Those Who Weep: Tears, Eyes, and Blood in the Boussu Hours

Katharine Davidson Bekker
Unaffiliated Scholar

Simon Marmion and the Master of Antoine Rolin’s Boussu Hours (ca. 1490-95) is resplendent with imagery of suffering in its unusual marginal decorations. Holy effluvia—blood and tears—flow from golden pages covered in wounds and weeping eyes. These decorations, surrounding the Hours of the Passion, pictorially enact a theological notion of tears as wounding agents, and spiritually prompt the reader’s contrition. Notable wear on the “bloody” page indicates a pattern of tactile interaction between book and reader; this physical engagement with the marginals represents a quasi-liturgical manifestation of guilt and efforts made to abate it. The gestural touching of the page also connects blood to visual representations of weeping, furthering the connections between bleeding, touching, crying, and repenting. As microcosms of Christ’s tormented face in Gethsemane and of Mary’s anguishing sorrow at the foot of the cross, the fluids on the pages catalyze a chain of imitation wherein the reader emulates Mary who emulates Christ himself. This paper suggests that 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.

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

¹ Kirkland-Ives, “The Suffering Christ,” 35.
specifically the book of hours and argues that, in the context of the co-suffering Christ and Virgin, tears act as agents of wounding and injury to the holy dyad and their viewers.

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.\(^2\) Tears and blood were both thought to issue, either literally or metaphorically, from the heart, and were connected to “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.”\(^3\)

Considering the widespread commonalities between holy blood and tears in visual and textual representations of the early modern Flemish devotional culture, this paper argues that certain marginalia in 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), 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 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.

The book of hours puts the reader in proximate and intimate conversation with the subjects who are face-to-face with each other on

\(^2\) Harvey, “Episcopal emotions,” 595 discusses tears as sacrifice: 595-6 for tears as “scour[ing] the eyes; see 599 for cleansing from sin. See Elkins, Pictures and Tears, 138 for discussion of Catherine of Siena, see Kalas, Margery Kempe, 49, who suggests that Margery’s tears allowed her access to visions of Christ’s wounds.

\(^3\) Kalas, Margery Kempe, 50, referencing Liz Herbert McAvoy, Medieval Anchoritisms, 35.
“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, 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. 1, 2) 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. 2); folio 187v opens the text of Matins with the typical incipit “Domine labia mea aperies,” accompanied by the scene of Christ before Pilate.


4 Jacobs, Opening Doors, 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.
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. 3) 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.
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. Their tears were multipurpose, with 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

5 Harvey, “Episcopal emotions,” 592.
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.

8 Harvey, “Episcopal emotions,” 595. 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.
9 Harvey, “Episcopal emotions,” 595-6. Kalas, Margery Kempe, 38 also mentioned that weeping was thought to “cause, or to create, physiological change.” Psalm 119:37. St. Birgitta, The Revelations, Vol. 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 eyes.
10 Saint Bonaventure, St. Francis, 62.
11 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. Blood and water together also evoke the fountain from Christ’s side wound. 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. 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.” Tears, then, were essentially no different in substance from blood or sweat, and the water that ac-

13 John 19:34
14 Hebrews 5:7
15 Ossa-Richardson, “Cry Me a Relic,” 311 suggests that tears were “only a kind of sweat or saliva, a superfluity of the humors.” Harvey, “Episcopal emotions,” 602. See also Bynum, Fragmentation, 109, 114.
companies 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—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.”

16 *St. Bonaventure, Our Lord and Savior*, 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.

17 Denis the Carthusian, *Spiritual Writings*, 224.
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 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. 5) and the reeds and crown of thorns used to mock his holy status (folio 193r, fig. 6).  

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

18 Mark 15:15; Matthew 27:29
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.\(^{19}\) Also in this moment, Christ tells the daughters of Jerusalem to “weep not for me, but weep for yourselves, and for your children.”\(^{20}\)

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 heart—to indicate their distressed state, but the eyes on the facing page abundantly fill in for the absent weeping in the miniature.\(^{21}\) Here, the cascading tears indicate not only 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.”\(^{22}\) 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.”\(^{23}\) 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


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


Compassion of the Virgin in the *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. 7). 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.

![Fig. 7: Workshop of Simon Bening, Da Costa Hours, c. 1515. Fol.92v. MS M.399. Morgan Library and Museum, New York, NY](image)

**Weeping and Penitence in the Book of Hours Medium**

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.\textsuperscript{24} 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 \textit{Boussu Hours}, those subjects are the travelling 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 many tears.\textsuperscript{25} Weeping as an accompaniment to devotion is particularly suited to the \textit{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

\textsuperscript{24} Decker, \textit{Technology of Salvation}, 68-88; Bynum, \textit{Fragmentation}, 180, 184. 184 also addresses 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.

\textsuperscript{25} Harvey, “Episcopal emotions,” 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.”
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. 8).  

Penitential weeping has a long tradition in Christian devotion, beginning with patristic theologians such as Origen, who claimed that

26 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.
“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 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.

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 the notable fourteenth-century Swedish mystic 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 are “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.”

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. The vita of St. Francis supports


28 Gutgsell, “Gift of Tears,” 251; 244 quotes Catherine of Siena discussing God as an “external authority” over man.

29 Kalas, Margery Kempe, 50.

this idea on both levels. Weeping “brought on a grievous malady in [Francis’] eyes,” but the saint still would “choose rather to lose the light of the body than to repress those tears by which the interior eyes are purified.”31 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.”32

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.33 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.

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

31 Saint Bonaventure, St. Francis, 62.

32 Fatula, Catherine of Siena, 103; Gutgsell, “Gift of Tears,” 244.

33 Rudy, “Eating the Face of Christ,” 175 discusses Philip the Good’s amuletic, comestible, consumptive relationship with images of the Veronica in one of his books of hours; Wieck, “Death Desired,” 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).
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 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

34 Decker, Technology of Salvation, 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.

35 Decker, Technology of Salvation, 70.

36 Bennett, “Commemoration of Saints,” 55.

37 Matthew 18:18
away.\textsuperscript{38} 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.\textsuperscript{39} 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 wounds.\textsuperscript{40} 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:

\textsuperscript{38} Cicero’s \textit{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, see page 222; Decker, \textit{Technology of Salvation}, 71-72.

\textsuperscript{39} Bynum, \textit{Fragmentation}, 176 mentions, as well as drops of blood, metrics such as “virtues, merits, and credits towards salvation” among those being quantified; Brown, \textit{Religious Lyrics}, 323; Areford, “The Passion Measured,” 217. This number is also written above the wounded heart on folio 24r of British Library MS ADD 37049.

\textsuperscript{40} Decker, \textit{Technology of Salvation}, 88, 95, citing an anonymous fifteenth-century Flemish prayer book, quoted in M. Meertens, \textit{De Godsverdiende in der Nederlanden} [n. 51], 119-121: “O here, ic bin ein scolt dijnre bittere pinnen, ic bin die sake dijnre ontschuldinwe doet…O mijn god, ic hebbe seer misdaen ende ghi sijt daer voer ghepijnt.”
[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.41

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.”42 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 own sweet offspring dying, forsaken” (figs. 9, 10).43 This apparent interest in the 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 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.

41 Robert of Brunne, Handlyng Synne, 25-8; Decker, Technology of Salvation, 87.
42 St. Birgitta, The Revelations 2, 289. In this vision, Christ speaks to his mother.
Fig. 9: Simon Marmion, Pietà, late 15th century. Philadelphia Museum of Art, Philadelphia, PA
Fig. 10: Master of Antoine Rolin, Paris, c. 1480-90. Fols. 77v. 78r. Ms W.432. Walters Art Museum. Baltimore, MD

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.44 Such gestures are shown in their great variety in the angels surrounding the four main figures in Claus Sluter’s 1395-1405 Well of Moses (fig. 11).45


45 The Well of Moses also combines dripping blood and dripping tears: the crucified Christ (no longer extant in situ) bleeds from above the well, prompting the angels to weep.
An example more specifically related to the iconography of the Boussu book is the Cummer 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.” The 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 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

46 Areford, The Art of Empathy, 43.
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. 12).

![Fig. 12: Roger van der Weyden, detail from the Crucifixion Triptych, c. 1443. Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna](image)

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 re-
sulted in the *Boussu Hours*’ devotional effacement (folios 1v-2r, 6v-7r, British Library MS Egerton 1821, fig. 13). 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.

*Fig. 13: English Psalter and Rosary of the Virgin, c. 1480-1525. Fols. 1v-2r. MS Egerton 1821. British Library, London*

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 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 Mariæ*. 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.

*Katherine Davidson Bekker holds a master’s degree in Comparative Studies and Art History from Brigham Young University. Her research interests lie in fifteenth-century Northern European devotional art, with particular emphases on Marian and Christological imagery, gendered and mystical devotion, materiality, and visual exegesis.*

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