffre, a further example of how haemolacria in contemporary culture may be read as a physiological manifestation of ethical degeneracy.

Heart-rending bloody tears are, however, most notably linked with the later medieval tradition of affective piety and its depictions of the Virgin Mary. One such appearance of the bloody tears of the Virgin is in the thirteenth-century lyric *Stond wel, Moder, under rode*, in which Christ looks down from the cross and addresses his mother thus:

'Moder, thou rewe all of thy bern,
Thou woshe away the bloody tern;
It doth me worse then my ded.'²⁹

Mary replies,

'Sone, how may I teres werne?
I see the bloody stremes erne
From thin herte to my fet.'

In yet another, *Thou synfull man of resoun*, the bloody tears of the Virgin are clearly intended to evoke compunction:

Thou synfull man of resoun þat walkest here vp & downe,
Cast þy respeccyoun one my mortall countenaunce.
Se my bloody terys fro my herte roote rebowne,

²⁷ M. Campbell, dir., *Casino Royale* (MGM-Columbia, 2006).

²⁸ Z. Smith, *White Teeth* (London, 2000). I am grateful to Jonathan Wilcox for drawing my attention to this instance of haemolacria.

²⁹ M. S. Luria and R. L. Hoffman (eds), *Middle English Lyrics* (London, 1974), p. 216.

Loke one my sorofull chere & haue therof pytee,
 Bewailynge my woo & payne, & lerne to wepe wyth me.³⁰
 (ll. 1–3, 6–7)

In *M and A and R and I*, the bloody tears of the Virgin are once again apparent at the Passion:

Our swete lady stod hym by,
 With M and A, and R and I,
 Che wept water with here ey,
 And alwey the blod folwyd among.³¹
 (ll. 11–14)

The images of blood and water resonate with the blood and water that flow from the side of Christ after his death on the cross, and therefore represent an active participation in his sacrifice. These affective depictions of Mary in Middle English literature, these images of a weeping, dejected Theotokos therefore emphasised the humanity of Christ and brought home to the penitent how much Christ, and his mother as intercessor, had suffered for his sins; furthermore, the humanity of the Virgin transforms her experience into exempla for the penitent.

It is not the Virgin Mary, though, who weeps tears of blood in *Christ*: in fact, whenever she features she is figured as a vehicle of the grace of the Holy Spirit. Her duties include bringing comfort to others: she begs Joseph to stop mourning her condition and she inspires joy in the hearts of the angels in heaven. In fact, throughout the poems, she is exalted, described as ‘seo clæneste cwen ofer eorþan’ (‘the most spotless woman on earth’, l. 276), ‘þa æþelan cwenn’ (‘the noble lady’, l. 1198), and

mægða weolman,
 mærrē meowlan, mundheals geceas.

³⁰ C. Brown (ed.), *Religious Lyrics of the Fifteenth Century* (Oxford, 1939), no. 8.

³¹ T. Wright (ed.), *Songs and Carols from a Manuscript in the British Museum of the Fifteenth Century* (London, 1856).

(ll. 445b–446)

[the flower of virgins, glorious maiden, chosen protection.]

Little else is to be expected from the poem in its depiction of Mary: the Anglo-Saxon tradition of the virgin places much more emphasis (following, perhaps, the lead of Ambrose) on her glory and grace.³²

Even *The Dream of the Rood*, with its intensely affective images, manages to depict the Virgin in glory, oblivious to the cruel tortures being inflicted on earth:

Swylce swa he his modor eac, Marian sylfe,

ælmihstig god for ealle menn

geweorðode ofer eall wifa cynn.

(ll. 92–5)

[Thus he, Almighty God, has honoured his mother Mary herself, for all people, above all womankind.]

This sense of grace, though, only serves to enhance the compunctive element of the poems, with the humiliation and physical torture intensified by contrast with the glory and spiritual honour of the company of heaven.

Instead of choosing a human agent for these bloody tears, then, the poet of *Christ* creates a figurative context for the affectivity of his text. The trees become anthropomorphised in order to highlight the shortcomings of human piety, and the text opens itself up metaphorically to ask us to interpret the trees (as devotional objects or as instruments of torture) and the substance that they shed. Just as anthropomorphised beams were not unfamiliar to the Anglo-Saxon imagination, nor were natural phenomena combining blood and water. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* contains examples of what is now known as ‘blood rain’: rain with a reddish hue due to the presence of sand carried in from desert regions. In the *Chronicle*, and elsewhere, these bloody rains are omens of doom. The entry for A.D. 685 in London, British Library, Cotton Domitian A. VIII reads, ‘Her wearþ in Brytene blodi ren. ⁊ meolc ⁊

³² See, for example, M. Dockray Miller, ‘The Maternal Performance of the Virgin Mary in the Old English *Advent*’, *NWSA* 14/2 (Summer, 2002): 38–55, at 49.

butere wurdon gewend to blode',³³ while the entry for 979 in London, British Library, Cotton Tiberius B.I reads,

On þys gearre wæs Æþelred to cininge gehalgod on þone sunnandæg feowertyne niht ofer Eastron at Cingestune; ond þær wæron æt his halgunge twegen ercebisceopas ond tyn leodbisceopas. Þy ilcan gearre wæs gesewen blodig wolcen on oftsiðas on fyres gelicnesse; ond þæt wæs swyðost on middeniht opywed, ond swa on mistlice beamas wæs gehiwod; þonne hit dagian wolde, þonne toglad hit.³⁴

[In this year, Æthelred was consecrated as king, on the Sunday fortnight after Easter, at Kingston. And there were two archbishops and ten suffragan bishops at his consecration. In the same year, a bloody welkin was often seen in the likeness of fire; and that was most apparent at midnight, and thus in misty beams was shown; but when it became day, then dispersed.]

The homily for Easter Day in the *Blickling Homilies* describes how the eschaton will be accompanied by a mixture of blood and water:

Þa ærestan dæge on midne dæg gelimpeþ mycel gnornung ealra gesceafta, ond men gehyraþ mycclre stefne on heofonum swylce þær man fyrde trymme and samnige. Þonne astigeþ blodig wolcen mycel from norþdæle ond oforþeþ ealne þysne heofon, ond æfter þæm wolcne cymeþ legetu and þunor ealne þone dæg. Ond rineþ blodig regn æt æfen.³⁵

[At midday on the first day a great mourning of all creation will occur, and men will hear a great summons from heaven as though an army is being recruited and assembled. Then a great bloody cloud will proceed from the northern regions and cover all this heaven, and after this cloud will come lightning and thunder all day. And it will rain bloody rain in the evening.]

³³ 'In this year there was a bloody rain in Britain. And milk and butter were turned to blood.' In B. Thorpe (ed.), *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, According to Several Original Authorities*, 2 vols (London, 1861), I, p. 63.

³⁴ For an analysis of blood-rain in medieval writings, see J. S. P. Tatlock, 'Some Mediæval Cases of Blood-Rain', *Classical Philology* 9 (1914): 442–7.

³⁵ 'Dominica Pascha', in R. Kelly (ed.), *The Blickling Homilies: Edition and Translation* (London and New York, 2003), pp. 57–67 at ll. 136–40.

This rain is a portent of doom – a sign of the impending eschaton, accompanying the earth being consumed by a conflagration, the sea drying up, and the skies becoming agitated. These examples of bloody rain, though, are of a very different sort of phenomenon than that described in *Christ*, where the trees emit this bloody substance, and where the emanations are said to be not a sign or *tacn* (as they are in the *Blickling Homily*), but an instinctive, yet emotive, response.

Of course, blood and water are closely linked throughout Christianity. For a start, there is an intermingling of water and wine during the Eucharist: a practice that is believed to have been common in the Mediterranean at the time of Jesus. There is a further intermingling of the two substances on the Mount of Olives in the gospel of Luke, as the trepidatious perspiration shed by Christ is streaked with blood.³⁶ Finally, the blood and water that flow from the side of the crucified Christ when pierced by a spear helps to reinforce the blending of the two substances in the Christian imagination.

This linking of blood and water takes one set of biblical symbols and juxtaposes them with another. Blood, in the bible, symbolises existence: in it lies the vitality of life, whether animal or human – hence the dietary prohibitions against the eating of meat in which blood is present (Lev. 17:10–12; Deut. 12:23–4). We also see how blood, when shed and distributed, can have positive effects: the Israelites escaping from Egypt mark their doors with blood to protect themselves from God’s vengeful angel (Exod. 12); blood also comes to be symbolic of atonement, of sacrifice, and of promise: it is through blood that the covenant between God and the Israelite people is sealed on Mount Sinai (Lev. 1), and it is through the shedding of the blood of Christ that mankind is saved and, according to tradition, bought out of any punishment it owes for its sins. Water, on the other hand, is life-sustaining, cleansing and purifying.

³⁶ ‘Et egressus ibat secundum consuetudinem in monte Olivarum. Secuti sunt autem illum et discipuli. Et cum pervinisset ad locum, dixit illis: Orate ne intretis in tentationem. Et ipse avulsus est ab eis quantum jactus est lapidis: et positus genibus orabat, dicens: Pater, si vis, transfer calicem istum a me: verumtamen non mea voluntas, sed tua fiat. Apparuit autem illi angelus de cælo, confortans eum. Et factus in agonia, prolixius orabat. Et factus est sudor ejus sicut guttæ sanguinis decurrentis in terram.’ [And going out, he went, according to custom, to the Mount of Olives. And his disciples also followed him. And when he had reached the place he said to them: Pray, so that you do not enter into temptation. And he withdrew himself a stone’s throw from them, and kneeling he prayed, saying: Father, if you wish, remove this chalice from me; however, let not my will, but yours, be done. And an angel from heaven appeared to him, comforting him. And being in agony, he prayed at great length. And his sweat became as drops of blood, flowing onto the ground.] (Luke 22:39–44)

Baptism with water brings all of these benefits. The fusion of these two substances, then, has absorbed a broad significance from scripture, but with more specific points in Christ's life: his baptism and his Passion.

The image of the bloody tears in *Christ* therefore resonates with the three points of Christ's ministry and mystery through which blood and water come to be associated: the Eucharistic celebration of Christ's sacrifice, the anguished prayer on the Mount of Olives, and the death of Christ on the cross. In these three episodes, the intermingling of blood and water is clearly an echo of Christ's Passion – as it is in the poem itself. The bloody tears of the poem are, in fact, anticipated in these lines:

Ond eac þa ealdan wunde ond þa openan dolg
on hyre dryhtne geseoð dreorigferðe,
swa him mid næglum þurhdrifan niðhycgende
þa hwitan honda ond þa halgan fet,
ond of his sidan swa some swat forletan,
þær blod ond wæter bu tu ætsomme
ut bicwoman fore eagna gesyhð,
rinnan fore rincum, þa he on rode wæs.

(ll. 1107–14).

[And also they, dejected in spirit, will see the old wound and the open sore on their lord, as men of malicious thought pierced with nails those white hands and the holy feet, and caused to issue forth blood from his side – there blood and water both together came out, before the sight of all, gushing before the men when he was on the cross.]

The depiction of the injured body of the dead Christ will pre-empt and resonate with the portrayal of the trees that shed tears of blood at the sight of the Passion. In fact, it is the prosopopoeia of the poem that enhances the affectiveness of the tears, just as the prosopopoeia of *The Dream of the Rood* produces a similar effect. Here, though, the fusion of blood and water points out beyond its own immediate signification – as a manifestation of soul-rending emotion and piety – to the signification of these two substances in their scriptural and liturgical antecedents. The bloody tears in *Christ* therefore become an ultimate compunctive act, but also serve a reminder to those who have not yet wept for their souls to make haste and do so immediately. To borrow the words of the Vercelli homilist:

Men þa leofestan, ic eow bidde and eað modlice lære, þæt 3e wepen and forhtien on þysse med-miclan tide for eowrum synnum. Forþan ne bioð eowre tearas and eowre hreowsunga for noht 3etealde on þære towearden worulde.³⁷

[Most beloved men, I ask and humbly teach you, that you weep and fear for your sins in this short space of time. Because your tears and your repentance will not avail in the next world.]

While *Christ* is what we might call ‘affective’, then, its affectivity is of quite a different character to that which we might traditionally associate with the term. The affectivity is directed more to evoking shame in humankind than pity, and through this emotion, experiencing compunction. While the apocalypticism of the triad is both terrifying and horrific in equal measure, this is secondary to the sorrow one ought to feel at the absence of a loved one – in this case, God. Furthermore, the suggestion that this sorrow itself may lead to salvation provides further motivation for compunction where no further motivation is necessary. So those bloody tears may seem horrific to the modern mind, but interpreted in the light of the kind of compunction that the poems attempt to evoke, it is evident that they are testament to exactly this kind of heart-wrenching, soul-rending compunction that is less reliant on eliciting fear of the terror of hell and judgement day, and more on emphasising the brutal sadness of separation from God.

If, as Williamson notes, prosopopoeia serves as a mirror in which the listener can identify himself, the use of this device in *Christ* highlights the desired compunctive state and asks the listener to measure himself against it. The deep affectivity of the outward signs of compunction, when transferred to an inanimate object, is intensified by virtue of the nature of that inanimate object. Richard C. Payne, writing on *The Dream of the Rood*, asserts that,

when we turn to a consideration of the dreamer’s reaction to the vision as it is presented in lines 13ff., we arrive at the thematic core of the poem, and we can begin to see the intended effect of the poem’s eschatological locus. ... The dreamer’s reaction to the vision of the cross is undoubtedly intended as a ‘touchstone’ of the response expected from the poems’ audience.³⁸

³⁷ ‘Vercelli Homily IV’, in M. Föster (ed.), *Die Vercelli-Homilien: I–VIII Homilie* (Hamburg, 1932). Cited in McEntire, p. 96.

³⁸ R. C. Payne, ‘Convention and Originality in the Vision Framework of *The Dream of the Rood*’, *Modern Philology* 73 (1976): 329–41, at 334.

If the response of the dreamer to the vision of the Rood is a touchstone of that which is to be expected from the audience, then that of the trees in *Christ* is merely a glimmer of that which is to be expected from inanimate beings.

Not only this, though, but the weeping trees become a metaphor for the crucifixion itself, taking on all the layers of signification bound up with arboreality in Anglo-Saxon thought, and affectively demonstrating the barbarity of the event while highlighting how it has facilitated salvation. The poem mediates between the spiritual and the material worlds in order to compel the listener to explore the Passion from a range of perspectives. Through the trees taking on human characteristics, the listener takes on the viewpoint of the anthropomorphised trees, comes to experience the Passion vicariously as a participant, and reconfigures his understanding of the psychological process of grief into a concrete, material, vivid, brutal image of bloody tears. Arner and Stegner write,

the key innovation of *Christ III* is the implication that the pleasure derived from the act of reading is continued in the afterlife. The *Christ III* poet establishes the connection between the vision and the act of reading by presenting the Crucifixion as a spectacle occurring ‘fore eagna gesyhð’ (before the sight of their eyes, l. 1113); it is not simply a self-evident visual event, but one performed and dependent on the interpretation of signs. Consequently, the blessed’s visual apprehension and interpretation of signs on the bodies of the damned is figured in terms of the reader’s engagement with the words of a text. ... The *Christ III* poet underscores that the blessed are engaged in an ongoing, pleasurable hermeneutic process. Consequently he proposes that the blessed will continue to be readers in heaven.³⁹

The text creates an ontological game, as Williamson asserts – a tree bears multiple identities from organic entity to devotional object to instrument of torture. Its tears absorb a wealth of scriptural and theological significance, and the listener, through the comparison created by the prosopopoeia of the text, is urged to hasten to define *himself* spiritually before the Day of Doom.

³⁹ T. D. Arner and P. D. Stegner, “‘Of þam him aweaxeð wynsum gefea’”: The Voyeuristic Appeal of *Christ III*, *JEGP* 106 (2007): 428–46, at 429.