Blood, Tears, and Wounded Eyes: Holy Effluvia and the Compassion of the Virgin in Early Modern Flemish Visual and Devotional Culture

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ABSTRACT

Blood, Tears, and Wounded Eyes: Holy Effluvia and the Compassion of the Virgin in Early Modern Flemish Visual and Devotional Culture

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Images of the Mater dolorosa, the weeping Mother of God mourning over her dead son, are plentiful art of Northern Europe during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and often foreground the shedding of effluvia—blood, sweat, and tears—in their depictions of the holy pair. This paper explores the visual themes of tears, blood, eyes, and wounds as vital actors in images that require close, meditative, and affective looking and engagement. Such image formats include small-scale pairings of the Man of Sorrows and Mater dolorosa as well as books of hours. In these contexts, the holy fluids and their bodily sources expand the images’ narratives and allow for greater exegesis of their devotional prompts. This phenomenon of expansion via effluvia occurs throughout Flemish devotional culture of this period; this paper uses Albrecht Bouts’s diptych panels of the Mater dolorosa and Man of Sorrows, produced between 1490 and 1525, as the chief case study to encapsulate and ground those ideas while still acknowledging that they also apply beyond this image. Considering the widespread commonalities between blood and tears in visual and textual representations of the early modern Flemish devotional culture and the visual similarities between weeping eyes and bleeding wounds, this paper argues that Mary’s eyes act as the external manifestations of her internal wounds and become locus of her Compassion for Christ. Furthermore, pictorial blood and tears function as metonymic devices that, like the Man of Sorrows type, invoke the entirety of the Passion and Compassion. The multivalent functions of the blood and tears in Bouts’s diptych expand it beyond just a representation of Mary and her son and allow it to become a window and mirror into which viewers could look to engage in penance and communion with Mary and Christ.

Keywords: Mater dolorosa, Man of Sorrows, Albrecht Bouts, Boussu Hours, Compassion of the Virgin, effluvia, blood, tears, eyes, wounds, weeping, bleeding, gendered devotion, soul formation, penitence, weeping, pictoriality, materiality, diptychs, book of hours, affective piety, vision, marginalia, devotional touch
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis would not have been possible without the encouragement and support of many. I would like to first acknowledge my brilliant advisor, Elliott Wise, for his boundless enthusiasm, patience, kindness, and expertise through this process. The many hours he spent helping me develop this project and my passion for the emotional, devotional, and sometimes macabre art that it foregrounds have been invaluable and deeply meaningful. I have so much gratitude also to the superb scholars that mentored him and to all those that produced the scholarship that informs this paper and its field.

My parents, Michelle and Christ, and my mother- and father-in-law, Kathy and Matt, have also shown me a tremendous amount of love and support through my education. Thank you for your faith in me.

Most of all, this thesis would never have come into existence without Jeremy, who bolstered me through every step of the project. A final acknowledgement goes to my sweet feline assistant, Frances, who was literally right by my side for so much of the writing process.
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Introduction

Images of the *Mater dolorosa*, the weeping Mother of God mourning over her dead son, are plentiful in the art of Northern Europe during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Some depict the sorrowful Virgin alone, but most show her with Christ, either in a scene from the Passion or paired like a double portrait in a diptych format with Christ depicted as the Man of Sorrows: crowned with thorns, blood and tears running down his face. The Man of Sorrows type, which emerged alongside the legend of the Mass of St. Gregory that featured an apparition of the dead and bleeding Christ on an altar, shows Christ in a transitional state between life and death, outside of any distinct scene from the Passion, and standing upright but bearing the marks of his Crucifixion.\(^1\) Perhaps the most distinctive feature of the diptych images of Mary and Christ is the foregrounding of the fluids—blood and tears—that fall down the faces of the Virgin and her holy son. This literal outpouring of emotion is prominent in Albrecht Bouts’s diptychs of the *Man of Sorrows* and *Mater Dolorosa*, from the end of the fifteenth and beginning of the sixteenth centuries.

This paper explores the visual themes of tears, blood, eyes, and wounds as vital actors in images that require close, meditative, and affective looking and engagement. Such image formats include small-scale pairings of the Man of Sorrows and *Mater dolorosa* as well as books of hours. In these contexts, the holy fluids and their bodily sources expand the images’ narratives and allow for greater exegesis of their devotional prompts. This phenomenon of expansion via effluvia occurs throughout Flemish devotional culture of this period; this paper will use Bouts’s diptychs—which remain surprisingly underrepresented in the literature—as the chief case study.

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to encapsulate and ground those ideas while still acknowledging that they also apply beyond this image.

Bouts and his workshop produced many panels of these subjects around the turn of the sixteenth century. Today, some stand alone, and some are paired *post facto*—that is, a panel of the Virgin and a panel of Christ that were not originally painted as a pair are now exhibited together. Despite not necessarily being painted as specific pairings, the panels are easily combined as pendant works in diptych format, and Renaissance buyers probably displayed them together in that way. Thus, it is not only permissible but also historically accurate to consider the devotional arguments created by various combinations of *Mater Dolorosa* and *Man of Sorrows* images and to apply arguments across panels and pairings. The various panels are also formally similar in general; thus, the majority of them function similarly in terms of theological and devotional purpose. For this thesis and for the purposes of clarity, the default pairing to which I will refer is the diptych currently found at the Fogg Art Museum at Harvard University (figs. 1, 2). The composition of this diptych pertains, in most of its details, to the other most well-known and well-documented panels by Albrecht Bouts: the diptych in the Suermondt-Ludwig-Museum in Aachen, Germany, and the single panel of Christ in the Metropolitan Museum in New York City (figs. 3, 4). Bouts painted each of these panels between 1490 and 1520.

In these images, each figure is surrounded by a mystical gold background, either blank or adorned with tiny, dark red dots. Mary and Christ are depicted alike, with specific details drawing parallels between their appearances and emotional states. Crystalline tears bead in the Virgin’s reddened eyes and drip down her cheeks, while blood, mingled with tears, falls in jewel-like pendulums on Christ’s injured, agonized face. Mary’s face is framed by her white mantle and blue robe; Christ’s is bordered by a thickly woven crown of sword-like thorns. Both figures
have their hands visible, Mary’s in prayer and Christ’s crossed or in ostentation of the wounds on his palms. The physical and emotional suffering of the mother and son is made obvious through tears, blood, and injuries. Extrapolations on the gospels provide reference for Mary’s weeping over the suffering and death of Christ, but Bouts’s images expand her tears to have significant theological meaning pertaining to her *Compassio*, or “Compassion.”

Referring to Mary’s co-suffering with Christ as he travailed first on the *Via dolorosa* and then on the cross, the “Compassion” of the Virgin is a manifestation of Mary’s complete unification with Christ and her ability to fully mirror him even in his most acute agony. The diptych format of Bouts’s work is particularly suited to depict the Compassion; it places the mother and son face-to-face—literally cheek-to-cheek—when closed, in visually similar postures, both covered in the fluid evidence of their emotional and physical pain. Bouts’s diptych also follows the tradition of the *Andachtsbild* type: an image taken out of any surrounding narrative and intended to form a devotional prompt for the viewer. By focusing on just the faces of Christ and his mother, Bouts also draws attention to those visual and spiritual similarities between the two figures in their bleeding, weeping, and suffering.

Blood in its varied depictions and receptions is a vital aspect of this project. Reflected in theological controversies, veneration of relics like the vial of Christ’s Holy Blood in Bruges, and practices of lay and monastic piety, devotion to Christ’s blood was a vibrant and extensive aspect of Christian practice, particularly from the fourteenth century and into the sixteenth. Blood—both Christ’s blood and blood generally—was a frequent subject of writing, visions, and

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2 John van Engen, “Multiple Options: The World of the Fifteenth-Century Church,” *Church History* 77, no. 2 (June 2008): 280 discusses that theologians worried about the “doctrinal implications” of holy blood devotions. Such concern was happening concurrently with concern over Holy Name devotions, which were originally deemed heretical due to their implicit erasure of Christ’s blood and the cross.
pilgrimage, as explored in great depth by Caroline Walker Bynum.³ This emphasis on the blood of Christ reflected not a carnal or violent focus but rather a concentration on deeply personal, intimate, and emotional piety and devotion to Christ; his blood, after all, was the means and method for salvation.⁴ Understandings of blood in late medieval and early Renaissance medicine contribute to the importance of blood as a theme: it posited that a child’s body was created from its mother’s uterine blood, meaning that the child is its mother’s blood and that its blood is the same as hers.⁵ Furthermore, it was believed that all bodily fluids—including tears—were “processed forms of blood”.⁶ Blood and tears, then, were physically comparable in that they were thought to be literally the same substance.

Important spiritual comparisons between blood and tears that existed during this period allow for further visual comparison between the two fluids. The shedding of tears was considered to be sacrificial and was even conceived as mirroring Christ’s sacrificial shedding of blood. Tears were a means and result of “injuring” one’s eyes and they, like Christ’s blood, were able to cleanse from sin. They were also part of the process of mystical stigmatization or visions of the stigmata for mystics like Catherine of Siena and Francis of Assisi.⁷ Tears and blood were both thought to issue, either literally or metaphorically, from the heart, and were connected to

³ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Germany and Beyond* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007) discusses controversies and theologies surrounding sacred blood at great length, with particular emphasis on questions of Eucharistic vs. non-Eucharistic blood, “miracle hosts” that bleed when broken, and the issue of immutability vs. decay in devotion to blood left behind by Christ or miraculously appearing in other contexts.
⁴ Ibid, 16.
⁵ Ibid, 158.
“feminine piety because of their associations with the suffering of the Virgin as Mater dolorosa as she beholds the wounds of Christ at the foot of the cross.”

Bouts’s image and others like it allowed for expansion on the associations between blood, tears, and the sorrowing Mary. Like the mirrored droplets scattered on the faces of the two holy figures, Mary’s eyes themselves play an important role in her Compassion. Both Christ’s and Mary’s eyes are not just full of tears; they are also red and swollen, their eyelids inflamed and pushed together until they are little more than gashes on their faces. The apparent bloodiness and slit-like appearance of the Virgin’s reddened eyes in the painting makes them very much like depictions of Christ’s side wound from which redemptive blood and water flowed after his Crucifixion.

Despite the visual similarities of the Virgin’s weeping eyes to the wound that pierced Christ’s heart and the early Renaissance comparisons of blood and tears, particularly in their applications in female piety, there is no scholarship of which I am aware that directly addresses this visual relationship beyond a cursory mention. Furthermore, Mary’s compassionate tears mimic the blood and water from Christ’s side, both coming directly from the heart; the eyes, then, serve the same purpose as the wound as both allow holy water to breach the barrier of the

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body from within. Lastly, the eyes and the wound—as well as the blood that pours from it—frequently appear to be physically connected as well as visually similar. The side wound and Mary’s weeping eyes tend to be emphasized or treated in similar ways, with pictorial gesture, seeping fluid, and other formal elements putting the eyes and the wound on an almost equal plane. Set in tandem with the profusely bleeding Christ, Mary’s bloodshot and downturned eyes are the mechanism that mystically connects her heart to his via his open side wound; the bleeding wound and the weeping eyes are twin testimonies of Christ’s redemptive suffering, his love for humanity, and the mother’s ceaseless devotion to her son.

Considering the widespread commonalities between holy blood and tears in visual and textual representations of the early modern Flemish devotional culture, I argue that Mary’s eyes act as the locus of her Compassion for Christ and for all of humanity. Furthermore, I suggest that pictorial blood and tears—combined as they are on the faces, bodies, and hearts of the Virgin and her son—function as metonymic devices that, like the Man of Sorrows type, invoke the entirety of the Passion and Compassion. The multivalent functions of the blood and tears in Bouts’s diptych expand it beyond just a representation of Mary and her son and allow it to become a window and mirror into which viewers could look to engage in penance and commune with the tormented dyad in love and supplication.

1. Channels to the Heart

The heart, as both the literal center for anatomical blood flow and the spiritual center for love, is a vitally important organ in discussions of both bleeding and weeping. In Bouts’s diptych, Christ and his mother draw implicit attention to their hearts through multipurpose gestures: Christ’s hands, either lifted in blessing or crossed in captivity frame his bare, bruised, and bleeding chest; Mary’s praying hands, with their steepled shape and lifted thumb, direct the
viewer’s eye to her heart and make a protective enclosure of her chest, almost like a secondary, “exterior heart,” similar in size, shape, and placement to one beneath her skin. Christ’s open robe is starkly scarlet against his pale skin, and the blood streaking his chest is painted in precisely the same color as the cloth, further emphasizing his heart within. The deep V-shape of the garment, together with the musculature of his neck, makes his entire chest cordiform. Both hearts, though enclosed in flesh and cloth, are “opened” in these images through literal or physical wounding induced by deep, compassionate love.

These holy hearts have several access points beyond simply the veins that draw life-giving blood in and out of them. The fourteenth-century Swedish mystic Saint Birgitta suggests that “there are two ways to reach the heart of God. The first is the humility of true contrition. This leads a person to God’s heart and to a spiritual dialogue. The second way is the contemplation of [the] Son’s passion. This removes the hardness of the human heart and makes a person run toward God’s heart with joy.” Bouts’s painting, though, suggests more specific channels to the heart that pertain to Birgitta’s notions of contrition and meditation on the Passion: it considers physical as well as spiritual access to the heart of God.

Perhaps the most obvious of these channels to the heart is pierced skin, which allows the blood to leave the safe, pure confines of the heart and exit the body. Christ’s side wound, of course, is the ultimate example of this wound-to-heart pathway: when he “willed that [his] holy side should be opened by the point of a ruthless lance,” the spear that pricked him reached all the way to his heart, expelling the fountain of blood and water that respectively redeemed and washed away the world’s sins.

imagines Christ’s words to the reader: “I have had my side pierced by a soldier’s spear in order to open wide for you the entrance to my heart, and to show you how great was the love which led me to die for you.” Here, the literal and spiritual connections between wound and heart are again emphasized as the breach in Christ’s side allows the devout viewer entrance into his body and access to his love, housed in his heart that is “most sweet, most clean, and most pleasant, so abounding in love.”

Love also is the mediator for the second channel into the heart: the eyes. This channel manifests in several different ways in the art and writings of the period surrounding Bouts’s diptych. One example is a courtly mythological allegory that places Christ in the guise of Cupid. In this role, Christ acts as both the object and deliverer of love. In images like that of Love and Fortune in the Songbook of Jean de Montchenu (folio 4, National Library of France, Ms. Rothschild 2973, ca. 1475, fig. 5), Cupid takes on attributes—such as the mandorla—that are usually reserved for Christ. The love that the amorous archer delivers is likened to the love of the Passion, wherein Christ died to save his beloved, which is all of humanity. The Cupid-Christ figure shoots arrows into the eyes of his subjects, and it is via the eye that either love or arrow enters into their hearts.

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12 Lockhart, 45.
14 Barbara Newman, “Love’s Arrows: Christ as Cupid in Late Medieval Devotion,” in The Mind’s Eye: Art of Theological Argument in the Middle Ages, ed. Jeffrey Hamburger and Anne-Marie Bouche (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2006), 267, 263. Newman explains that the Cupid of the late Middle Ages was not a putti, but rather a mature, serious, and dangerous figure that bestowed “amorous desire,” which was thought of as a medical condition.
15 Newman, 267 notes that Venus is also sometimes given a mandorla in a “mildly sacrilegious homage to the Virgin’s Assumption.” Potential blasphemy aside, this iconographical connection of Venus to Mary also supports the imagery of Christ as Cupid.
17 Newman, 280.
Hagiographic examples of literal and spiritual connections between the eyes and the heart further support this channel. In his iconic account of the life of the poverello of Assisi, St. Bonaventure (d. 1274) wrote that it was specifically the vision of Christ crucified “presented to his eyes by Divine Providence that caused St. Francis to rejoice while simultaneously “piercing [his] soul like a sword of compassion and grief” and ultimately resulting in “a marvelous fire in [Francis’] heart and a wonderful sign on his flesh.” Here again, the eyes are a point of entrance resulting in an effect on the heart: literal sight can result in literal and spiritual changes to the heart. The shedding of tears is another common saintly mechanism through which the eyes and the heart connect; specifically, the heart is often mentioned as the headwaters for a stream of spiritual weeping. Thomas à Kempis (d. 1471), in the Imitation of Christ, expresses his deep desire to, like the Magdalene, weep in the presence of Christ: his “entire heart should be inflamed and weep for joy.” Denis the Carthusian suggests that the “sweetest tears” flow when the sensations of “spiritual joy and pleasure we find in our Beloved and in His gracious presence” are felt in the heart, which, similar to previous examples, Denis describes as a “wellspring of holy love.” Catherine of Siena, as part of her many writings on tears and weeping, claims that “every tear proceeds from the heart.”

In Bouts’s painting itself, the particularly sharp and lethal-looking thorns in Christ’s crown pierce into the skin of his forehead and approach his eyes, mimicking the spear into his heart. In the Meditations on the Life of Christ (Meditationes vitae Christi), Pseudo-Bonaventure

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18 Saint Bonaventure, The Life of St. Francis of Assisi: from the “Legenda Santi Francisci” of S. Bonaventure, ed. The Archbishop of Westminster (London: R. Washbourne, 1868), 164. Newman, 277. Bynum, 162 discusses how, though the soul is not held in the blood or the heart per se, both blood and soul are animating forces; thus, blood is equated with spirit as both are considered to be a “carrier of soul or life.”
20 Denis the Carthusian, Spiritual Writings, 244.
21 Gutgesell, 245. Gutgesell 244 discusses Catherine of Siena’s outline of a kind of spiritual progression through the various purposes and types of tears; her ascribed functions for tears are not particularly relevant to this paper.
describes “how often they strike him upon the head to drive the piercing thorns more deeply into
his sacred temples, so that they forced the blood from every part, which running down in great
abundance, covered his blessed face”—the abundant blood running from the facial wounds
further associates them with the one on his side.²²

The sight of this blood running down her son’s face is another means by which Mary’s
heart is reached and pricked. St. Birgitta, who recorded many visions of the lives of Jesus and his
mother, addresses Christ’s beauty several times in her revelations. She describes how, growing
up, Christ “was so fair of face that no one, not even someone very sad at heart, could see him
face-to-face without being cheered at his sight” and that he “possessed such a gift of beauty that
all those who looked upon him used to be comforted from whatever sorrow they had in their
hearts.” Even as a child, he was so pure that “not even tangles or dirtiness were ever found in his
hair.”²³ This description of innocent, brilliant, uplifting beauty stands in direct contrast to
Bouts’s image, which instead shows how “streams of blood poured down from where the thorns
sat and filled his face and hair and eyes and ears so that almost nothing at all but blood could be
seen.”²⁴ Bouts presents the viewer and Mary with a ghastly Christ whose face, like Job’s, “is foul
with weeping, and on [his] eyelids is the shadow of death.”²⁵

This countenance clearly does not, as promised by Birgitta, comfort the sorrow in the
mother’s heart. Jesus’s beauty is hidden not only by his grisly but pure outpouring of blood; it is
also defiled by the spittle of his persecutors. Birgitta describes how Mary, “when she
contemplated her Son’s face, more beautiful than any of the sons of men, she thought on how

²² Saint Bonaventure, St. Bonaventure’s Life of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, trans. From Latin (New York:
P.J. Kenedy, 1881), 297.
²³ Saint Birgitta, Volume 2, 127; Saint Birgitta, The Revelations of St. Birgitta of Sweden: Volume 3, Liber Caelestis,
²⁵ Job 16:16
irreverently the lips of impious men would stain it with their spit” and how “[his] head was crowned with thorns, and [his] face spat upon by their mouths.”26 Christ himself speaks to her saying, “I am regarded as a worm, lying as though dead in the winter. Passersby spit on it and trample it down.”27 These filthy effluvia, expelled in violence by the “dogs” that “gaped on me with their mouths” corrupts, even as Christ’s holy effluvia, mingled with theirs on his face, promises cleansing and life rather than defilement and death.28

Mary’s sorrow in seeing her son’s beautiful face so debased is exacerbated by her memory of his fairness and the foreshadowing of his suffering in childhood. Saint Birgitta explains that Mary’s sorrow “expressed itself…in [her] inner thoughts” when she looked at her young son, “as often as [she] wrapped him in linen-cloth, as often as [she] saw his hands and feet” and heard slander spoken against him.29 While Christ hung on the cross, Mary “beheld her Son naked and bleeding, alive and dead, pierced by a lance, and everyone mocking him as he hung there among thieves.”30 The son that the sorrowing Virgin sees face-to-face in the diptych, then, is the same one that she worried over in his infancy and the same that she swooned with in his death. Uncharacteristically causing grief instead of “cheer,” Christ’s countenance in the diptych evokes each of Mary’s distressing memories of sorrow and pain for her son. The Ad Herennium suggests that images stay in the memory more than words and that “if we somehow disfigure [images], as by introducing one stained with blood or soiled with mud or smeared with red paint, so that form is more striking…that, too, will ensure our remembering them more

28 Psalm 22:13, 16.
readily.”31 And, indeed after Christ’s death, “His passion was so firmly fixed in [Mary’s] heart that, whether [she] was eating or working, it remained fresh in [her] memory.”32 Streaked liberally with red paint as blood and the “mud” of wicked spittle, Bouts’s Christ exemplifies the Ad Herennium’s image as one that is both easily remembered and that prompts memory. The cruor that drips down Jesus’s face, obscuring his perfect beauty, comes from the thorns that threaten his eyes as the lance threatens his heart; similarly, the thorns and blood “pierce” Mary’s eyes and subsequently her heart. In a manifestation of Simeon’s prophecy, which Birgitta visualizes as “an angel carrying a long sword, very broad and bloody” standing in front of the Virgin, Mary’s vision of her son as Man of Sorrows encompasses all of her sorrows into one bloody, wounded figure that, once again, pierces her heart.

1.1. Visual Blending of Blood and Tears

The triangulation of heart, eyes, and wound is a foundational idea in this paper. Eyes produce tears and wounds produce blood; however, because of the connection between eyes and heart, it may also be possible that eyes produce blood and wounds tears. In this tripartite system, blood and tears become almost interchangeable, both functioning as cleansing agents, symptoms of pain, and emotional effluvia produced in that “wellspring of love” that is the heart. In the Bouts diptych, there is a notable blurring of distinction between blood and tears. The painting shows the jewel-like drops of blood produced by Christ’s thorny crown dripping past his eyes and falling alongside his tears; the outer corners of the eyes in particular blend the two, with pink liquid falling from each. Mary’s vibrantly reddened eyes in the same pairing seem to make her tears bloody as well. Though her blood remains enclosed in her cheeks, its proximity to the

skin’s surface effectively mixes the two fluids. Other standalone images of Christ as the Man of Sorrows painted by Bouts or his workshop, such as a panel in the Metropolitan Museum and another in the Kunstberatung, Zurich AG, show drops of blood on Christ’s cheeks that appear to have come from the eyes themselves (fig. 6). These drops could reference those that spilled into his eyes such that “he could not even see…without blinking to get rid of the blood,” but they also create an intentional ambiguity between blood and tear.33

The outpouring of fluid from Christ’s side on the cross after “one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water” makes perhaps the most obvious connection between blood, water, and wound, but several visual examples expand on or deepen this comparison to include tears specifically.34 Adriaen Isenbrant’s solemn and sepulchral depiction of the Christ Crowned with Thorns (Ecce Homo) and the Mourning Virgin, produced some three decades after the bulk of Bouts’s works, is much less graphically bloody than its earlier diptych counterparts but maintains the uncertain mixing of blood and tears in its demure depiction of the fluids (fig. 7). Several peach-colored drops dot Christ’s upper chest, above the spot where his side wound would be, their source ambiguous. Their light color, just visible on Christ’s pallid skin, suggests that the drops are not just blood, but blood mixed with tears, perhaps his own or those of Mary, who stares in blank grief at her son’s wounded body. The diluted blood in this work, which, indicated by the lack of side wound, shows Christ before his crucifixion, also foreshadows the two fluids that will pour from his opened side.35

34 John 19:34
Mary’s mourning face also shows blended blood and water as indications of the eyes’ connection to the bleeding heart. Some examples demonstrate a literal exchange of tears for blood, as in a mid-fourteenth-century icon of the Virgin, which may have served as an early reference for the paired Mater dolorosa type. In this image, her face and sky-blue mantle are streaked with red instead of blue, ambiguously combining Christ’s blood dripping from the cross above and the tears spilling from the Virgin’s eyes (fig. 8). A small German panel from the fifteenth century also shows Mary’s mantle flecked with the blood falling from Christ’s pierced hands above her; Mary’s tears seem to be displaced by the droplets of Christ’s blood that rain down on her and the blue and white cloth that seems to pour over her hands (fig. 9). However, because the Virgin’s “bleeding” eyes are a result of interior rather than exterior wounds, her tears tend to be colored by the blood that swells under her skin and reddens her eyes and by the compassionate suffering in her heart.36

Christ’s tears, too, sometimes appear as an indistinctly pink, mixing either with the blood on his face—a result of literal wounds—or beneath his reddened eyelids—a result of his deep empathy with and cyclical pain felt in response to his mother’s compassion. His pain, like Mary’s was also internal: as he entrusted his mother to his beloved apostle, “it could be clearly seen from his expression that his heart was being pierced by the most sharp arrow of immense pain out of compassion for his mother.”37 However, because Mary’s suffering during the Passion is exclusively internal, it manifests more emphatically in unshed blood on her person than it ever does on Christ’s. Mary’s face, surrounded by a blood-red mantel in the Pietà panel of Rogier van der Weyden’s Miraflores Triptych, demonstrates her internal grief with its flushed complexion

36 Areford, David S. The Art of Empathy: The Mother of Sorrows in Northern Renaissance Art and Devotion (London: Giles, 2013), 38, 40.
(fig. 10). The transparent tears on her cheeks are dyed red from blood veiled by unbroken skin—this blood, previously just an anatomical marker of weeping, is emphasized and accessed by Mary’s grieving tears.

An early English Marian lyric describes the Virgin’s “bloody tears” that originate in her heart and fall from her eyes and emphasizes, in the words of Laura Kalas, “the connection between blood and its fluid transference as a material (and maternal) conduit of emotion.”38 For Mary, particularly in her pairing with the suffering Christ, her eyes are her wounds that connect to her heart, that bleed from her anguished soul, and that feel the emotional sting when she gazes at her son. As she looks on Christ, he implores, “Mother, have pity on your child, and wash away those bloody tears, they hurt me worse than my death,” to which she responds, “Son, how may I these tears shun? I see those bloody floods run out of thy heart to my feet.”39

2. The Eye as Wound

The notion of Mary’s eyes as wounds is a key aspect of their status as the locus of her compassionate suffering with Christ.40 Visually, Mary’s eyes and her son’s wounds are depicted and addressed in similar ways to indicate their functional and spiritual correspondence. In images of the sorrowing Virgin, her eyes are frequently shown bright red and swollen almost shut from weeping. Her eyelids push together like the lips of a deep cut; her downturned gaze mimics the crescent shape usually seen on Christ’s ribs. Although Bouts’s diptychs usually do not show the side wound itself, Mary’s eyes are often directed toward where it would be, and the blood and

38 Kalas, 51; the Marian hymn taken from IMEV 3692, ‘Mary at the Foot of the Cross’, no. 40, l. 3, in Middle English Marian Lyrics, ed. Karen Saupe (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1997), TEAMS online Edition.
40 Kalas, 30 discusses melancholia “as an open wound” specifically in the context of Margery of Kempe’s weeping.
tears discussed previously make an implicit connection between her eyes and his wound as
generators of sacred effluvia. Other works of the same subject, though, do make this visual
connection explicit: for example, a diptych of the *Mater Dolorosa and Man of Sorrows* after the
style of Rogier van der Weyden (ca. 1475-1499) puts Mary’s two bloodshot eyes and Christ’s
seeping wound at precisely the same angle, drawing a clear line between these three, almond-
shaped gashes in the skin, as if each of them had been created by the same piercing weapon (fig.
11). The Cummer Museum’s *Mother of Sorrows* panel (ca. 1470) by the Master of the Stötteritz
altarpiece emphasizes the bloodiness of the Virgin’s eyes even more garishly (fig. 12). They
seem to almost glow red with subcutaneous blood; the thickly swollen lids and fountains of tears
that pour from them appear much more like an injury than a natural anatomical function.

The unnaturally red and swollen eyes of the Virgin connect them to Christ’s side wound
spiritually and functionally as well as visually. Both the bleeding wound and the red, crying eyes
are indications of an internal substance—blood or water, both composed of the body’s humors—
breaching the body’s integrity by a failed or nonfunctional barrier: broken skin or inflamed tear
ducts.\(^{41}\) Christ’s side wound is often allegorized as a doorway into which he welcomes the
“body of the Church,” literally enfolding them into his own body. While this certainly is true,
particularly considering the willingness with which Christ allowed his side to be “opened” on the
cross, the wound is also—simultaneously—an injury and a result of violation to the body’s
wholeness.\(^{42}\) Thus, the wounding, willful and welcoming though it was, resulted in an
“unnatural” shedding of blood. Medieval theology on the Holy Blood uses the term *sanguis* for

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\(^{41}\) Kalas, 30-32 argues that Margery of Kempe’s weeping functions in a similar way: the woman’s tears are not an
“expression” of mystical experience, but rather are “teleologies of a prior disposition and melancholia,” an idea that
“is supported by the complex web of medieval systems of body—mind, heaven—earth, inner—outer” that support
the notion of the physio-spiritual barrier that I suggest here.

\(^{42}\) Bynum, 2 discusses the Church coming forth from the side wound; Bynum, 10 describes Christ’s wounds as
“doorway and access” rather than “violation”; Lockhart, 45 and Bynum, 170 discuss how Christ made the choice to
exsanguinate after being stabbed by Longinus’ spear.
Christ’s sweet, pure, and healthy blood, circulating naturally inside the body. The violation of the Passion tainted the internal sanguis into cruor, blood violently and unnaturally pulled outside the body.\textsuperscript{43} The breaching of the physio-spiritual barrier of Christ’s skin both paid the pretium for humanity’s sin and resulted in the temporary sullying of Christ’s perfect blood and the sorrowing of his watching mother.

Mary’s eyes are a similar victim of violence. Though not literally stabbed, her eyes, “attentively fixed on her beloved son,” took in the painful and “wounding” sight of her son’s gruesome death; her heart “felt many strokes of death” and “thus did the one lance, with the same sacrilegious stroke, pierce the blessed body of Jesus and the sacred soul of Mary.”\textsuperscript{44}

Christ’s mother, despite this anguishing blow to her soul and its iconographic repercussion in the deathlike swoon she frequently adopts in images, is not depicted textually or visually as bearing any external injury. However, I suggest that Mary’s eyes are her wound, the indicators and consequences of the greatest of her sorrows. Violated as she was by viewing the beating, humiliation, bleeding, and death of her child, the wholeness of her pure body is similarly violated by a lacrimal exsanguination that imitated her son’s hematic one. In images like the Cummer Mother of Sorrows and Bouts’s diptych, Mary’s eyes are raw and injured like her son’s body—“as the blood flowed over his whole body during the scourging, the water of countless tears streamed out of her eyes.”\textsuperscript{45} As the entry point of the sword into her heart, the eyes pour out the tearful “blood” that her interior wounds cannot shed.

Their formal mimicry of Christ’s wound extends beyond their gash-like shape: both eyes and wound overflow with blood and water called forth as a result of deep and abiding love for

\textsuperscript{43} Bynum, 17-19 discusses the distinction between these two forms of blood as discussed by Isidore of Seville (d. 636 CE) and Vincent of Beauvais (d. 1264 CE).

\textsuperscript{44} Saint Bonaventure, \textit{St. Bonaventure’s Life of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ}, 313, 316.

Mary’s and Jesus’s broken children: Christ and all of fallen humanity, respectively. A painted Pietà from the workshop of Gerard David (ca. 1520) further emphasizes the mother-child relationship as it recalls the icon type of the Virgin of Tenderness—in both, Mary nestles her child into her cheek, almost touching him with her lips (fig. 13). In this Pietà, Mary sheds six glistening tears above seven rivulets of blood on the dead Christ’s forehead. Hans Memling’s The Man of Sorrows in the Arms of the Virgin (ca. 1475) similarly depicts this moment of imitative grief: Christ’s wound, mirrored in his mother’s eyes, spills six streams of blood into his hand, cupped—chalice-like—at his hip; seven drops adorn his brow (fig. 14). Mary, likewise, sheds six tears, just one short of her canonical Seven Sorrows. The Deposition is generally thought of as the sixth Sorrow and the Entombment as the seventh; these painted scenes fall between those two, as the impetus of every Sorrow lies bleeding, still and cadaverous, in the Virgin’s embrace.

2.1. Gestural Connections Between Eyes and Wound

Another way in which Mary’s eyes and Christ’s wound are treated similarly is with pictorial gesture. Gesture, as will be discussed in more detail in a later section, is an important aspect of depicting weeping in art, helping to clarify ambiguous facial expressions that could be understood as either grief or laughter. In many depictions of the mourning Virgin, including the Bouts works and the Cummer panel mentioned above, Mary is shown with some kind of gesture

46 A painted Pietà from the workshop of Gerard David, ca. 1520 in the Philadelphia Museum of Art also shows Mary shedding six tears as she rests her cheek on the dead Christ’s.
47 Dagmar Eichberger, “Visualizing the Seven Sorrows of the Virgin: Early Woodcuts and Engravings in the Context of Netherlandish Confraternities” in The Seven Sorrows Confraternity of Brussels: Drama, Ceremony, and Art Patronage (16th-17th centuries), ed. Emily S. Thelen (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2015), 113-144 discusses multiple examples of woodcuts showing the distinct Seven Sorrows, often in roundels surrounding a central image of the Virgin pierced by a sword. The introduction to this same volume discusses how devotion to the Seven Sorrows of the Virgin blossomed in the Low Countries during the late 15th and early 16th centuries; Kirkland-Ives, 37 mentions that Mary’s tears mimic the blood on Christ’s forehead.
associated with her tears: typically wiping her eyes with a cloth or holding her hands, covered or bare, to her upper face. In several additional instances, Mary’s gesture of weeping and touching her eyes is mimicked in her gesture toward Christ’s side wound. A clear example of these twin gestures is seen in Martin Schongauer’s engraving of Christ as the Man of Sorrows with the Virgin and Saint John from the second half of the fifteenth century and in an ivory carving based on the engraving (figs. 15, 16). This image shows Christ crowned with thorns with a gash in his ribcage—after his death, yet still standing. He is supported by John’s hand on his left elbow and Mary’s on his torso, almost touching the bleeding wound. Mary’s other hand reaches up to her face to wipe away a tear from her inflamed and downcast eyes.

This image of Christ between his two beloved mourners draws parallels between Mary’s eyes and her son’s wound in several ways. Mary’s touch on Christ’s torso, ostensibly holding him up in the transitory state between life and death that is characteristic of the Man of Sorrows type, is too light to really be able to support his body: her three fingertips just brush the skin around his wound. While the delicacy of this gesture speaks to the miraculous nature of Christ’s dead-yet-standing body (John, too, supports Christ with only a few fingers) and the extra-narrative nature of the image, it also mimics Mary’s wiping of her eyes. In the same way that she reaches to remove the tears from her stinging eyes, she extends her hand to brush the drops of blood from Christ’s broken skin. Both hands even hold a similar position, lightly cupped with the thumb away from the fingers. This gesture enacts a vision to St. Birgitta where Mary speaks of her interaction with Christ after he was pulled from the cross; she lingered with the body after everyone else departed, as it brought her comfort to “be able to touch his body…and explore his wounds and wipe away the blood.”

similarity between injury and eyes: his skin is parted more than in some depictions (as Mary’s eyelids are, conversely, pushed closer together), and its curved U-shape reflects that of Mary’s eye. Rather than bleeding in streams, Schongauer’s wound bleeds in two discrete drops like the tears that so often roll down the Virgin’s nose. Mary, however, sheds no tears in this engraving; her manual connection to Christ’s blood seems to take the place of literal tears as the fluid emotion that would typically appear on her face is transferred and condensed into the two drops falling from Christ’s wound. Those twin rivulets act simultaneously and synecdochally as blood, tears, and the water that came from Christ’s heart.50

John’s gestures lend further insight into the function of Mary’s. His right hand lightly grasps the Savior’s elbow, and his left holds a place in the pages of his Gospel book. The connection between John’s two hands—one on the body of Christ and the other on the text—is likely a visual testimony of the beloved apostle’s statement that “the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us” as the hands emphasize, respectively, the bodily nature of Christ and the written word.51 That John’s gestures are a reflection of his Gospel testimony suggests that Mary’s gestures have a similar function of attesting her faith in her son. John’s gaze, though slightly unfocused, is inclined in the direction of Christ’s wound, also referencing the saint’s eyewitness account of the piercing that produced the injury.52 In the cases of both Mary and John, it is the sight of Christ’s death and injury that produced their sorrow and testimony, respectively.

St. Birgitta, at multiple points in her revelatory writings on the Passion, describes Mary’s reaction to seeing her son’s death. She records that the Roman solider Longinus “thrust the lance

50 Barasch, 23-24 discusses how sometimes gesture is used to indicate crying in lieu of (rather than in conjunction with) literal tears.
51 John 1:14
52 John 19:34
at [Christ’s] right side so violently and powerfully that the lance was almost about to go through the other side of the body. When it was pulled out of the body, there immediately came a sudden and abundant flow of blood from the wound…when his mother saw [the blood from the wound], it could clearly be seen in her face and expression that a sharp sword of pain was piercing her soul.”53 John’s witness of the brutal scene is again referenced in the book he holds, as “he that saw it bare record.”54 While John’s witness resulted in a literal written testimony, Mary’s resulted in one inscribed on her heart by that “sharp sword of pain” that entered through her eyes and wrote there the indelible image of her broken son. Here tears, too, become a kind of “ink” that pens her witness on her very face.

The Virgin’s testimony of Christ, then, is centered on her suffering. In the Schongauer print, her suffering is indicated by bleeding and weeping, two distinct manifestations of late medieval female piety.55 Here, eyes and tears, connected to the wound as they are, become her testimony of Christ as the “Son of the Highest.”56 The emotion in Mary’s eyes, emphasized by the weeping gesture and by their swollen lids, implies her connection to her divine son, both as his mother and as his devoted disciple. Their wounded appearance implies Christ’s suffering and, consequently, Mary’s co-suffering, thus becoming indicators of her spiritual wounds. Even in images where, unlike in the Schongauer, Christ’s wound is not present, the Virgin’s eyes invoke her own wounds and those of her son.57

53 Saint Birgitta, *The Revelations of St. Birgitta of Sweden: Volume 3*, 237. Other of Birgitta’s accounts of Mary’s reaction to seeing Christ die on the cross can be be found in *Volume 2*, pg. 127 and *Volume 4*, pg. 185.
54 John 19:35.
55 Kalas, 50.
56 Luke 1: 32. The angel Gabriel tells Mary that Jesus “shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his Father David.”
57 Denis the Carthusian, *Spiritual Writing*, 224 discusses how “the remembrance of what our Lord suffered in His Passion” produces “tears of love” from the heart.
In images of the sorrowing Virgin when Christ is only implied, such as the Cummer panel, Mary’s eyes take the place of Christ’s wound. Red, swollen, and seeping, they are the literal manifestation of the spiritual wounds on her heart, pierced with the “sword of sorrow.”

As Mary gazes on the cross, her eyes are pierced, like Christ’s heart, by the image of her anguishing son; the physiological and psychological indications of the mother’s pain similarly pierce the viewer, so all three participants—mother, son, and supplicant—are “wounded with gashes…on account of the love of [Mary’s] Son.”

3. Tears as Agents of Wounding

Books of hours are another medium in which the viewer is brought into close contact with devotional imagery. As a kind of pendant medium to the diptych, the book of hours puts the reader in proximate and intimate conversation with the subjects who are face-to-face with each other on “leaves” of vellum instead of wood. Many books of hours contain representations of Christ suffering and his mother grieving, but there is generally less emphasis on blood and tears in these manuscripts than there is in panel painting. However, the Boussu Hours, ca. 1490-95, a book of hours produced for use in Cambrai by the Master of Antoine Rolin and Simon Marmion (National Library of France Ms-1185 reservé), foregrounds imagery those effluvia. This long and luxuriously illuminated manuscript features unique marginals on several of the pages of the Office of the Passion; the decoration on folios.187r and 196r (figs. 17, 18) draws particular attention to the interface between blood, eyes, and tears. The prayer cycle is preceded by a full-page miniature of Christ in Gethsemane (folio 186v, fig. 19); folio 187v opens the text of Matins.

58 Luke 2:35, St. Bonaventure, St. Bonaventure’s Life of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, 316
59 From the Stabat Mater hymn, via Areford, Art of Empathy, 32.
60 Lynn F. Jacobs, Opening Doors: The Early Netherlandish Triptych Reinterpreted (Pennsylvania: The University of Pennsylvania State Press, 2012) 3-4 discusses 15th-century usage of “leaves” (feuilles) as the terminology for panels in triptychs and how this term links “the experience of the triptych conceptually with that of reading and more particularly the page-turning that necessarily accompanies the act of reading.” Jacobs also discusses the terms “doors” and “wings” for the panels of triptychs.
with the typical incipit “Domine labia m[ea] aperies,” accompanied by the scene of Christ before Pilate.

Surrounding the text is a gold background dripping with sparkling, translucent water drops and thick drops of blood. Among the drops is an image of the pelican using her beak to prick her breast and feed her hungry brood in imitation of the suffering Christ opposite her. A few pages later, as the book’s miniatures follow the course of Christ’s Passion, a full-page image of Christ on the *Via Dolorosa* (folio 195v, fig. 20) faces the beginning of the hour of Sext surrounded with similarly unusual marginal decoration. Folio 196r also features a sprinkling of glistening liquid, but now as tears, falling from reddened, squinting eyes that dot the gold background behind. Here, the initial shows the Elevation of the Cross, and the weeping eyes are accompanied by the heavy nails and hammer that would have been used by Christ’s executioners in the miniature.

These marginal decorations speak to an important aspect of the comparison between weeping eyes and bleeding wounds: that tears act as agents of wounding and injury. The injurious power of tears is particularly salient in the relationship between the dying Christ and his compassionate mother as they cause both figures physical and spiritual pain. The decoration of the *Boussu Hours*’ Passion cycle supports this suggestion of tears as weapons both for the holy figures depicted in the book and for the contrite reader interacting with it.

3.1. Weaponizing Tears

Perhaps the most direct cultural example of tears as wounding agents comes from the practice of episcopal weeping. Bishops were often recorded weeping during services, from important festivals to common celebrations of the mass.61 Their tears were multipurpose, with

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such functions as mourning for sin or death, giving proof of divine absolution, and signifying the
bishop’s unity with Christ’s suffering. A bishop’s tears were also conceptualized as weapons
“in defense of the Christian faith” as they protected against the devil’s temptations and aided the
bishop in his ongoing battle for control of his physical body. Bishops shed tears as a form of
self-flagellation, made effective by the belief that weeping—particularly “excessive weeping”—was detrimental to one’s health. The eyes were thought to be a source of temptation, and tears could be used to “scourge” them in response to sin, with blindness occurring as a literal consequence of such penitent weeping and helping the bishop to “turn away [his] eyes from beholding vanity” and to “see the evil things [he] must flee and the healthful things [he] must preserve.” Such clarifying tears are enacted by St. Francis of Assisi, who, as recorded in his vita, wept “regardless of the danger to his bodily health” and recommended that all men “cleanse their conscience daily with an abundance of tears.”

Devotional weeping also occurred outside of the realm of physical penance. St. Jerome, speaking about the tears that accompany his most heartfelt prayer, says:

O humble tear, yours is the power, yours is the kingdom; you do not fear the tribunal, you impose silence on your wicked accusers. No one can forbid you access, and when you have entered in you will not depart empty. You inflict more torments on the devil than can hell itself. What more can I say? You conquer the Unconquerable, and in a certain way you bind and force the All Powerful. Prayer bends God, a tear—if I may say so—forces Him; a prayer soothes and delights him, a tear pierces Him.

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62 Ibid., 593-4.
63 Ibid., 596-7.
64 Ibid., 595. In this article, Harvey discusses at length the practice of episcopal weeping as part of the bishop’s efforts to master and control his sexual urges: weeping was thought to be a proper and healthy expelling and cooling of his male “hot” humors in lieu of sexual expulsions for the same purpose.
65 Ibid., 595-6. Kalas, 38 also mentioned that weeping was thought to “cause, or to create, physiological change.” Psalm 119:37.
66 St. Birgitta, The Revelations of St. Birgitta of Sweden: Volume 2, 272. This revelation consists of a set of questions and answers between God and a monk. The monk asks God if he cannot do whatever he likes with the eyes he was given; God replies with the quoted text as the purpose of his giving the monk his eyes.
67 Saint Bonaventure, The Life of St. Francis of Assisi, 62.
68 Denis the Carthusian, Spiritual Writing, 224. This idea from St. Jerome is cited by Denis the Carthusian, himself a great proponent of devotional weeping for all devout.
In this excerpt, tears not only have the injurious power to “pierce” and “torment” God, but they are themselves likened to a prayer, specifically the Pater Noster, for “theirs,” like God’s, “is the power and kingdom.”

This idea of tears as prayers, weapons, and actors of injury is pertinent to the Boussu margin decoration and to the notion of Mary’s eyes being the locus of her co-suffering with Christ. Visually, both pages connect tears to sharp instruments used to wound: on folio 187r, the blood and water surround the piercing bill of the pelican, almost as if the gold margin were an expanded microcosm of the bird’s broken breast. Folio 196r pairs the tears with the nails and hammer used to affix Christ to the cross. It bears noting at this point that the water drops on folio 187r may not be exclusively tears: because they immediately follow the Gethsemane miniature that begins the office, the drops could certainly represent Christ’s agonized sweat like “great drops of blood falling down to the ground,” as if soaking through to the page opposite the miniature when the book is closed.68 Blood and water together also evoke the fountain from Christ’s side wound.69 However, neither of these interpretations negate the possibility of the drops of water being tears, as Christ also produced “strong crying and tears” during his prayer in the Garden.70 Additionally, as mentioned, bodily fluids were conflated during this period such that all or most of them were considered to be some form of blood, even to the point that, as Caroline Walker Bynum states, “all human exudings…were seen as bleedings; and all bleedings were taken to be analogous.”71 Tears, then, were essentially no different in substance from blood

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68 Luke 22:55
69 John 19:34
70 Hebrews 5:7
71 Anthony Ossa-Richardson, “Cry Me a Relic: the Holy Tear of Vendôme and Early Modern Lipsanomachy,” in Knowledge and Profanation: Transgressing the Boundaries of Religion in Premodern Scholarship, ed. Martin Mulsow and Asaph Ben-Tov, 299-329 (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 311 suggests that tears were “only a kind of sweat or saliva, a superfluity of the humors.” Harvey, 602.
or sweat, and the water that accompanies the blood on folio 187r could be any of the mentioned holy fluids individually or simultaneously. However, because of their visual and compositional similarity to the tears on folio 196r, these drops likely function as tears.

It is important to address the question of what makes tears the wounders and not simply the result of having been wounded. While they certainly are the latter, they have the dual purpose of also causing injury themselves. Christ’s sacrificial tears in Gethsemane exemplify this idea. In direct divergence from St. Jerome’s claim that a prayerful tear “forces God” to hear an individual’s supplication, Christ’s prayer, mirrored in the words of the incipit for Matins that beg, “God, come to my assistance / Lord, make haste to help me,” falls on unyielding divine ears. His tears, though, do “pierce” the divine listener as Jerome suggests—but because he is God, his tears pierce himself. This paradoxical action of Christ’s tears as seemingly ineffective but actually efficacious and self-reflexive prayer imitates the widespread visual and theological notion of Christ as both priest and sacrifice—divinity vested in flesh and simultaneously ransom and officiant. Thus, Christ in the Garden weeps and suffers both despite and because of his tears.

The piercing action of the tear is also demonstrated by the resulting fluids on the facing page: as mentioned, when the book is closed, the marginal decoration would close over and adhere to Christ’s body in the Gethsemane miniature, allowing his holy blood, tears, and sweat to mystically transfer onto the incipit page. His tears wept in Gethsemane seem to produce the blood speckling the gold background on the facing page, with Christ’s injurious, pleading tears puncturing the precious golden “skin” of the book. The resulting mingling of tears and blood—

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72 St. Bonaventure, St. Bonaventure’s Life of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, 280 prompts the reader to ponder how, in this moment of most desperate “profound humility,” Christ forgets his “co-eternal and co-equal” status with God the Father and prays, like a man, for himself.
73 Denis the Carthusian, Spiritual Writings, 224.
pictorial and imagined—embodies one of the central mysteries of the Savior’s Agony in the Garden: that the water of his sweat mingled with and became “great drops of blood.”

In the case of folio 196r, the connection between tears and weapons of injury is more visually explicit: here, the droplets of water are accompanied by the nails used to affix Christ to the cross in the page’s historiated initial. The tears, like the three heavy nails—their broadened heads making them almost cruciform—have a strong downward action as they fall toward the bottom of the page. The sharp tips of the nails taper in precisely the same direction, so that they appear themselves like tears fashioned from iron. Other marginal decoration from the Boussu office of the Passion contain different weapons used to injure or humiliate Christ: many-tailed whips and bundles of sticks to beat his body (folio 190r, fig. 21) and the reeds and crown of thorns used to mock his holy status (folio 193r, fig. 22). Like the tears, these weapons are scattered over the same gold margins, drawing visual parallels between all four pages. The association of tears as nails on folio 196r also relates to the full-page miniature that faces the marginalia page: the scene of Christ carrying his Cross on the Via dolorosa. St. Veronica has just offered up her veil to Christ’s exhausted, dirty face; it is at this same moment that Mary sees her son from afar and, overcome with grief, weeps. Also in this moment, Christ tells the daughters of Jerusalem to “weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children.”

The weeping Virgin and women are depicted in the background of the Boussu miniature, barely noticeable behind the main scene. Their distance from the front of the picture plane leaves only their gestures—heads down and hands clasped or, in the case of Mary, crossed over her

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74 Mark 15:15; Matthew 27:29
heart—to indicate their distressed state, but the eyes on the facing page abundantly fill in for the absent weeping in the miniature.\textsuperscript{77} Here, the cascading tears not only indicate Mary’s grief but also the incipient hardship and sorrow predicted for the women and their children following Christ’s death. Thus, the tears become weapons rather than consolers for the weeping women; in a kind of inversion of the apotropaic weeping of a bishop, their crying promises suffering and spiritual destitution rather than protection with Christ’s statement that “the days are coming, in the which they shall say, blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bare, and the paps which never gave suck.”\textsuperscript{78} The visual relationship between the tears and nails further supports the notion of injurious tears: like the nails into the wood of the cross, the tears are imaginatively driven back into the eye. With every drop shed, the tears paradoxically “pierce” back into the eye—in the words of Arsenius the Great (d. 450 CE), “carving a whole into [the] chest from continuous weeping.”\textsuperscript{79} Mary’s Compassion also relates to the piercing action of the tears. Her encounter with Christ on the road to Calvary is the fourth of her Seven Sorrows, often depicted by literal swords entering into her heart, as in the opening miniature to the Hours of the Compassion of the Virgin in the \textit{Da Costa Hours}, ca. 1515, which, notably, also shows Mary’s eyes injured, bright red and swollen into welts over her sockets (folio 92v, Morgan Library MS M.399, fig. 23). Tears and nails on folio 196r become the weapons to pierce Mary’s heart by means of her red and swollen, wound-like eyes, injured, like Christ’s own body, by pictorial nails and imagined sword.

3.2. Weeping and Penitence in the Book of Hours Medium

\textsuperscript{77} Barasch, “The Crying Face,” 125 discuss the use of gesture rather than (or in addition to) facial expressions and literal tears to indicate weeping.

\textsuperscript{78} See Harvey, 596-7 as discussed above. Luke 23:29.

\textsuperscript{79} Gutgsell, 241.
A second level of wounding exists in the context of the book of hours medium as the readers of the book, engaged in an intimate conversation with the painted blood, sweat, and tears of the Mary and Christ, are wounded by their guilt for participating in the suffering of the Lamb. Devotion to and visual representation of the sorrowing Christ and his mother—the *Vir doloris* and *Mater dolorosa*—were so ubiquitous during this period that the reader confronted with the emotional, visceral fluid prompts in the book would likely have turned their thoughts to the holy dyad. Christianity during the late medieval period was also particularly preoccupied with penance and compunction: worshippers were encouraged to consider how their past and ongoing sins caused Christ’s pain, bleeding, and death.\(^80\) The book of hours, with its format that requires close physical engagement in its use, is an effective vehicle for implicating oneself in the suffering of Jesus. In the case of the *Boussu Hours*, those subjects are the travailing Christ, the sorrowful Virgin, and the fluid symptoms of their suffering. The wounding aspect of tears in this book, then, breaks into two categories or modes. I have already discussed the first, injurious tears as referential to the Passion. The second mode addresses injurious tears as pertaining to one’s own sinfulness, guilt, and compunction. In this second type, as in the first, the weaponizing of tears pertains to their effects on the body, their imitation of Christ’s weeping, and the relationship between blood and tears, both pictorially and theologically.

As mentioned in the context of bishops, “excessive weeping” was thought to cause blindness in the weeper. Such blindness, though, was not a punishment or undesirable consequence of crying: the subsequent blindness after weeping for one’s sins was considered to be a divine gift, a sign of sufficient penitence after engaging in the “self-flagellation” of shedding

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\(^80\) John R. Decker, *The Technology of Salvation and the Art of Geertgen tot Sint Jans*, (Burlington: Ashgate, 2009), 68-88; Bynum, 180, 184 Page 184 also addressed the discrepancies between the theological idea discussed here that an individual’s ongoing sins pained Christ anew continually and during transubstantiation, and the scriptural reference in Hebrews 9:28 that Christ was just “once offered” as a bloody sacrifice.
many tears. Weeping as an accompaniment to devotion is particularly suited to the Boussu pages because the blood and tear margins adorn the Hours of the Passion, the part of the book where the readers would have been most likely to weep over the suffering of Christ, both out of grief—like Mary—and out of penitent guilt for their contributions to the Savior’s pain. An unusual rubric for the hour of Sext, decorated with its painted eyes, calls readers’ attention to Jesus’s crucifixion between two thieves, inviting them to ponder the injustice of his execution and the debasement of his holy status and tender body. The pansy flower in the margin, the name of which references the French penser (“to think”), further encourages the reader to think deeply about the images on the page. Tears feature on one more page in the book: on folio 347r, columbine flowers and gold monograms join tears and gold-and-scarlet cordiform flowers to embellish the Miserere mei penitential psalm, further emphasizing the connection between tears, the reader’s need for mercy, and the psalmist’s plea to “have mercy upon me, O God” (fig. 24).

Penitential weeping has a long tradition in Christian devotion, beginning with patristic theologians such as Origen, who claimed that “prolonged prayer and intensity of tears incline God to mercy.” Crying for sin and guilt continued into the late medieval period with figures such as Margery of Kempe who wept for “compunction, devotion, and compassion” and

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81 Harvey, 595-6. A bishop’s self-flagellating activities and personal devotion made up for the fact that he had to be in the world surrounded by fineries. Weeping counted as a penitent action because contemporary medicine claimed that “excessive weeping was potentially detrimental to health.”

82 The gold monograms on this page likely pertain somehow to the book’s patrons (listed in the online catalogue entry as Jacques and Isabelle de Lalaing), but further exploration of this motif, which is seen throughout the book, is beyond the scope of this paper. Columbine flowers are sometimes a reference to the Holy Spirit. Psalm 51:1.

Catherine of Siena, who suggested that tears may be shed for fear of punishment for one’s sins and in recognition of God as judge over man.84

Weeping readers of the Boussu Hours, as they viewed Christ’s journey through his Passion, were prompted and mirrored by the eyes on folio 196r. The pictorial eyes also weep “excessively,” with fountains of tears spilling from their lids. They appear to have been physically wounded as a result of their sorrowing: they are red and bloodshot as if bleeding themselves and are swollen almost shut in a kind of mechanical blindness that imitates the blindness catalyzed from within the eye via weeping. One of Saint Birgitta’s visions supports this potential blinding function of the eyelid as she sees Christ tell Mary that “everyone with a good conscience understands well that God is more lovable than anything else, and such a person puts this into practice. However, not everyone sees this even if they have healthy pupils, because eyelids cover the eyes of most people. What does this eyelid signify if not the neglect of the life to come?” As “ocular wounds,” the eyes in the margins “blinded” by their eyelids model to the reader what devout eyes should look like, as if embodying the words of Gregory of Nyssa who described tears of compunction as “the blood in the wounds of the soul.”85

Blindness as a consequence of crying is also significant for readers who, during and after of their book-based devotion, could use tearful “spiritual blindness,” wounding to the eyes though it is, as a kind of clarifying baptism, washing the dirt from their soul’s wounds and allowing them spiritual sight.86 The vita of St. Francis supports this idea on both levels. Weeping “brought on a grievous malady in [Francis’] eyes,” but the saint still would “choose rather to lose

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84 Gutgsell, 251; 244 quotes Catherine of Siena discussing God as an “external authority” over man.
the light of the body than to repress those tears by which the interior eyes are purified.”87 Once again, this aspect of weeping is reflected in the Boussu eyes, as they, too are washed by tears on folio 196r and by Christ’s salvific blood and water—the materials requisite for complete spiritual cleansing—on folio 187r. Thus, the reader, with the swelling shut of their corporeal eyes and subsequent opening of their spiritual ones, may “weep with tears that flow from a will made perfectly one with God.”88

3.3. Physical Penitence in the Boussu Hours

The penitent reader-viewer of the Boussu Hours maybe have attempted to create a kind of physical connection to the wounded body of Christ via the blood and water on folio 196r. The paint on bottom left corner of this page appears to be worn away more than on any of the other pages with similarly placed margin decoration, suggesting that the owner of the book touched or kissed this page more than any other. Abundant evidence exists of physical interaction with books of hours for multiple purposes, from healing sickness to helping secure the soul’s place in heaven.89 It may be, then, that the repeated touching of this page to the point of effacing the painted blood reflects another aspect of experiencing—and hoping to expunge—guilt. The act of interacting with this page, I suggest, has two sides to it: a tactile litany of repeated, supplicative touching to abate the suffering of Christ, and a bodily form of active, efficacious weeping and imitatio Mariae.

87 Saint Bonaventure, The Life of St. Francis of Assisi, 62
88 Mary Ann Fatula, Catherine of Siena’s Way (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier Books, 1987), 103; Gutgsell, 244.
89 Kathryn Rudy, “Eating the Face of Christ. Philip the Good and his Physical Relationships with Veronicas,” in Convivium: Exchanges and Interactions in the Arts of Medieval Europe, Byzantium, and the Mediterranean, ed. Amanda Murphy, Herbert L. Kessler, Marco Petoletti, Eamon Duffy, and Guido Milanese (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2017), 175 discusses Philip the Good’s amuletic, comestible, consumptive relationship with images of the Veronica in one of his books of hours; Roger Wieck, “Death Desired: Books of Hours and the Medieval Funeral,” in Death and Dying in the Middle Ages (New York, 1998), 440 discusses the effacement of demons trying to steal away the soul of the recently deceased in funerary images in books of hours (in the Hours of the Dead).
Images of Christ as the Man of Sorrows have been considered particularly potent in their ability to provoke contrition in the late medieval viewer due to their affective, detailed, and often graphic condensations of all the suffering of the Passion into a single image of the tormented Savior. John Decker suggests that such images “confront Christians with the harm their sins do to Christ” by making Christ’s grief and suffering so apparent. In Decker’s book, which uses Geertgen tot sint Jans’s *Man of Sorrows* as the example for this confrontation, the author cites the painting’s “direct stare” out to the viewer and “the hundreds of smaller marks on [Christ’s] body” as important aspects of the image’s devotional and affective purpose. Although the *Boussu Hours* do not feature an image of the Man of Sorrows as such, the combined depictions from the Hours of the Passion of Christ in Gethsemane, at various points of his torment, and hanging on the cross—all supported and accompanied by the magnified eyes and effluvia in the margins—function similarly to the Geertgen *Man of Sorrows* as a catalyst for contrition. The indications of reader interaction with the *Boussu* margin illustrations support this idea that the book fostered a strong penitential response.

Books of hours not only personalized devotion, but also personalized liturgy. As such, readers’ tactile engagement with the book may have functioned eschatologically both for their own souls and for the sufferings of Christ. That is, their repeated touching could have become an almost priestly act to “bind on earth [what] shall be bound in heaven.” Readers may have thought about the drops of blood and tears in several ways as they manually interacted with

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90 Decker, 68-89 is devoted to the contrition for sin engendered by Geertgen tot sint Jans’ *Man of Sorrows* panel. Although his example is a panel, Decker emphasizes the small size of the painting and suggests that it may have originally been part of a diptych and meant to be displayed at a 45-degree angle, making the Geertgen image function very similarly to a book.
91 Decker, 70.
93 Matthew 18:18
them. The paint behaves very much like shed blood as it begins as bright, flowing liquid, then dries and then darkens over time—from oxidization or the touch of oils from skin—and ultimately flakes away. In touching these painted drops on folio 187r that act so much like arterial ones, the reader may imagine that, like St. Veronica offering Christ her cloth, they are wiping away Christ’s blood, offering him some kind of respite, or even reducing the number of drops he must shed—retroactively removing some of their sin that caused his blood to fall like sweat from his pores. Hoping to decrease the number of drops shed—or at least drops depicted—is certainly in line with contemporary devotional interests, as medieval Christians tended to place particular emphasis on quantifying religious phenomena, including the drops of blood that Christ shed during the Passion, usually enumerated as 547,500. Thus, by literally erasing drops of the painted blood with their fingers, they may have imagined themselves to be decreasing that painful number.

The desire to reduce Christ’s suffering also relates to the notion of contrition and guilt characteristic of devotion from this period. Several writings produced around the same time as the book of hours illustrate the extent and context of such devotional guilt. An anonymous confession in a fifteenth-century Netherlandish prayer book cries that “I am the cause of your pain, I am to blame for your innocent death…Oh lord I have gravely sinned and you are wounded for it,” showing the causal relationship between a sinner’s actions and Christ’s

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94 Cicero’s *Ad Herennium* posits that images stick in the memory more than words, and that images “stained with blood or soiled with mud or smeared with red paint” are “more striking” and thus are more readily remembered; the “blood” and paint on this page certainly fits that description. M. Tulli Ciceronis (Psuedo?), *Ad Herennium. De Retione Dicendi (Rhetorica ad Herennium)*, trans. H. Caplan (Harvard University Press, 1954), 222; Decker 71-72.

95 Bynum, 176 mentions, as well as drops of blood, metrics such as “virtues, merits, and credits towards salvation” among those being quantified; Carleton Brown, *Religious Lyrics of XVth Century* (Oxford, 1939), p. 323; David Areford, “The Passion Measured: A Late Medieval Diagram of the Body of Christ,” in *The Broken Body: Passion Devotion in Late-Medieval Culture*, ed. MacDonald, Ridderbos, and Schlusemann (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing, 1998), 217. This number is also written above the wounded heart on folio 24r of British Library MS ADD 37049.
wounds. 96 Robert Mannyng’s (Robert de Brunne, d. ca. 1338) fourteenth-century tract, *Handlyng Synne*, reflects this popular mode of piety in an account of a vision that showed the interaction between a sinner and a woman, obviously representing the Virgin, carrying a disfigured and bloody child in her arms:

[Rising, the man spoke, saying]… who has made your child so bloody? You have made him so, she said. You have rent and drawn my dear child with your wicked and wild oaths…they harmed him once and then no more, you harm him every day. You undo all the pain he suffered for you on the cross and tear his flesh every time you swear falsely on his name. 97

The imagery of Christ as a child being wounded and tormented reaches an even greater affective height. While no Christ child is shown in the *Boussu* Hours of the Passion, the interactions between Mary and Christ—in miniature in the *Via dolorosa* scene and magnified with the weeping eyes in the margins—evoke the same tender and poignant relationship of mother and child foregrounded in the vision and alluded to in Christ’s threatening prophecy to the daughters of Jerusalem.

Additionally, the illuminators of the hours, the Master of Antoine Rolin and Simon Marmion and his workshop, treated the subject of the Virgin holding and grieving over her dead or dying son several times in other books and in panel form, in a tender recall of when, as a young mother, “your bodily hands touched my humanity, and I rested in your arms with my divinity.” 98 The workshop even depicted the mournful pair opposite the text of the *Stabat Mater*, which speaks so evocatively of Mary who “mourned and grieved and trembled” as she “saw her

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96 Anonymous fifteenth-century Flemish prayer book, quoted in M. Meertens, *De Godsvrucht in der Nederlanden* [n. 51], p. 119-121, via Decker 88, 95: “O here, ic bin ein scolt dijnre bittere pinen, ic bin die sake dijnre ontshuldinger doet…O mijn god, ic hebbe seer misdaen ende ghi sijt daer voer ghepijnt.”
own sweet offspring dying, forsaken” (figs. 25, 26).\textsuperscript{99} This apparent interest in the \textit{Mater dolorosa} type indicates that the artist may have been using the implicit connection between eyes, blood, and tears here as a reference to the sorrowful relationship between Mother and Son. The readers of the \textit{Boussu} book, erasing the blood and weeping with Mary over their lethal sins, would hope to minimize the suffering of both holy and tormented figures.

Touching the page in a ritualistic or even quasi-liturgical way connects the act of touching to the act of weeping via the nexus of one of the oldest methods for representing crying in works of art. Several scholars have written on the use of gesture—in addition to or in place of depicted tears—to demonstrate weeping: wiping eyes, clutching hands, and clasping faces.\textsuperscript{100} Such gestures are shown in their great variety in the angels surrounding the four main figures in Claus Sluter’s 1395-1405 \textit{Well of Moses} (fig. 27).\textsuperscript{101} An example more specifically related to the iconography of the Bouts diptych is the Cummer \textit{Mother of Sorrows}. In this deeply emotive image of the weeping, mourning Virgin, she extends her hands—covered by her veil, with which she has been blotting her streaming eyes—apparently toward Christ, despite being depicted alone. David Areford suggests that Mary’s clutched veil in this image “becomes an extension of her body and a vehicle for the act of touching.”\textsuperscript{102} The \textit{Boussu Hours} becomes a similar vehicle for contact with Christ, both allowing the reader-viewer to touch him and acting as the necessary boundary between his sacred flesh and the reader’s profane. The animal hide of the vellum page, covered with drops of blood that have no specific wound from which they fall, mimics Christ’s flesh and acts as magnified portion of his suffering skin in the miniature opposite. The dermal

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{100} Barasche, 20-24.
\item \textsuperscript{101} The Well of Moses also combines dripping blood and dripping tears: the crucified Christ (no longer extant \textit{in situ}) bleeds from above the well, prompting the angels to weep.
\item \textsuperscript{102} Areford, \textit{The Art of Empathy}, 43.
\end{itemize}
nature of the page’s material compresses the space between the reader’s touch and Christ’s flesh even further. The Cummer Mary’s implied gesture of wiping her tears, supported by the glistening drops on her cheeks, is also recapitulated in the reader’s touching of the page: whether or not they shed their own literal tears, they mimic the motion of wiping away tears and the gestural weeping of Mary that appears in the background of the Gethsemane miniature on folio 195v.

The naturalism of the blood makes the reader’s gestural effacing of it even more Marian, as the Virgin is often depicted in tender contact with Christ’s scarlet *cruor*. Such a scene is present in the center panel of Rogier van der Weyden’s Vienna *Crucifixion Triptych* ca. 1445, wherein Mary’s desperate clinging to the cross mingles her tears with Christ’s blood (fig. 28). The blood in this image is painted with such viscosity and weight that it is almost raised in relief from the picture plane. An English psalter (ca. 1480-1525) in the British Library features similar sanguine marginalia and devotional wear to that in the *Boussu Hours*; here, though, the painted blood appears to be literally raised from the page, perhaps to encourage the very tactile interaction that resulted in the *Boussu Hours*’ devotional effacement (folios 1v-2r, 6v-7r, British Library MS Egerton 1821, fig. 29). The act of touching a bleeding book, then, is not isolated to folio 187r in the *Boussu Hours*, but the visual connections between blood and tears unique to this page fosters the bodily connection between devotional touching of the page and gestures of weeping.

Considering the tactile and Marian quality of these other images alongside the *Boussu* pages, readers of the *Boussu* book could, like Rogier’s Mary, imagine themselves mingling their own tears with Christ’s blood in the way that tears and blood run together on folio 196r. Such mingling would also remind the reader of the public liturgical experience of the Offertory prayer,
immediately before the Canon of the Mass, wherein the priest pours water and wine into the Eucharistic chalice and pronounces, “by the Mystery of this water and wine, we may be made partakers of His divine nature.” Thus, the devotional touching becomes not only a tactile, gestural mimicry of weeping and of liturgy but also a reciprocal shedding of effluvia with Mary and with Christ, touching his blood to heal him as he touched those who were blind, who wept, and who bled.

The Boussu Hours of the Passion are resplendent with imagery of suffering and wounding: Christ’s blood, sweat, and tears and Mary’s weeping, bloodshot eyes. These decorations—in a book that functionally and formally acts like the Bouts diptych—pictorially enact the theological notion of tears as wounding agents and spiritually prompts the reader’s contrition. As microcosms of Christ’s tormented face in Gethsemane and of Mary’s anguishing sorrow on the Via dolorosa and as models for the external and internal eyes of the book’s owner, the holy effluvia—blood and tears—on the pages catalyze a chain of imitation wherein the reader emulates Mary who, of course, emulates Christ himself. The reader’s guilt, contrition, and efforts to minimize Christ’s suffering through effortful touch and Marian lamentation are, essentially, practices of imitatio Mariae. The pictorial blood and tears mediate the relationship between sinner and sanctified Mother, and the shedding of tears brings them together as they both experience the agony of Christ, centralized in their dripping, reddened eyes.

4. Mixed Effluvia and Iconography

The Man of Sorrows type is a noteworthy one in Christological iconography because of the way it condenses the narrative of the Passion into a single representation. Christ as the Man of Sorrows is an Andachstbild, an iconic depiction wherein the subject is taken out of its

narrative context to create a timeless, thought-provoking devotional prompt. As the Man of Sorrows, the Savior appears in a transitory state between life and death. He bears the wounds of his Crucifixion, indicating that he has already died, but stands, surrounded by the instruments of the Passion, flanked by Mary and John the Beloved, or alone. Unlike images of the Ecce Homo or Christ Mocked, which fit into distinct points in the Passion narrative, the Man of Sorrows occupies no discrete or chronologically plausible scene.\textsuperscript{104}

This mode of representation, which Mitzi Kirkland-Ives describes as “cobbl[ing] together and conflat[ing] a number of themes into a single image that is not only beyond the confines of the narrative but narratively impossible,” creates a particularly poignant devotional experience for the viewer, especially as it is often accompanied by deeply affective and even graphic depictions of the Savior’s suffering.\textsuperscript{105} Bouts’s Man of Sorrows diptych in the Fogg Art Museum is a particularly effective example of the non-narrative aspect of the type: Christ is shown alone in a gold space devoid of landscape, crowned with thorns and presenting his wounds to indicate his post-Crucifixion state but still wearing the red robe taken from him and divided before he was affixed to the cross.\textsuperscript{106} His raised hands and open eyes indicate that he is alive, yet his glazed expression and the presence of the wounds imply otherwise.

The “cobbling” of Passion narratives to make a Man of Sorrows Andachtsbild also plays out in microcosm via the sacred effluvia streaking Christ’s face. That is, as the Man of Sorrows

\textsuperscript{104} Colum Hourihane, 23 cites Halls Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art and several other sources in his article outlining the iconographical differences between various types of the suffering Christ. The Ecce Homo shows Christ before his Crucifixion, often bound and/or carrying his cross. The Christ Mocked type shows Christ beaten, scorned, or otherwise humiliated; additive details such as the presence of the tormenters situate this type in the narrative context as well.

\textsuperscript{105} Kirkland-Ives, 35. See Decker, 68-70 for further discussion of this idea.

\textsuperscript{106} Many of the Aelbrecht Bouts panels likely paired with images of the Mater Dolorosa depict the Ecce Homo type (lacking the wounds on the hands or side) rather than the Man of Sorrows; however, multiple examples of both types exist, including those by the title of Man of Sorrows in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Kunstberatung Zurich AG, the Staatsgallerie Stuttgart, and the Bob Jones University Museum and Gallery.
type mixes the iconographies of the Scourging, the Mocking, the Crucifixion, the Descent, and others, the mixed effluvia on the face and body of Christ also mix the vignettes of the Passion into one agonized, broken body. As discussed in the previous section, Christ’s holy secretions chronicle his suffering—tear by tear and drop by drop—in Gethsemane, through Jerusalem, and on the Cross. Thus, like the Man of Sorrows type on which they appear, the fluids condense the Passion narrative by referencing its discrete elements in a single extra-narrative portrait. Caroline Walker Bynum suggests that blood is a “synecdoche for Jesus’s death”; I suggest that blood, sweat, and tears together are a synecdoche for the Passion as a whole.107

This multi-referential reading of Christ’s shed effluvia tracks with the iconography of the Man of Sorrows, as that visual type is multi-referential in its very composition. The sepulchral ledge behind which the *Vir doloris* often stands, the instruments of the Passion that surround him, and the presence of Mary or other mourners all signify disparate narratives. Moreover, the ways in which the Man of Sorrows appears in conjunction with other images and texts and even its title drawn from Isaiah 53 make reference to something outside of itself.108 Indeed, without these external references, the Man of Sorrows type would not exist; its implied rather than explicit narrative requires the existence of other visual and textual referents.

The blending of blood and water invokes an important aspect of the Virgin’s Compassion as yet unaddressed: her postponed labor pain on Calvary. Accounts of the Nativity, like the vision of St. Birgitta, claim that Mary’s delivery of Christ was entirely painless; however, those

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107 Bynum, 213.
108 Susan Boynton, “From Book to Song: texts Accompanying the Man of Sorrows in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries” in *New Perspectives on the Man of Sorrows*, ed. Catherine R. Puglisi and William L. Marcham, (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2013), 122. This article discusses visual and textual accompaniments that add meaning to historical visualizations of the Man of Sorrows. The example mentioned (Man of Sorrows by a Circumcision), comes from the Bohun Psalter-Hours. Kirkland-Ives, 47 discusses how the *arma Christi* motif in Man of Sorrows images may have “served as a flexible mnemonic image with which prayers and meditations on any number of Passion-related topics could be efficiently embellished and extended; it was a way in which the individual narrative episodes on the torments of Christ could be presented to the viewer in a single dense image.”
previously unfelt pains of childbirth manifested as part of the spiritual sword that pierced her heart when she witnessed the injury and death of her son.\textsuperscript{109} Birth as a theme underlies much of the imagery of the Crucifixion; blood and water as aspects of birthing feature both textually and visually. Again, blood and water—both visually and theologically—are multi-functional and multi-purpose.

As Mary is brought back to the moment of Christ’s birth during his Crucifixion, Jesus himself also experiences a birthing of sorts while on the cross. Contemporary texts and images discussed Christ crucified as being pregnant with souls, conceiving (rather than receiving) the faithful in his heart.\textsuperscript{110} The piercing of his side and the subsequent outpouring of blood and water mimic birthing fluids as Christ’s “veins burst when in one day [he] gave birth to the whole world.”\textsuperscript{111} Significantly, fifteenth-century anatomical science suggested that a child’s body was made of the mother’s uterine blood; Christ’s bleeding, then, not only mirrors Mary’s labor but literally makes use of his mother’s blood.\textsuperscript{112} In a vision to St. Birgitta of Jesus speaking to the Virgin, he tells his mother that “you can therefore well be called the blood of the heart of God. Just as each member of the body receives life and strength from the blood, so too everyone comes to life again after sin and is made more fruitful before God through you.”\textsuperscript{113} It is the same blood and water—Mary’s—that delivered both Christ and those he saved. Through Mary’s

\textsuperscript{109} Saint Birgitta. \textit{The Revelations of St. Birgitta of Sweden: Volume 3}, 250-252 recounts Birgitta’s vision of Christ’s miraculously painless birth. On pg. 252, Mary confirms Birgitta’s account by telling her that “I brought him forth with such joy and exultation of soul that I felt no pain or discomfort as he left my body.”

\textsuperscript{110} Bynum, \textit{Wonderful Blood}, 159; for example, a French \textit{Moralized Bible}, MS Bodleian 270b, fol. 6 shows Ecclesia emerging from Christ’s side wound. Bynum, \textit{Fragmentation and Redemption}, 93-97 discusses the Christ as a mother. Pg. 93 in particular addresses how the bride-Church both nurses from Christ and nurses the people of the church, so Christ, in providing that nourishment, is “also therefore a mother, and that this motherly body is all of us.”


\textsuperscript{112} Bynum, \textit{Wonderful Blood}, 158

Compassionate suffering and Christ’s exsanguination, both figures shed their own and each other’s blood.

The shared blood and water between parent and child, in birth and death, in physical and emotional torment, is refigured in Bouts’s diptych of Mary and Christ. Mary’s gaze, glazed and unfocused but looking in the direction of Christ, draws attention not to what she sees with her physical eyes, but the things that sees, keeps, and “ponder[s] in her heart.” Blood and water, both natal and fatal, are reflected, of course, in the tears of both figures, in the blood on Christ’s face, and in the redness of Mary’s eyes. In Bouts’s diptych, those fluids are also referenced in the bleeding scratches on Christ’s chest and the dark, bruise-like circles on his sallow cheeks. Even the thorns, violent under the thin skin of Christ’s forehead, reference water in their blue cast and downward pull. The red and blue of blood and water are recapitulated in the characteristic robes of Mary and Christ—their very presences, paired together, “always already” evoke birth and death, in both their tender maternal-filial relationship and in the deep suffering shared between them.

4.1. The Mater Dolorosa and Immaculata

Details in the depiction of Mary alongside the non-narrative Man of Sorrows also mix multiple iconographies. In Bouts’s image and in other diptych-format pairings of the mourning Virgin and the dead Christ, Mary’s gesture and pose are similar to those found in depictions of the Immaculate Conception, or Maria in sole, which speak to Mary’s complete purity—how she has no stain of sin, but “a special mark of virtue was found in her.”114 Images of Mary Immaculate usually show the Virgin clothed in a luminous blue or white robe, standing in a mandorla, and surrounded by small images of her titles from the Laurentian Litany, much like

the arma Christi that often surround the Man of Sorrows (Chester Beatty, W.99, fol. 12v and Princeton University Library, Taylor MS. 7, fol. 97r, figs. 30, 31). In some depictions, she also wears the “crown of twelve stars” donned by the woman of the Apocalypse as referenced in Revelation and first associated with the Virgin Immaculate by Bernard of Clairvaux (d. 1153).115

In both the Immaculate Conception and the Mater dolorosa iconographic types, Mary’s praying hands point to her son and her head is set at a slight tilt. She also wears the characteristic Immaculate blue-and-white garment as the Mater dolorosa, and the gold background in Bouts’s diptych makes a kind of diffuse mandorla or crown around her. Banderoles above the Maria in Sole exclaim Tota pulchra es amica mea et macula non est in te, or “thou art all fair, my love; there is no spot in thee.”116 The combination of the praying hands, the color of the mantle, the gold background, and even the pure, crystal-clear tears on Mary’s cheeks envisions a space in which the Bouts Virgin is both Sorrowing and Immaculate, just as the Man of Sorrows encapsulates Christ at multiple moments in his life and Passion.117

In the banderole inscription, the lack of stain refers, of course, to Mary’s miraculous conception devoid of original sin. When immaculacy is applied to Bouts’s diptych, however, the theme becomes more complicated as Bouts draws attention to visible and invisible marks, or “spots” (macula). The background of the Fogg diptych, like several other of Bouts’s panels, is strewn with very small red dots—tapered on one end such that they appear as dashes or drops—

116 Song of Solomon 4:7
117 Brisman, 276-277 discusses how the translucence of Mary’s veil and Christ’s covering in Jan Gossart’s 1520 Virgin and Child in the Art Institute of Chicago alludes not only to Christ’s incarnation, but also to Mary’s immaculacy that allowed the embodiment of Divinity.
covering the entirety of the otherworldly gold space that Christ and his mother occupy.\textsuperscript{118} These marks act as replicas of Christ’s many drops of blood, mirrors of Mary’s weeping eyes, and displacements of her invisible spiritual wounds. The image of Christ opposite Mary, covered in contusions and lashes and surrounded by spatters of red, illustrates Isaiah’s vision that “from the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, putrefying sores” and Pseudo-Bonaventure’s description that “the Flower of all Flesh and of all human nature is covered with bruises and cuts.”\textsuperscript{119}

Mary, in her perfect alignment with Christ, surely feels each of her son’s enveloping injuries—but her unbroken flesh, glistening with translucent tears, points to her immaculate status (\textit{macula non es in te}), even while the \textit{macula} of Compassion afflicting her soul are indicated in the bloody rain behind her. Mary’s eyes are the hinge at the limen between pristine immaculacy and painful Compassion: similar to Christ’s wounds, they drip with pure, transparent tears as a literal gash in the skin would with blood. The dots behind her echo the unseen blood falling from her interior wounds. These three traces of Mary’s suffering—red dots, weeping eyes, and spiritual wounds—are, like Christ’s various effluvia, like disparate “pigments” used together to form the timeless \textit{Andachtsbild} that is both Mary Immaculate and Compassionate.

\textsuperscript{118} Ron Spronk, “Three Boutsian Paintings in the Fogg Art Museum Technical Examinations and Art Historical Implications” in \textit{Bouts Studies: Proceedings of the international Colloquium}, Leuven, 26-28 November 1998, ed. Bert Cardon, Maurits Smeyers, Roger van Schoute, and Hélène Verougstraete (Leuven: Peeters Publishers, 2001), 439 analyzed the paint composition of several features of the Fogg pairing; both the background dots and Christ’s robe feature red lake (the dots are composed of red lake, chalk, lead white, and red earth, the robe of red lake and vermillion), but no analysis of the blood or flesh tones was included. Whether the blood and the red tones in the figures’ eyes matched the red background dots could lend interesting insight into the artist’s intention. The following of Bouts’ \textit{Mater Dolorosa} and Man of Sorrows panels also feature the dots: the pairing in the Suermont-Ludwig-Museum in Aachen, Germany and panels of Christ at La Cambre Abbey in Ixelles, Belgium; at Adam Williams Fine Art Ltd., in NYC, USA; and at the Hood Museum of Art in Hanover, USA.

The immaculist imagery in the diptych also works to enhance the pictorial depiction of Mary’s sorrow. That Mary’s heart is unstained and perfectly innocent makes it all the more tender and all the more easily wounded. St. Birgitta describes Mary growing up like a “delicate rose” that is “pierced ever more sharply by the thick thorns of hardships.” The Virgin continued to “blossom and grow in beauty” until she reached motherhood and ultimately, the death of her son; at this point the thorns “pressed painfully upon her more thick and sharp,” her petal-soft heart entirely vulnerable to loving sorrow. Mary’s Immaculacy “bleeds” into her Compassion—that is, it is precisely because of her purity that her heart is so grievously injured when struck by the imagined sword. The iconography of the Compassion is similarly reciprocal to that of the Immaculate Conception: the immaculist imagery highlights Mary’s capacity for compassion; her all-encompassing sorrow recalls her Immaculacy.

4.2. Paint and Pictoriality

The dotted background of Bouts’s diptych reflects another “mixing”, that of the physical and pictorial worlds. The Man of Sorrows and Mater Dolorosa already exist outside of the “reality” of the Passion, but the gold speckled with painted burgundy “macula” in the Bouts painting removes it from even the typical world of that iconographic type and blends real space with pictorial. The various drops that fall in the images seem to blend blood into the paint; the background dots appear to be made of both bodily fluids and manufactured pigment. References though they are to Christ’s many wounds and to Mary’s spiritual bleedings, the colored spots are, in reality, streaks of red pigment on gold. As such, the painted pair’s effluvia apparently become both the mechanism for and medium of creating the painted image. That is, the glistening, reflective trompe l’oeil drops seem to be made of those natural fluids from eyes and injuries, not

just of paint. Mary and Christ, pouring out permanent stains from their wounds, turn their very
countenances into artistic representations—painted panels like the wood on which they are, in
reality, represented.

Christ’s blood as a means of artistry has precedent in the creation of the Veronica: in that
instance, his effluvia painted his face and transcribed his countenance into cloth. In the case of
Bouts’s panel, it again seems as though blood is the means of recording Christ’s visage. St.
Birgitta describes that the barbs of the crown of thorns “entered his venerable head so forcefully
that his eyes became filled with flowing blood, his ears were blocked and both his face and beard
seemed covered and saturated with rose-red blood”; Julian of Norwich described the excess of
Christ’s bleeding to the point that it was “as if all the body were blood.”¹²¹ There was certainly,
then, sufficient blood with which to paint Christ, his mother, and the bloody dots behind them.
The material actually used to create the red in the speckles, mostly red lake, was itself the
product of a very physical process of grinding, clipping, boiling, squeezing, and pounding—even
the pigment itself “suffered” bodily like the subjects it ultimately painted.¹²²

Walter Melion, referencing Ludolphus of Saxony’s account of the Lord’s beaten body,
describes that “like strata of pigment, wounds are layered upon wounds, bruises on bruises,
stripes on stripes, blood on blood, until the tormentors tire, and with them the observers’
eyes.”¹²³ The proximate looking facilitated by the diptych format encourages the eliding of wood
into countenance, as the onlooker is meant to ponder the subjects closely both as devotional

¹²¹ Saint Birgitta, The Revelations of St. Birgitta of Sweden: Volume 3, 235; Juliana of Norwich, Revelations of
¹²² Spronk, 439 discusses the composition of Bouts’s pigments. Jehan le Begue, “Manuscripts of Jehan le Begue” in
Medieval and Renaissance Treatises on the Arts of Painting, trans. Mary P. Merrifield (New York: Dover
Publications, Inc., 1967), 50-52. This mid-15th-century treatise discusses the process of making pigments for
painting in great detail.
¹²³ Walter S. Melion, “Introduction: Meditative Images and the Psychology of Soul,” in Image and Imagination of
the Religious Self in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe, ed. Reindert Falkenburg, Walter S. Melion, and Todd
M. Richardson (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), 12.
images and as artistic compositions. As they brought their faces close to those of Mary and Christ, the viewers likely felt that tiring of the eyes borne from physical and emotional strain. In their ocular connection to the weeping mother and son, the viewers, though they occupy the same mundane realm as the literal pigment, are invited to straddle the lines between the pictorial, the spiritual, and the real in order to “weep[p] for [their] offenses against such an infinitely good and kind God.” 124 In doing so, they, like their holy models, create on their own faces a likeness of Divinity.

4.3. The Viewer’s Emotional Engagement

A final blending feature of this image’s devotional and intellectual prompts also pertains to its faithful viewer. As a condensation of the Passion, the Man of Sorrows image calls forth a volatile composite of emotions from the viewers as they, encouraged by the sorrowing Virgin, ponder the many pains of Christ in his great salvific act. The Meditations on the Life of Christ provides a textual invitation to experience varied and strong emotions upon thinking about Christ. Readers are asked to “pause here a moment…that you may be moved to inward compassion toward him and feed your soul with devout contemplation,” beholding Christ “full of wounds and bruises.” 125 Along the tiresome Via dolorosa and on to the cross, the reader is further prompted to “accompany” Christ, to “consider the profound meekness of him as God and man,” to “take pity on him in this sad plight of renewed afflictions and calumnies,” and in so doing to “find therein great matter of sorrow and compunction” and experience “tender compassion.” 126 Surely, meditation on the Passion would prompt love and gratitude for being

125 St. Bonaventure, St. Bonaventure’s Life of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, 300
126 St. Bonaventure, St. Bonaventure’s Life of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, 300-302, 305, 313.
unprofitably saved, awe for God’s humble debasement, and, as discussed previously, guilt for culpability in Christ’s anguish.\textsuperscript{127}

Bouts’s diptych of the \textit{Man of Sorrows and Mater Dolorosa} encapsulates these emotions, felt simultaneously and changeably by viewing the Christ whose torment and death accomplished the viewer’s salvation. The graphic nature of the images incites rising emotions—pain, compassion, grief, and even disgust. As viewers considered the narrative of the Passion compressed into these \textit{Andachtsbilder} and the accompanying effluvia that indicate specific moments and emotions in the narrative, they experience their own outpouring of indistinct emotion, similar to Mary’s. Bouts’s diptych, then has a dual function: it compresses the account of the Passion in the depictions of Christ and his mother and expands those images to track that same narrative. The blood, tears, and sweat in the diptych come to serve as mnemonic devices not only for the discrete scenes of the Passion, but also for the emotion and Compassion that accompanies it.

5. Weeping and Vision

With a discussion of eyes comes a necessary discussion of sight. In the case of the Bouts images, multiple sight lines are significant, particularly Mary’s and the viewer’s. Sight—both spiritual and literal—was the subject of considerable debate and philosophizing in the late medieval and early modern period. The two most common and well-known theories for physical sight were intromission and extramission. Extramission proposed that the “species or power”—some intangible substance or essence—of the eye extends out to an object to perceive it, while intromission, first proposed by Aristotle (d. 322 BCE) suggested that the species of an object

\textsuperscript{127} Luke 17:10; Psalm 113:6.
extends into the eye.\textsuperscript{128} In terms of spiritual sight, St. Augustine’s tri-level theory of vision began with object-based or corporeal vision, and then moved on to the mental faculty of imaginative vision, and culminated in the aniconic mode of intellectual vision.\textsuperscript{129} The relationship between the eye and the religious object was another oft-explored facet of seeing. In the \textit{Celestial Hierarchies}, the Pseudo-Dionysius claimed that “it is by way of the perceptible images that we are uplifted as far as we can be to the contemplation of what is divine,” even while other writers like Bernard of Clairvaux suggested that devotion without images was the pinnacle of spiritual engagement.\textsuperscript{130}

5.1. Vision as Violence

Each of these aspects of vision informs the functions and meanings of gaze and sight in the diptychs of the \textit{Man of Sorrows} and \textit{Mater Dolorosa}. Because of the uncomfortably graphic details in Bouts’s suffering Christ, close looking likely engendered some feeling of discomfort in the viewer. However, it also likely inspired deep emotional devotion and even visionary contact with Christ. The relationship between blood and visionary sight or experience is well-documented in the lives of saints, mystics, and holy figures from this period of Christianity. In several instances, bleeding occurs as a result of seeing—sight, then, enacts both compassion and violence.

\textsuperscript{129} Aristotle, \textit{De Anima}, trans. D. W. Hamlyn (Oxford: Clarendon Press: 1993), 42, 424a17-28 first puts forth the idea of intromission, giving the example that the eye (“that which can receive”) receives an “imprint” of a ring’s matter or “perceptible forms” without receiving any of the actual matter into itself.
\textsuperscript{130} The original source discussing the three types of vision (spiritual, imaginative, and intellectual) is St. Augustine’s \textit{On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis}; see also Christian K. Kleinbub, “Raphael’s ‘Transfiguration’ as Visio-Devotional Program,” \textit{The Art Bulletin} 90, no. 3 (2008): 367.

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One rather early example of vision resulting in bleeding comes from the *Visio monachi de Eynsham*, a late twelfth-century record of the visions of an English Benedictine, Edmund. The monk describes a particular instance of having fallen to his knees before a miraculously bleeding crucifix in his monastery: he “came kneeling to the cross, and again offered devout supplications and thanks to my God, often kissing the feet of the crucifix and busily watering them with my tears.” As he continued to weep and worship, “I lifted up my eyes, which were sore with weeping, to the face of the crucifix, I felt some drops falling on me; I put my fingers there and knew by the redness it was [Christ’s] blood.” Edmund examined the crucifix and found that the corpus of the Lord “welled out with blood, as man’s flesh bleeds.” Upon this discovery, he “anointed” his eyes, ears, and nose with Christ’s blood, then put a drop on his tongue and swallowed it. The tasting or consumption of Christ’s visionary blood is another relatively common feature of blood visions. Julian of Norwich also reported a vision that resulted in an extraordinary outpouring of Christ’s “hot blood” such that “neither skin nor wound could be seen—as if all the body were blood.” In these cases the act of looking caused bleeding or increased bleeding. Edmund’s intention in gazing was, of course, holy, but his sight resulted in renewed injury to Christ’s body.

Other examples of deeply spiritual vision resulted in the bleeding of the viewer rather than of Christ, particularly in association with receiving the stigmata. Accounts also exist of individuals bleeding from the eyes, such as cases of “hysterical bleeding” caused by viewing images of Christ’s suffering. Catherine of Siena, a notable proponent of both weeping and

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132 Ibid, 38.
134 Elkins, 138.
bleeding, is said to have received the stigmata by looking at an image of Christ crucified.135 Catherine, like Edmund, also “abundantly drank that indescribable and unfathomable liquid” from Christ’s side in another vision.136 The *vita* of Elizabeth of Spalbeek describes “a stigmata of the eyes,” with blood seeming to mix with her tears and to drip from the visionary wounds she received as a sign of her mystical unification with Christ.137 In each of these examples—injuring Christ or self—the act of looking creates a physical relationship with Christ with blood as the conduit.

The blood in Bouts’s diptych creates the possibility of a similar visionary-physical interaction with Jesus. The painted yet lifelike and graphically flowing drops of blood become the mechanism for mystical experiences between the pictorial Christ and the eyes of the viewer. That emphasis that blood places on his bodily nature and the closeness of his humanity in the diptych format inspires the viewer to cry and commune with Christ. The sight lines between the viewer, Christ, and the holy wounds—made explicit in images such as Martín Bernat’s *The Crucifixion* ca. 1480-90 (fig. 32)—create communion with the Lord, but with a focus on the violent aspects of seeing. Indeed, in the language of extramission, this visual communion with Jesus is physical since something exits the eye of the viewer and touches the object of sight.138

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135 Elkins, 138; Laugerud, 185.

Historically, the concept of extramission was applied in the partaking of the Eucharist: when the priest held the host aloft, it was considered enough for the worshipper to simply look upon it, thus “eating by sight” by means of their visual rays reaching out and making contact with the holy wafer. The act of “ocular communion,” as it is called, is significant in contexts beyond that of the Eucharistic host, specifically in other physical or meditative acts of viewing the body of Christ. Vision, particularly extramissive vision, can allow the viewer awareness of and contact to the subject of sight that is more direct than the result of physiological seeing.
the act of seeing, the viewers’ gazes become another thorn, nail, or spear, as they pierce Christ with their eyes to draw forth his saving blood.

Conversely, the language of intromission explains the reverse of this phenomenon, wherein the viewers themselves bleeds as Christ’s “species,” specifically, here, the species of his blood, enters into the viewer’s eye. Thomas Aquinas’s (d. 1274) commentary on Aristotle’s intromission theory suggests that if the eye of the receiver has the “same disposition” or “manner” as the thing it is beholding, then the receiver is “affected” by the species “in the same manner as it existed in the agent,” even to the point that the viewer’s eye receives the matter of the subject.139 More simply, if the viewers are like the thing they are receiving, then they will receive the literal substance of the object into their eyes. In the context of Bouts’s diptych, the viewers are both Mary and the suppliants, and both mimic the “disposition” of Christ, the object of their sight: Mary in her Compassion and the suppliants in their spiritual mimicry of Jesus. As they conform their “manners” to Christ’s, they receive the matter of his blood in their eyes in the form of holy tears and experience a “bleeding” of sorrow and compassion.

5.2. The Sight of the Virgin

Mary, like the mortal viewers, experiences communion with Christ in diptych depictions of the mother and son. In the pairings of the Man of Sorrows and the Mater dolorosa, sight is uncertain: Mary often looks down rather than at Christ, her eyes almost closed. In instances where her eyes are clearly open, as in the Fogg diptych, they are unfocused and seem to look past rather than directly at her son. However, it is clear that regardless of her corporeal vision, Mary engages with Christ. It may be that her weeping functions as a kind of sight, the tears like

139 Thomas Aquinas, A Commentary on Aristotle’s De Anima, trans. Robert Pasnau (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 283. The commentary continues on to specify that when “the thing affected” (the eye or its owner) does not have the same disposition or manner as the object, then “the form is received in the affected without matter insofar as the thing affects is made like the agent with respect to form and not matter.”
variants on extramissive rays that relinquish corporeal vision in favor of imitative communion with Christ.

It is common for women in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century art to be shown looking downward rather than directly at the spiritual object before them. Rogier van der Weyden’s *Crucifixion Triptych* exemplifies this: the female donor looks toward the ground while her husband looks directly at the vision of Christ before them (fig. 33). Similarly, Mary, even as she flings herself onto the cross, keeps her eyes down, whereas John the Beloved looks directly up toward Jesus. In many of Bouts’s diptychs, such as those in Aachen and Stuttgart (fig. 34), as well as in other depictions of Mary sorrowing over her son, the Virgin’s eyes are similarly downcast. The lack of direct eye contact, or even any gaze at all, between Mary and Jesus indicates a higher plane of devotion or spirituality. Like Mary and the female donor in the Rogier triptych, Bouts’s images of the Virgin typify that gendered sight line that approaches aniconic communion with Christ despite his presence directly in front of the two women; by *not* looking at him, they see him more clearly in their hearts.

This stands in apparent contrast to Nicholas of Cusa’s pronouncement on devout vision, that “where the eye is, there is love” since Mary does not look at Christ.\(^\text{140}\) The “eyes” of her love must be understood, then, to be spiritual eyes, *oculi mentis*. That she does not need to look corporeally at Christ to feel or express her love for him suggests that his presence is reflected constantly in the eyes of her heart. Mary’s streams of tears may even serve as many miniature convex pools that reflect what she does not see physically, for her tears, at least, are in close enough proximity to Christ’s face to serve as a constant mirror of him washed over her skin. Not only do these “mirrors” reflect the Lord’s countenance, but they also act as traces of the vision in

\(^{140}\) Nicholas of Cusa, *Unity and Reform: Selected Writings of Nicholas de Cusa*, ed. John Patrick Nolan (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1962), 139.
Mary’s heart that her downturned and weeping eyes perceive. This internal sight, then, encapsulates another of Nicholas of Cusa’s claims about vision: that “thy look is thy being.”\textsuperscript{141} Mary’s very being is consumed by the sight that she does not see—the blood that drips on the cross is the same blood that flushes her cheeks, swells her eyelids, and falls in the form of tears from eyes pierced to the heart with the imagined but painful vision of her lifeless son. In this way, Mary’s tears allow her to see Christ: the painting seems to argue that it is only through the visual introspection of the heart, catalyzed by tears in the eyes, that the Virgin can view her internal image of Christ.

Mary’s indirect gaze, accompanied by weeping, also imitates Christ. Her Compassion, expressed largely through her tears, is her ultimate form of \textit{imitatio Christi}. Just as the Virgin’s tears could literally or spiritually reflect the image of Christ, so, too, could her eyes mirror him on their surface. As mirrors, Mary’s eyes—shrouded in tears—become a model for the reformation of the soul, a vital aspect of devotion and self-improvement during the early Renaissance in northern Europe. Christians sought to literally refashion their souls, elevating them from their scarred and fallen state to once again look like God. This process was often connected to visual and pictorial imagery, for looking at holy images could help reform the soul, and the very process or reformation was likened to the process of painting, carving, or sculpting, such that “the soul that imitates Christ is like a painter gazing closely at an image he wishes to copy, diligently transcribing it stroke by stroke upon his panel” and becoming “the image so transcribed.”\textsuperscript{142}

Another common metaphor for the process of soul reformation was that of the supplicant looking in a mirror: worshippers hoped to eventually see God reflected when they looked into

\textsuperscript{141} Nicholas of Cusa, \textit{Unity and Reform}, 139.
\textsuperscript{142} Melion, 2007, 6.
themselves. Christ’s sacrifice was the ultimate object that the Renaissance Christian would hope to reflect. Like Bouts’s painted panels, “so too, a mirror is hung on a wall, as Christ’s sacrificial body was raised upon the Cross, that tainted by sin, we might gaze into this penitential mirror, be purified, and come to love God.”¹⁴³ Looking at the crucified Savior was the means by which the viewers could fully unify themselves with him. Mary’s eyes, through her Compassion, internal communion with Christ, and perfect purity already reflect that image directly. In a vision to Saint Birgitta, Jesus told his mother that, as a result of her beauty and virtue, “your eyes were so bright and clear in my Father’s sight that he could see himself in them, for in your spiritual eyes and in your soul’s intellect the Father saw…that you desired nothing but his [will] and wishes for nothing except as according to his will.”¹⁴⁴

Similarly, the viewers of the diptych would literally have the image of Christ reflected on the glassy surface of their eyes. More importantly, by looking deeply at the pairing of Mary and Christ, they could imbue their “eyes of the mind” (oculis mentis) with the Lord’s reflection. Meditating on the pairing of Mary and Christ would become a mechanism for transforming the soul in a chain of imitation, similar to that discussed in the context of the Boussu Hours: Mary’s weeping imitates Christ’s bleeding and encourages the viewer to also look and weep; the resulting reflection of Christ on the viewer’s corneas helps the process of reformation. The viewers may even have recited the poignant Stabat Mater as they looked at Mary and her dead son, and entreated, “Come then, Mother, fount of love, make me to feel the strength of your sorrows so that I may mourn with you.”¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ Melion, 2007, 10, referencing the 1538 Great Evangelical Pearl (Grote evangelische Peerle): “op dar hem alle menschen daer in souden spiegelen ende reynigen van allen sonde, op dat si den oversten here mochten behagen.”
A final way in which Mary’s sight and weeping imitates and offers a point of access to Christ is through her intercession. The Man of Sorrows type encapsulates Christ’s death for humanity as “the propitiation for our sins” and thus marks his role as the “one mediator between God and men”.146 His grieving mother beside him acts, though sorrowed herself, as “the comforter in sorrow, everyone’s mediator.”147 The intercessory power of Bouts’s *Mater dolorosa* images is focused in her tearful eyes and amplified by references to mediating vision in two of the most well-known Marian prayers, the *Salve Regina* and the *Obsecro te*. Both invoke Mary’s mercy with her eyes as the mechanisms through which she intercedes for the “poor banished children of Eve.”148 The *Obsecro te* entreats Mary’s mercy specifically “through the sorrow thou didst have when thou didst see Him wounded, through the fountains of His blood…through all the sorrow of thy heart and through the fountains of thy tears.”149 By petitioning Mary under the auspices of her sorrowful tears—particularly tears in connection to Christ’s blood—this prayer acts almost like a musical accompaniment for the trio formed by the painted Christ and Mary in the diptych and the supplicant before them, singing out the prayer. Likewise, the image visualizes the prayer, emphasizing Mary’s grief and intercessory power.

The *Salve Regina* also speaks directly to Mary’s eyes and begs her to “turn then, most gracious Advocate, thine eyes of mercy toward us, and…show unto us the blessed fruit of thy womb Jesus.”150 The connection between this prayer and the diptych is different, as it asks not just for Mary’s merciful tears, but specifically for her gaze: those that are “mourning and weeping in this vale of tears” request that Mary train her vision upon them and, in so doing,

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146 1 John 2:2; 1 Timothy 2:5.
show them Christ. The wording of this prayer has several implications for the diptych. First, it implies that Jesus can be seen in Mary’s eyes—although the unveiling of Christ could certainly occur in a different medium, it is a direct result of Mary’s gaze turned toward the sinners. Again, then, the reflection of Christ in Mary’s eyes indicates her imitation of Christ and her connection to him. Second, it emphasizes the direction of Mary’s sight. Her eyes in the diptych are turned inward rather than outward to those soliciting her attention; in this way, the diptych’s depiction of Mary encourages active supplication on the part of the viewer-votary.

While the diptych acts as an illustration of the Obsecro te, it also acts as an admonition to recite the Salve Regina—the supplicant must pray and engage with Mary in order to elicit her gaze and subsequent intercession. Eyes, then, as shown textually in the prayers and pictorially in the diptychs, are ties between Mary and humanity and between Mary and Christ. Mary’s eyes become the mechanism of intercession, both in their reflection of Christ and in their weeping. Christ’s will is “bent” most forcefully by his mother’s tears: the Pseudo-Bonaventure suggests that “our Lord, seeing his beloved [mother] afflicted and in tears, could not refrain from tears himself, but wept with her.” Her tears act like Christ’s blood, also salvific but one step removed from the direct redeeming power of the fluid pretium paid on the cross. As intercessory bodies, Mary’s eyes are not only the locus of her Compassion for Jesus, but also her compassion for all of humanity for whom she weeps and prays. In her tears, she responds to the plea, “Mother of Christ, assist in our needs, you who brought joy to a world in tears.”

6. Conclusion

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151 Ibid.
152 St. Bonaventure, 249.
Albrecht Bouts’s affective and graphic panels of the *Man of Sorrows and Mater Dolorosa* from the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries are a compelling case study in the argument of the spiritual, pictorial, and functional convergences of blood, tears, eyes, and wounds in their surrounding visuo-devotional culture. These multivalent and multi-referential iconographies traditionally function as condensations of the Passion narrative; this paper argues that they also function as expansions of it by virtue of flowing effluvia that adorns them. Blood and tears together make reference to Mary’s Immaculacy, Christ’s birth, distinct but co-existing scenes from the Passion, and to the Virgin’s Compassion. Mary’s weeping, bloodshot eyes, as the confluence of blood and tears, are the site of her co-suffering with her son. They are the physical manifestations of the invisible wounds in her heart that mimic those on Christ’s side and in his soul.

The diptych format of the images encourages close, meditative, and expressive looking on the part of the viewers, whose strong and varied resulting emotions are reflected in and prompted by the blending of holy blood, wicked spittle, and cleansing tears on the faces of the Virgin and her son. Mary and the viewers of the diptych, as witnesses to Jesus’s anguish, find simultaneous pain, spiritual refinement, and salvation in his blood. In return, his salvific countenance, wounded, bleeding, and apparently beyond life, promises that “he will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces.”

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154 Isaiah 25:8.
Figure 1. Albrecht Bouts, *The Man of Sorrows* panel of the diptych pairing, ca. 1495. Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts.
Figure 2. Albrecht Bouts, *Mater Dolorosa* panel of the diptych pairing, ca. 1495. Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts
Figure 3. Albrecht Bouts, *Ecce Homo and Mater Dolorosa Diptych*, 1491-1520. Suermondt-Ludwig-Museum, Aachen, Germany.
Figure 4. Workshop of Albrecht Bouts, *The Man of Sorrows*, ca. 1525. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City.
Figure 6. Albrecht Bouts, *Christ as the Man of Sorrows*, ca. 1455-1549. Kunstberatung Zurich AG, Zurich.
Figure 7. Adrian Isenbrant, *Christ Crowned with Thorns (Ecce Homo), and the Mourning Virgin*, ca. 1530-40. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City.
Figure 8. Unidentified artist (Bohemia), *Ara Coeli Madonna*, ca. 1355. Metropolitní Kapitula, Prague.
Figure 10. Rogier van der Weyden, Pietà, center panel of the *Miraflores Triptych*, ca. 1440. Gemäldegalerie, Staaliche Museen, Berlin.
Figure 11. Brussels Workshop after the style of Rogier van der Weyden, *Diptych of the Man of Sorrows and the Mater Dolorosa*, ca. 1475-1499. Groeningmuseum, Bruges.
Figure 12. Master of the Stötteritz Altarpiece, *Mother of Sorrows*, ca. 1470. Cummer Museum and Gardens, Jacksonville, Florida.
Figure 15. Martin Schongauer, *Christ as the Man of Sorrows with the Virgin and Saint John*, ca. 1435-91. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City.
Figure 16. South German Artist after Martin Schongauer, *Man of Sorrows*, ca. 1500. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City.
Figure 17. Simon Marmion and the Master of Antoine Rolin, the *Boussu Hours*, ca. 1490-95. Fol. 187r, Ms-1185, National Library of France, Paris.
Figure 18. Simon Marmion and the Master of Antoine Rolin, the Boussu Hours, ca. 1490-95. Fol. 196r, Ms-1185, National Library of France, Paris.
Figure 19. Simon Marmion and the Master of Antoine Rolin, the *Boussu Hours*, ca. 1490-95. Fol. 186v, Ms-1185, National Library of France, Paris.
Figure 20. Simon Marmion and the Master of Antoine Rolin, the *Boussu Hours*, ca. 1490-95. Fol. 195v, Ms-1185, National Library of France, Paris.
Figure 21. Simon Marmion and the Master of Antoine Rolin, the *Boussu Hours*, ca. 1490-95. Fol. 190r, Ms-1185, National Library of France, Paris.

Figure 22. Simon Marmion and the Master of Antoine Rolin, the *Boussu Hours*, ca. 1490-95. Fol. 193r, Ms-1185, National Library of France, Paris.
Figure 23. Workshop of Simon Bening, *Da Costa Hours*, ca. 1515. Fol. 92v, MS M.399, Morgan Library and Museum, New York City
Figure 24. Simon Marmion and the Master of Antoine Rolin, the Boussu Hours, ca. 1490-95. Fol. 347r, Ms-1185, National Library of France, Paris.
Figure 25. Simon Marmion, Pietà, late 15th century. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia.
Figure 27. Claus Sluter, details of angels on the *Well of Moses*, ca. 1395-1400. Originally for the Carthusian monastery of Chartreuse de Champmol which is now the Centre Hospitalier La Chartreuse, Dijon.
Figure 28. Rogier van der Weyden, detail from the *Crucifixion Triptych*, ca. 1443-43. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.
Figure 29. English, Psalter and Rosary of the Virgin, ca. 1480-1525. Fols. 1v-2r, 6v-7r, MS Egerton 1821, British Library, London.
Figure 31. French, Book of Hours (use of Paris), ca. 1500-25, fol. 97r, Taylor MS. 7, Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.
Figure 32. Martín Bernat, *The Crucifixion* (and detail), ca. 1450-1505. The San Diego Museum of Art, San Diego.
Figure 33. Rogier van der Weyden, *Crucifixion Triptych*, ca. 1443-43. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna.
Figure 34. Albrecht Bouts, *Christ with the Crown of Thorns and Mary in Mourning at Prayer*, ca. 1500. Staatsgallerie, Stuttgart.


Robert of Brunne. ‘*Handlyng Synne,* A.D. 1303, with those parts of the Anglo-French treatise on which it was founded, Willian of Wadington’s ‘Manuel des pechies.’ Re-edited (from MSS in the British Museum and Bodleian Libraries) by Frederick J. Furnivall. London: K. Paul, Trench, and Trübner, 1901.


