

FROM 'SEEING' TO 'FEELING'. MONASTIC ROOTS OF THE 'THEATRE OF MERCY' (IX-XI SEC.)

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Recently, theatre studies have focused on the relationships between dramatic action and both the rhetorical mechanisms of writing and reading - based on locational memory's techniques - and the construction of mental or artistic images. This article aims to demonstrate that in monastic circles, through ninth and eleventh centuries, there is a deep change in the rhetorical memoria's device for visualizing the Passion of Christ. It is a change that characterizes both silent, daily prayer and the public rites of Good Friday, especially the adoratio Crucis' ceremonies. I will describe this change using three textual examples of prayers to the Cross: we shall see that when the point of view changes, at the same time there is a change in the textual structure and in the dramatic system; in addition, the emotional response from the beholder also changes. From Peter Damian to Anselm there seems to be a process that moves from an ostensive intention of Christ's body (quite a 'seeing' the broken body, covered with blood and injuries) to an affective sense of the Passion's event (quite a 'feeling' and 'sharing' the pain for those wounds). The analysis would try to highlight how this change represents the historical foundation of the 'theatre of mercy', so important in late Middle Age.

Keywords: monastic prayer, rhetorical memoria, christian drama, theatre of mercy.

Recent studies in the visual culture of the Christian Middle Ages have mainly focused on the question of representation in relation to the figurative images and their status, the dynamics of the vision, and the performative dimension of the sight¹. Since the Sixties, even theatre studies have moved towards a phenomenological analysis of texts and contexts, reading documents and sources according to an interdisciplinary approach and in relation to different areas². One of the most exciting results of these interdisciplinary encounters is the realization of the deep connection that 'dramatic action' entertains both with the construction of mental and artistic images (determining their form and function)³, and with the rhetorical mechanisms of writing and reading based on locational memory's techniques, commonly used for composing silent and daily prayer but also for meditation, colloquies, homilies and public prayers⁴.

It is now well established that the reinvention of mnemotechnique in monastic circles is involved in the rise and the developing of the 'theatre of memory', already present in Augustinian theorization, which was shaped in acting images that were placed in recoverable background locations and grouped together in mental scenes that varied throughout the centuries. Beginning with the tenth century, those scenes 'embodied' themselves and became concrete representations on a tangible stage⁵. Thereafter, the elements of rhetorical 'memoria' (*inventio, intentio, dispositio, ductus, imagines agentes, loci*) shape a new form of theatre characterised by motion, places and images. Likewise, the word 'representation' no longer means 'reproduction', but is instead connected to the concept of *agere memoriam* often used about liturgy and preaching: that is, 'to represent' means 'playing memory'⁶ and it implies both the physical

¹ Among the most recent studies see, e.g., S. BIERNOFF, *Sight and Embodiement in the Middle Ages*, New York, 2002; C. BARBER, *Figure and Likeness: On the Limits of Representation in Byzantine Iconoclasm*, Princeton, 2002; K. STARKEY, *Reading the Medieval Book. Word, Image and Performance in Wolfram von Eschenbach's Willehalm*, Notre Dame, 2004; G. DE NIE, K. F. MORRISON, M. MOSTERT (eds.), *Seeing the Invisible in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages. Papers from "Verbal and Pictorial Imaging: Representing and Accessing Experience of the Invisible, 400-1000"* (Utrecht, 11-13 December 2003), Turnhout, 2005; J. F. HAMBURGER, A.-M. BOUCHÉ (eds.), *The Mind's Eye, Art and Theological Argument in the Middle Ages*, Princeton, 2006; M.-J. MONDZAIN, *Immagine Icona economia. Le origini bizantine dell'immaginario contemporaneo*, ital. ed. Milano, 2006; J. BRANTLEY, *Reading in the Wilderness. Private Devotion and Public Performance in Late Medieval England*, Chicago & London, 2007; J. STEVENSON, *Performance, Cognitive Theory, and Devotional Culture. Sensual Piety in Late Medieval York*, New York, 2010; B. V. PENTCHEVA, *The Sensual Icon: Space, Ritual, and the Senses in Byzantium*, University Park, 2010. See also the Brepols' serie *Studies in the Visual Culture of the Middle Ages*.

² Cfr. O. B. HARDISON JR., *Christian Rite and Christian Drama in the Middle Ages*, Baltimore, 1965; G. WICKHAM, *Early English Stages. 1300 to 1660*, 2 voll., London, 1963; ID., *The Medieval Theatre*, New York, 1974; V. A. KOLVE, *The Play Called Corpus Christi*, Stanford, 1966; B.-D. BERGER, *Le drame liturgique de Pâques du X^e au XIII^e siècle. Liturgie et théâtre*, Paris, 1976. An useful overview in M. KOBIALKA, *This is My Body. Representational Practices in the Early Middle Ages*, Ann Arbor, 2003, p. 1-24.

³ To understand the link between 'form' and 'function' see H. BELTING, *Das Bild und sein Publikum im Mittelalter: Form und Funktion früher Bildtafeln der Passion*, Berlin, 1981.

⁴ Cfr. M. CARRUTHERS, *The Book of Memory. A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture*, Cambridge, 1990 and EAD., *The Craft of Thought. Meditation, rhetoric, and the Making of Images, 400-1200*, Cambridge, 2008; L. BOLZONI, *La stanza della memoria. Modelli letterari e iconografici nell'età della stampa*, Torino, 1995 and EAD., *La rete delle immagini. Predicazione in volgare dalle origini a Bernardino da Siena*, Torino, 2002.

⁵ See, for example, T. K. LERUD, *Memory, Images, and the English Corpus Christi Drama*, New York, 2008; E. GERTSMAN (ed.), *Visualizing Medieval Performances. Perspectives, Histories, Contexts*, Aldershot, 2008; C. BINO, *Dal trionfo al pianto. La fondazione del 'teatro della misericordia' nel Medioevo (V-XIII sec.)*, Milano, 2008.

⁶ Latin verb *repraesentare* together with the expression *agere memoriam* or *ad memoriam reducere* are very often used in the exegetical literature, since the IX century (in particular by Alcuin of York and Amalarius of Metz). On this topic see C. BINO, *Dal trionfo al pianto*, op. cit. (n. 5), p. 393-394 and EAD., *Il dramma e l'immagine. Teorie cristiane della rappresentazione (II-XI sec.)*, Firenze, 2015, p. 82-127.

movement of the action, and the body's motion from one place to another, as though such motions were journeys along a 'live' path⁷.

The crossroad of rhetorical and performative 'memoria' is particularly evident in the key-scene of the whole Christian mystery: the Passion of Christ. In the 'last act' of Golgotha, indeed, man and God are face to face; this episode is the showdown between death and life, body and soul, grief and love. For this reason it is the 'drama' itself of the Christian religion. Thus, it is crucial to understand which kind of images are composed and put together for this scene, and how they are ordered over the centuries, what is the way to see them, and, finally, how it is possible to take part in them. Furthermore, by making a scene of pain and death - the Crucifixion - a central focus of its own drama, Christianity tells us something decisive about the very idea of show and throws a challenge to the concept of what is 'the visible'. In front of the cross, facing a condemned man, a naked, slaughtered, dying man, who is God and a king at the same time, the dynamics of both sight and image collapse and are realigned. Moreover, the unprecedented idea of a 'responsible' vision arises and is entrusted to the eyes of the beholder. 'Seeing' becomes a 'dramatic action', a deeply performative and emotional action.

Christian theatre, therefore, has its acme in the 'theatre of the Passion' that I prefer to define 'theatre of mercy'. It is, in other words, a theatre of the visceral piety, in which the distant way of seeing, typical of the show, is removed and replaced by the closeness of feeling, which takes place when one is personally and physically involved in a real experience.

The present essay argues that the premises for this radical perspective shift should be sought in monastic circles in the ninth and eleventh century: in that context and at that time, monastic culture changes the rhetorical *memoria's* device for compositions about the Passion of Christ, and, most of all, about his crucified body. This is a 'dramatic change' that can be summed up as a move from 'seeing' the broken body, covered with blood and injuries, to 'feeling' and 'sharing' the pain for those wounds. With 'dramatic change' I mean a change in the whole representational device, which includes both the visual device and the system of inter-human relationships, mutual actions and emotions. Thus, not only we witness a change in the 'point of view' (which, as Carruthers has shown, is closely connected to rethorical *intentio*)⁸ from which the look arises (and, consequently, the process of shaping and ordering images), but also in the scenic situation, and, therefore, in every physical and empathetic action played on it.

I will describe this change in three stages and using three textual examples: Peter Damian's *Orationes ante cruce*,

John of Fécamp's *Oratio II Ad Deum Patrem per merita Filii incarnati* and Anselm of Canterbury's *Oratio ad Christum cum mens vult eius amore fervere*. I understand these three prayers as different forms of *agere memoriam*, that is to say as forms that reenact memory by playing mental actions on a mental stage. In doing so, I will follow the line which connects Peter Damian, John of Fécamp and Anselm, as suggested by Rachel Fulton in *From Judgement to Passion*, where she details the story of the effort to identify empathetically with the crucified Christ, becoming one with him⁹. My reading also takes into account the working principles of the 'machina memorialis' studied by Mary Carruthers¹⁰. In each example we shall see that when the point of view changes, at the same time there is a change in the textual structure and in the dramatic system; in addition, the emotional response from the beholder also changes.

LEARNING TO SEE THE BODY: PETER DAMIAN

The first stage of my investigation is the penitential prayer from the period before Anselm of Canterbury, characterized by a beseeching and regretful request of compassion from God¹¹. I consider Peter Damian's *Orationes ante cruce*, highly significant for two reasons: firstly because of the importance of penitence in the context of monastic reform promoted by Damian, and secondly because, although they are prayers composed for the daily 'meditative rumination' of the Fonte Avellana's community, they later became an integral part of the liturgical office of *adoratio crucis* on Good Friday in Montecassino¹².

Since the carolingian era, devotion to the cross had become the preferred occasion to monastic meditation about every single historical event of the Passion of Christ (capture, mockery, crown of thorns, flagellation, death sentence, crucifixion and burial). It is well known that Hrabanus Maurus in his *In honorem sanctae crucis* consecrated the cross with the Savior's *imago in cruce* ("Ecce imago Salvatoris membrorum suorum positione consecrat nobis saluberrimam [...] sanctae crucis formam")¹³. To look at the cross meant to see the body of the Lord - injured and stretched out on the wood - with mental and physical eyes *quasi praesentialiter*, that is to say as if he was present there before the beholder at that very moment. The Christ's body, living and palpitating, was the model for a spiritual but also carnal *agere poenitentiam*. This had a great influence on the structure and style of certain compositions such as prayers and meditative texts that were conceived to be performed by the believer lying face down at the foot of the Cross, with open arms to form the sign of Salvation, in the attitude of a penitent¹⁴.

⁷ Cfr. M. CARRUTHERS, *The Craft of Thought*, op. cit. (n. 4), p. 8.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 16: "Latin *intentio*, derived from the verb *intendo*, refers to the attitudes, aims and inclinations of the persons remembering, as well as of the state of physical and mental concentration required".

⁹ Cfr. R. FULTON, *From Judgement to Passion. Devotion to Christ and the Virgin Mary, 800-1200*, New York, 2002, p. 88-106 and p. 142-192.

¹⁰ Cfr. M. CARRUTHERS, *The Book of Memory*, op. cit. (n. 4) and EAD., *The Craft of Thought*, op. cit. (n. 4).

¹¹ Cfr. R. FULTON, *From Judgement to Passion*, op. cit. (n. 9), p. 142-155; about Peter Damian see the chapter *Signed with the Cross*, p. 88-106.

¹² Cfr. A. WILMART, *Les prières se Saint Pierre Damien pour l'adoration de la croix*, in *Revue des sciences religieuses*, 9, 1929, p. 513-523 and U. FACCHINI, *Introduzione*, in *Opere di Pier Damiani, Poesie e Preghiere*, Roma, 2007, p. 9 e 18, note 266.

¹³ HRABANUS MAURUS, *In Honorem Sanctae Crucis*, ed. M. Perrin, Turnhout, 1997 (Corpus christianorum. Continuatio mediaevalis, 100), p. 29.

¹⁴ Cfr. B. CALATI, I. GARGANO, *Introduzione generale*, in *Opere di Pier Damiani. Edizione latino-italiana promossa dalla Congregazione Camaldolese OSB*, 4 voll., 12 tomi, Roma, 2000; *Lettere*, I/1, Roma, 2000, p. 9.

Peter Damian begins precisely with this posture (and often he underlines it in the *Orationes ante cruce*) that it involves the physical translation of the complete human mind and body's adhesion to Christ's suffering¹⁵:

Resort to prayer, and with your own body groveling on the floor, raise your mind to heaven. [...] Often in your worship, extend your arms by way of the saving sign, so, trying to shape the cross' image, you shall beg the Crucified's forgiveness easier¹⁶.

The body's posture can be read also as 'eyes' perspective', which implies a vision from below and distant, humbled and unworthy: the believer really stands at the foot of the Cross, as if he was on Golgotha to see, to hear and to take part in the events:

Behold, Lord, I prostrate myself before the banner (*vexillum*) of your vivifying cross, and, suppliant, I adore the new and unheard triumph of your victory. [...] I see you with the eyes of my soul, fixed to the Cross with nails, I see you tormented with new wounds. I hear you saying to the thief with a clear voice; "Today you will be with me in Paradise"¹⁷.

The whole meditation is built from this point of view, which defines the making of mental images and their order; indeed, it traces out the itinerary that the worshipper is invited to follow. Like Hrabanus Maurus, Peter Damian too starts from the image of the body of Christ hanging on the cross that now is a tangible body, shown to the faithful and described in every single wound:

He was stripped, beaten, put in chains, spat upon, and his flesh pierced with fivefold wounds, that we might be cured from the invasion of vice, which enters into us by the five senses¹⁸.

This one mental image activates the process of remembering the Passion and summarises a sequence of other images. In fact, every verb (*nudatur, caeditur, nectitur, oblinitur, perforditur*) depicts both a specific condition of the body – stripped, beaten, enchained, smeared with spit, pierced – and also each action suffered by that body. In doing so, Damian embeds in one image the fundamental scenes of the Passion narrative – the arrest, the mockery, the beating,

the crucifixion, the death, the side pierced with the lance. Thomas Bestul noted that focusing on the tormented flesh of Christ is a distinctive feature of meditative literature and prayers composed between the eleventh and the twelfth century, and that above all it is a rhetorical element that makes it possible to expand the Gospel narrative: the gaze on each sore of the broken body permits to add new details that are often taken from the Old Testament (in particular from the books of Prophets and Psalms), and could also be inspired by the relationship between the worshipper and the crucified Christ¹⁹. The result is not a narrative image that allows the beholder to live the Passion scene by scene, but rather a synthetic image that reenacts it: an acting image.

In Peter Damian's thought, however, the Passion is, at the same time, the outcome of the human sins and the redeeming action through which human beings release themselves. Therefore, he connects each Passion's wound (*vulnera passionis*) to each sin²⁰. By virtue of that correspondence, the penitents will have to assimilate their own bodies to the suffering body of Jesus, almost as if all the reasons for Salvation and love were in pain:

Lord, sign my soul with the impression of this holy cross, purify me with its own virtue. [...] So that, when you are coming in Judgment and the this sign of the divine virtue will be shining in the sky, I shall be found signed with these marks (*stigmatē*). So, conformed to the Crucified in sufferings (*crucifixo configuratus in poena*), I shall deserve to become part of Him, arisen in glory (*consors fieri merear resurgentis in gloria*)²¹.

"*Crucifixo configuratus in poena*": with this expression Damian indicates a particular kind of likeness that is neither sharing the pain of Christ yet, nor simply mortifying the body. Imitating the suffering Savior is rather 'sealing man's own flesh' by impressing the evident sign of the unbridgeable debt to God. By presenting to the Judge their own wounded limbs, the penitents show the proofs of their atonement: they have paid for their debt²².

This meditation has two aims (or, in more specific terms, *intentiones*). The first is the penitential imitation: although not yet the 'conformative imitation' (being like God) typical of franciscan spirituality, it is already a sort of 'getting close' to the Passion for the purpose of taking part in it²³. The second is mercy, intended as something to obtain, a gift. The final outcome of the prayer, indeed, is the gift of tears

¹⁵ Cfr. also PETER DAMIAN, *Oratio XXX*: "Exaudi me, quaeso, clementissime ac misericordissime Jesu, Deus bone et benigne, prostratum ante adorandam gloriosissimam tuam crucem"; *Oratio XXXI*: "Me coram adoranda tua cruce prostratum in his sanctis diebus, et jugiter ab omnibus malis eripe, bonisque tuis misericorditer refice", in *Patrologiae cursus completus: Series Latina*, ed. J. P. Migne, 221 voll., Paris, Migne, 1844-1891 (from now on PL) 145, col. 927-930.

¹⁶ ID., *Letter 50*, in *Die Briefe des Petrus Damiani*, ed. K. Reindel, 4 voll., Munchen, 1983-1993 (from now on Reindel), II, p. 115-116. The translation is my own.

¹⁷ ID., *Oratio 26* (PL, 145, col. 927). The translation is my own.

¹⁸ ID., *Opusculum quadragesimum tertium. De laude flagellolom et, ut loquuntur, disciplinae*, in PL, 145, col. 679-686, *Letter 161*, Reindel IV, p. 137. The translation is my own.

¹⁹ Cfr. T. BESTUL, *Texts of the Passion. Latin Devotional Literature and Medieval Society*, Philadelphia, 1996, p. 23-25.

²⁰ Cfr. PETER DAMIAN, 133. *Alia oratio, Opere di Pier Damiani*, op. cit. (n. 14), IV, p. 267: "Tu Domine per quinque plagas sacratissimi corporis tui sanasti omnia vulnera quae nobis inflicta sunt per quinque sensus corporis nostri".

²¹ ID., *Oratio 26* (PL, 145, col. 927). The translation is my own.

²² Cfr. G. CONSTABLE, *The ideal of the Imitation of Christ*, in *Three Studies in Medieval Religious and Social Thought*, Cambridge, 1995, p. 143-248; see also R. W. SOUTHERN, *The Making of Middle Ages*, New Haven, 1953, p. 222-234.

²³ Cfr. C. W. BYNUM, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1987, p. 255-257; cfr. also R. KIECKHEFER, *Unquiet Souls. Fourteenth-Century Saints and their Religious Milieu*, Chicago, 1984.

into which emotions flow²⁴. The believer is crying over his own penitential status, and over his own sins; he is shedding copious tears (Damian quotes *Jeremias* 9) that cleanse his faults and point to the infinite distance between the penitent and God:

Oh Lord, mollify my heart of stone, give me repentance and contrition, so I shall cry my innumerable sins. [...] I am unworthy to roll my miserable eyes to heaven. [...] But, you, who created me as you want and as you known, have mercy on me²⁵.

This is not yet a form of sharing between the human and the divine; nor a mutual *cum-pati*. Here, mercy is asked, begged, mourned. But yet not felt.

THE BEGINNING OF 'CUM-PATI': JOHN OF FÉCAMP

Shortly after Damian's writings, devotional literature suggested a different meaning of mercy. To illustrate the second stage in the process that moves from 'seeing' to 'feeling' the pain of Christ, I have chosen the *Oratio II Ad Deum Patrem per merita Filii incarnati* composed by John the abbot of the monastery of Fécamp²⁶, contemporary of Peter Damian and belonging to the same spiritual context. Known as the *Meditation on the Son*, it marks an extraordinary change in the way of looking at the divine wounded body²⁷. The prayer is of the *Libellus de scripturis et verbis patrum collectus ad eorum presertim utilitatem qui contemplative vite sunt amatores* that is listed under Augustinian meditations in the *Patrologia latina*²⁸. Often circulating under the name of Ambrose, Anselm and even Bernard during the later Middle Ages (when it became very popular), the *Libellus* became a key text for the narrative treatments of Christ's Passion. Indeed it was the most widely read book before the Bonaventura's *Imitatio Christi*²⁹.

Historians of the Middle Ages have recently pointed out the importance of John's *Libellus* and have linked it to the first phase of affective devotion, around the eleventh century. In particular Fulton argues that the *Libellus*' most affective passages were drawn directly from John's own *Confessio theologica*, which he wrote several decades before for his own contemplative practices. Both these works are self-expressive as 'intimate effusions' and reflect John's personal devotion to Christ and to His flesh³⁰. Sarah McNamer, instead, asserts that women were instrumental to the origin of the devotion to Christ in his humanity, and the reason for the change in both the content and the tone of John's prayers is due to the fact that they were written for a female audience³¹. In my opinion, each of two hypotheses is plausible, but not

decisive. I believe that John's poetical shift to emotional attitudes toward Christ and his Passion should be linked to a change in the mnemonical and rhetorical system, which, in turn, depends upon the theological and spiritual change about the idea of historical reality of the body of Christ. As I have suggested elsewhere, between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries a growing attention on eucharistic realism produced a revolution in terms of representation, and caused a broad change of the Passion narrative, of its 'ritual staging' (the liturgical 'acting out' of the Passion through words, images and stagecraft), and of the dynamics of its perception. The idea of an affective sharing of the pain of Christ cannot be separated either from the concept of the real, historical, physical body of the crucified Jesus, or from the sacrificial character of that body, which is the Host, saves and redeems. In the same way, it is impossible to understand the affective emphasis on impassioned love without taking into account the idea of conformation with Christ that is founded on the main principle of theological anthropology and of christology; that man is made in the image and likeness of God³². The revolution of eleventh-century monasticism consists precisely in making mercy no more a plea to God, but the mutual and practical application of universal brotherhood, becoming thus a cognitive, affective and, then, social practice.

In poetic terms, such revolution translates itself into a change of the device of memory, starting with the change of the point of view. If Peter Damian had put the worshipper lying face down, to see the body of Christ from under the *scabellum* on which the feet were nailed, John's prayers are characterised by an intimate, personal relationship with God. The faithful, now, can go near Christ and can see him closely, as the use of the trembling latin verb *adesto* ("I am here, in front of you") clearly points out. But what makes the *Meditation on the Son* original is the groundbreaking trait of the gaze suggested to the faithful, a gaze which has parental features. Almost as if personally showing the body of Christ, the worshipper addresses God directly and offers Him the crucified limbs of His Firstborn:

Here (*ecce*), this is my mediator with you God and Father; here (*ecce*), this is my perfect high-priest, who does not need other blood to make expiation, because he shines with his own blood. Here (*ecce*), this is that holy victim, pleasing and unblemished, offered and accepted in a sweet-smelling savour; here (*ecce*), this that Lamb without spot, who was dumb before his shearers, and who did not open his mouth when he was slapped and spat upon and insulted (*Is* LIII, 7)³³.

²⁴ Cfr. PETER DAMIAN, *Ritmo del monaco penitente*, in *Opere di Pier Damiani*, op. cit. (n. 14), IV, pp. 343-345: "Quis infelicis fletus aquam capiti? Quis lacrimarum fontem dabit oculis? [...] Hostis antiqui tellis mille sauciam ploro peremptam in peccatis animam".

²⁵ ID., *Orazione alla Trinità*, in *Opere di Pier Damiani*, op. cit. (n. 14), IV, p. 287. The translation is my own.

²⁶ Cfr. PL, 40, col. 857-865.

²⁷ Cfr. A. WILMART, *Auteurs spirituels et textes dévots du Moyen âge latin. Études d'histoire littéraire*, Paris, 1971², and J. LECLERCQ, J.-P. BONNES, *Un maître de la vie spirituelle au XI^e siècle, Jean de Fécamp*, Paris, 1946.

²⁸ See in PL, 40, col. 901-942 as *Liber meditationum*. It has been translated by M. J. O'Connell as part of the *Meditations of Saint Augustine*, Pennsylvania, 1995 (chaps. 12-25, 27-33, and 35-37).

²⁹ Cfr. J. LECLERCQ, *Introduzione*, in GIOVANNI DI FÉCAMP, *Pregare nel Medioevo. La Confessio theologica e altri scritti*, Milano, 1986, p. 19.

³⁰ Cfr. R. FULTON, *From Judgment to Passion*, op. cit. (n. 9), p. 166-170.

³¹ Cfr. S. MCNAMER, *Affective Meditation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion*, Philadelphia, 2010, p. 58-73.

³² See C. BINO, "Quasi presentialiter". *La croce-crocifisso nel dramma della Passione tra meditazione e rito (IX-XI sec.)*, in L. CANETTI (ed.), *Statue. Rituali, scienza e magia dalla Tarda Antichità al Rinascimento*, (Migrologus' Library, 79), Tavernuzze, 2017, p. 168-218.

³³ PL, 40, col. 859-860. The translation is my own.

Human being, Christ, Father are all present at the same time: the sequence of *ecce* underlines the immediacy of the gaze and its substance. Thanks to this simultaneous presence, the beseecher can invite God to look at his Son. At that very moment, the point of view overturns itself and, moving from earth to the Heavens, it comes from the Father's own eyes fixed on the Son's wounds, seeing his sorrows as they were the price paid to forgive each man's sin:

Holy Father, look upon your most holy Son and the unholy things he suffered for me. Most merciful King, look upon the one who suffers, and remember with lenience the one from whom he suffered³⁴.

Then, after this first merciful overview, God's gaze is carried along the body of the Son, considering Christ's sufferings, wound by wound:

Lord, my God, turn your majestic gaze to this work of ineffable goddess. Look upon your dear Son with his body stretched out on the cross; see the innocent hands streaming with holy blood [...]; see the helpless side pierced by a cruel lance [...]; see the spotless feet [...] transfixed by frightful nails. [...] Do you not see, loving Father, how the young head of your dear Son bends on his snowy neck as it relaxed in a most precious death?³⁵

The resulting image is that of the body of Christ seen immediately after death, when the stiffness of each muscle is increasing and every sign of past injuries is engraving on the white and tender flesh: the corpse is tight, the innocent hands are dripping pious blood, the defenceless side is pierced by the spear, the immaculate limbs are hanging on the cross with hard iron nails. Finally, the focus moves to the nape of the neck, white as snow; the young Son of God, leaning his head forward after breathing his last breath, intimately displays it to his Father, who is looking from above.

As if the Father's gaze was acting as a mediator of mercy ("look, glorious Father [...] upon this body bruised and broken"), the body is contemplated with *affectus* and the believer has with it a relationship that was inconceivable before. The overturning of the point of view determines a different emotional posture that bridges the distance between the pleading sinner and the crucified Christ, now described with heartfelt adjectives: the naked, pure white chest blazes (*candet nudatum pectus*), the side overflowing with blood reddens (*rubet cruentum latus*), the tense abdomen is dry (*tensa arent viscera*), the shining eyes are languishing (*decora languent lumina*), the regal mouth is turning pale (*regia pallent ora*), the outstretched arms become rigid (*procera rigent brachia*), the legs, white as marble, are hanging (*pendent crura marmorea*), the wave of sacred blood flows through the pierced feet (*rigat terebratos pedes sacri sanguinis unda*)³⁶. The image of Christ is that of a man seen

while he is abandoning himself to die: his pain is complete, perfect and described with a pathetic emphasis that changes the emotional response and moulds the human being's idea of sin from an almighty conscience of guilt into a remorseful sense of responsibility:

What have you done, dear child, to be judged in this way? What have you done, young man who are so alive, that you should be thus mistreated? [...] Ah, it is I who delivered the wounding blow; it is I who bear the guilt of your death. I inflicted the bruises you suffered and the torments you bore. I was responsible for your death, mine was the sin for which you suffered³⁷.

Instead of a grieving plea of compassion, and even though human guilt is always the source of the pain of the Cross, now there is an unknown feeling of charity, mutual love, reciprocity:

Into what depths, Son of God, did your humility take you! How hot did your love burn? [...] How far did your love and compassion reach? I acted sinfully, you suffered the penalty; I committed the crime, you paid the price; I did evil, you were subjected to torment; I exalted myself in pride, you humbled yourself; I was inflamed with passion, you were straitened. [...] I indulged in pleasures, you are torn by nails; I taste the savory fruit, you the bitterness of gall³⁸.

From this new perspective, a first emotion of *compassio* - as an answer to the *miseratio divina* - shall begin:

My King and my God, what return shall I make to you for all that you have given to me? Nothing in the human heart can match such reards. Can human wisdom devise anything comparable to the divine compassion? [...] If you grant it this favor, it already begins as it were to suffer with you (*quasi jam tibi incipit compati*) the death you deigned to die for sin³⁹.

In the mystical vision evoked by the mental prayer, the relationship between the human being and God changes and becomes an intimate dialogue, a silent conversation, a whispered admission of sin: almost a parental relationship. As a consequence, its purpose is not only to produce contrition but also to feel love, and the final outcome is a deep and ardent sharing of Christ's sufferings⁴⁰. Once the *intentio* of meditation has been radically changed, the faithful's answer too does change. It does not any longer consist of penance, hopeless tears, but of repentance as a result of the comprehension of pain and of the consciousness of sins. Compassion, which in Peter Damian's prayers was featured as an exclusive prerogative of Christ, becomes a love's wound in John's prayers:

³⁴ *Ibid.*, translated by O'Connell, p. 31.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 31-32.

³⁶ *Ibidem*.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 33-34.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

⁴⁰ Cfr. J. LECLERCQ, *Introduzione*, op. cit. (n. 29), p. 16.

By the saving wounds which you suffered on the cross for our salvation, and from which flowed the precious blood of our redemption, wound this sinful soul of mine for which you were willing even to die; wound it with the fiery and powerful dart of your charity⁴¹.

Christ's wounds become love's weapons, which attack the beholder, fending his heart like a dart:

You are the choice arrow and the sharpest of swords (*tu sagitta electa, et gladius acutissimus*), so powerful that you can penetrate the tough shield of the human heart; pierce my heart, then, with the dart of your love (*jaculo tui amoris*), so that my soul may say: "I have been wounded by your love"⁴².

Thus, grief as *vulnus amoris* written or, better, engraved on the human heart⁴³ gives weeping a new significance: now tears cleanse guilt ("grant me the interior tears [...] that can break the bond on my sins")⁴⁴, and they are love's measure ("grant me this clear sign of your love for me: an ever-flowing fountain of tears, so these tears may bear witness to my love of you")⁴⁵ and expression of the desire to see and to own the beautiful and sweet divine face, until the loving embrace:

Strike, Lord, strike this hard heart of mine with the sharp spear of your love [...], grant be abundant source of water and make my eyes a real fountain of ever-flowing tears that spring from a great longing desire for the vision of your beauty. Then I shall accept no consolations of this present life but shall weep day and night until I am able to see you, my God and my Lord, [...] in your heavenly chamber. When I see your glorious and wonderful and beautiful and most sweet face, then [...] I shall cry out with those who love you: "now I see what I longed to see; now I possess what I hoped to possess; now I have what I yearned to have! I am united now with all my strength and embraced with all my love"⁴⁶.

During the same years, Peter Damian and John of Fécamp propose two different visions of the wounded body of Christ that translated into two contrasting but complementary ways of representation. The two different scenes of the Passion are distinguished by the point of view from which the sight comes. On the one hand, Peter Damian puts the believer at the foot of the Savior, with his/her own body in pain and signed with the Cross. On the other hand, John places the believer near the crucified Christ and makes him/her see through the Father's eyes. Both

are present on the Golgotha. Both share that pain. Both feel compassion and, at the end, cry. But if Damian weeps for the sins that have wounded the crucified Savior, John goes beyond that and perceives the great mercy that has made those wounds possible and that now pierces his heart; so, while the memory of the faithful is reenacting the events that have taken place on the Golgotha, he is crying over the love included in so much grief.

From the crossroads of these two gazes and from the combination of each *intentio* which features them, a new way of looking at Christ's sufferings emerges: the broken and aching flesh becomes the example to follow but also to share, and the weeping sparked by this emotional sharing becomes the key element in reconstructing the Passion narrative and its mental and material representation.

The *incipit compati*, which in John's prayer was an answer to the *vulnera Christi*, evolves and develops thanks to the devotional strengthening of the humanity of Jesus, typical of Anselm's thought and spirituality. The gaze, then, becomes wider and will go beyond the Cross, to include Mary and to build up a narrative that recalls things, places, people through empathetic contemplation of the Son's limbs in pain.

THE GAZE OF TEARS: ST. ANSELM

The work of Anselm represents the third and last stage of the transition from 'seeing' to 'feeling', thereby creating the necessary conditions for the flowering of the 'theatre of mercy'. Benedicta Ward has shown that the *Prayers and Meditations* of St. Anselm are the mirror of his theological and spiritual teaching and provide a *trait d'union* between the old Benedictine tradition and the new ways of Christian devotion⁴⁷. Written after seven years of silence – between 1063 and 1070 – during which Anselm did not compose any literary work for the public, the *Prayers and Meditations* were a great success; they were widely used for centuries, and had a deep influence on devotional texts. Conceived as private dialogues and expressions of the most intimate emotions, they aim to stir deference, piety and love. Therefore, their structure is not logical but affective, and aims at 'showing' the Truth rather than 'demonstrating' it, beginning from the human experience of God's love and grace. It is a physical experience, truly felt during meditation, as expressed by verbs indicating consumption such as *mandere, glutire, ruminare, sugere, gustare*. The purpose of *Prayers and Meditations* is to dig into the human soul in order to stir feelings and to direct concrete actions of charity⁴⁸. For these reasons, this kind of prayer became a fundamental practice of monastic spirituality, useful in establishing close relations within the cenobitic community

⁴¹ Cfr. PL, 40 col. 935-36, transl. by O'Connell, p. 114-115.

⁴² *Ibidem*.

⁴³ About memory intended as writing on heart see cfr. E. JAGER, *The Book of the Heart. Reading and Writing the Medieval Subject*, in *Speculum*, 71, 1996, p. 1-26; M. CARRUTHERS, *The Craft of Thought*, op. cit. (n. 4), p. 133-136. On this analogy in John of Fécamp, cfr. R. FULTON, *From Judgement to Passion*, op. cit. (n. 9), p. 164-166.

⁴⁴ PL, 40, col. 931, transl. by O'Connell, p. 106.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, col. 935, transl. by O'Connell, p. 115.

⁴⁷ Cfr. B. WARD, *Anselm of Canterbury and His Influence*, in *Christian Spirituality. Origins to the Twelfth Century*, ed. by B. McGinn, J. Meyendorff, J. Leclercq, New York, 1985, p. 196-205. See also A. WILMART, *Méditationes et Prières de saint Anselme*, Paris, 1923.

⁴⁸ Cfr. R. W. SOUTHERN, *Anselmo d'Aosta. Ritratto su sfondo*, Milano, 1998, p. 95.

but also to reach the laity. Southern has shown that this is the very beginning of the *devotio moderna* that finds a central turning point, “the Anselmian revolution”⁴⁹, in virtue of the radical change of the satisfaction view of the atonement, which Anselm argued in the *Cur Deus homo*. This allowed for a “fresh appreciation of the human sufferings of the Redeemer”⁵⁰, marking the path for medieval spirituality all the way to franciscan thought⁵¹.

Certainly, these themes were known also during the previous period, but Anselm deepened them and gave a finished form to the genre of private prayer, paying attention to the demands of the secular world - in particular to laywomen - and, in so doing, he extended the audience of eucological compositions⁵². It is partly for this reason that his style is evocative and colourful like it never was before. Anselm innovated the tradition of prayer with a double contribution: firstly, he offered new material as an alternative to the Psalms, which were the main tool of devotion in the context of the monastic *opus Dei*. Secondly, he replaced the conciseness of the Carolingian prayer (the most widespread and unchanging tradition for two hundred years) with a long and thoroughly elaborated text. By reading it “slowly, with attention, starting and stopping wherever seems appropriate; dividing text into paragraphs so that the mind does not become bored”⁵³, Anselm aims at placing human beings in the eyes of the Lord and, then, to excite their mind in order to understand their own condition as sinners, and their own personal responsibility. Only from an initial remorseful *compunctio cordis* the sinner could become not only conscious of his unpayable debt, but also able to feel love after fear. Human beings could never repay their debt because it is simply too great: they can only remember Christ’s sacrifice and can concentrate their own mind on the image of the human Christ and of His Passion, inscribing it in their own heart and slowly chewing over it constantly. They can give thanks to God for their salvation but also loving the man who had died voluntarily in payment for their sins⁵⁴.

Anselm starts the introspective process of his meditative prayers by professing the self-awareness of human guilt, intended as the dramatic expression of theology about the human condition: the first part of his prayers always insists on sin and fear. But the consciousness of such debt is counterbalanced by the confidence in divine mercy, in that “perfect charity [...] where each one will love the other no less than himself” (*Proslogion*, XXV). Between the condi-

tion of repentance and that of joy there is “the nostalgia of God focused on the Passion of Christ”⁵⁵, which becomes evident especially thanks to the interest in tenderness for the humanity of the Savior. The figure of the Virgin Mary has a central role to understand this kind of tenderness.

The *Prayer to Christ* (*Oratio ad Christum cum mens vult eius amore fervere*)⁵⁶ is the example that illustrates most completely to this new ‘style’ of devotion to Christ in his humanity. The aim of the prayer (*finis intentionis*) is expressly to be burned with the love for Christ:

My life, the end to which I strive (*finis intentionis meae*), [...] still let my desire for you be as great as my love ought to be. [...] My prayer tends towards this – that by remembering and meditating on the good things you have done I may be enkindled with your love⁵⁷.

As for Damian’s and John’s prayers, the starting point of meditative process is the *intentio* of the worshipper, who ‘sets’ himself before God keeping his eyes on the Savior’s wounds, contemplating the price paid for human salvation and feeling remorse for them. But Anselm suggests a new meaning of *compunctio cordis*, where contrition is an almost concrete action, a physical ‘stinging the heart’ through the contemplation of Christ’s pain, in order to excite emotions and achieve – in stages – love. The faithful, then, is no more ‘setting’ before the Crucified Christ but is ‘willing’ to the experience of the mystery; following a real route through memory-places, he or she takes an affective journey from fear to the comprehension of grief and love. Better, they feel and know love by way of grief⁵⁸.

The emotional posture is the desire of being in a ‘carnal’ relationship with God, here summarised in the phrase *te sitio, te esurio, te desidero, ad te suspiro, te concupisco* immediately followed by the image of the orphan that Anselm employs to suggest the feeling of deprivation and estrangement produced by the memorative ‘re-presentation’ of the Passion.

I thirst for you, I hunger for you, I desire you, I sigh for you, I covet you: I am like an orphan deprived of the presence of a very kind father (*pupillus benignissimi patris orbatus praesentia*), who, weeping and wailing, does not cease to cling to the dear face with his whole heart⁵⁹.

⁴⁹ Cfr. R. W. SOUTHERN, *Saint Anselm and his Biographer. A Study of Monastic Life and Thought (1059-1130)*, Cambridge, 1966, p. 42. See also G. CONSTABLE, *Past and Present in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries. Perceptions of Time and Change*, in *L'Europa dei secoli XI e XII fra novità e tradizione. Sviluppi di una cultura*, Atti della decima Settimana internazionale di studio (Mendola, 25-29 agosto 1986), Milano, 1989, p. 135-170; ID., *The Reformation of the Twelfth Century*, Cambridge, 1996.

⁵⁰ Cfr. R. W. SOUTHERN, *The Making of the Middle Ages*, op. cit. (n. 22), p. 236.

⁵¹ Cfr. I. BIFFI, *Pregliera e teologia nelle “orazioni meditative” di sant’Anselmo*, in ANSELMO D’AOSTA, *Orazioni e meditazioni*, Milano, 1997, note 103, p. 48.

⁵² Cfr. A. VAUCHEZ, *Les laïcs au moyen âge. Pratiques et expériences religieuses*, Paris, 1987, p. 130. See also F. H. BÄUML, *Varieties and Consequences of Medieval Literacy and Illiteracy*, in *Speculum*, 55, 1980, 2, p. 237-265.

⁵³ R. FULTON, *From Judgment to Passion*, op. cit. (n. 9), p. 173.

⁵⁴ Cfr. *Ibid.*, p. 190-191.

⁵⁵ B. WARD, *Anselm of Canterbury*, op. cit. (n. 47), p. 25.

⁵⁶ The prayer is so called in Oxford: Bodleian Library, Ms Rawlinson A. 393. I will follow the edition of the *Prayer to Christ* by B. WARD, *The Prayers and Meditations of St. Anselm with the Proslogion*, Harmondsworth, 1973, p. 105-116 (from now on *Prayer to Christ*, transl. Ward), specifying lines.

⁵⁷ *Prayer to Christ*, transl. Ward, v. 35-37.

⁵⁸ Cfr. R. FULTON, *From Judgment to Passion*, op. cit. (n. 9), p. 142-192.

⁵⁹ *Prayer to Christ*, transl. Ward, v. 53-62.

It is a warm familial *affectus*, which finds in the hopeless tears the expression of the grieving soul, and its most intimate and meaningful gesture in the embrace of the Father's beloved face.

The mystery of the Passion is seen through the crying eyes of a child. Drawing on what Mary Carruthers terms 'emotional colour', memory re-presents to the believer's eyes a short sequence of images, which are like frames of the violence suffered by Christ during the Passion: slaps, scourges, cross, injuries. Then, memory marks the three principal acts of the drama - Christ is killed (*occisus es*), the body recomposed to burial (*conditus*), buried (*sepultus*) - and the two glorious scenes of resurrection and ascension:

So, as much as I can [...] I am mindful of your passion, your buffeting, your scourging, your cross, your wounds (*memor passionis tuae, memor alaparum tuarum, memor flagellorum, memor crucis, memor vulnerum tuorum*), how you were slain for me (*pro me occisus es*), how prepared for burial (*conditus*) and buried (*sepultus*); and also I remember your glorious Resurrection, and wonderful Ascension (*memor gloriosae resurrectionis et admirabilis ascensionis*)⁶⁰.

The emotional journey through the Passion is anticipated and illustrated by a clear succession of affections, that are embodied in different and succeeding kinds of tears: tears of abandonment, regret, horror, grief, love, solace and desire.

All this I hold with unwavering faith, and weep over the hardship of exile, hoping in the sole consolation of your coming, ardently longing for the glorious contemplation of your face⁶¹.

The reenacting process of memory gets to the heart of the matter, starting with the first kind of tears, those of estrangement. As Ward has noticed, "it is not [...] the estrangement caused by sin that Anselm is thinking of here; it is quite definitely the fact that he did not know the Lord in his earthly life that grieves him"⁶². Therefore, the emotional colour of this stage is the personal regret at not having seen, not having taken part in the historical events:

Alas for me, that I was not able to see the Lord of Angels humbled to converse with men, when God, the one insulted, willed to die that the sinner might live. Alas that I did not deserve to be amazed in the presence of a love marvellous and beyond our grasp⁶³.

Within the range of this regret, Anselm composes vivid acting images, translated in perfectly legible pictures and in touching scenes. Moving, once more, from the mental vision of the crucified Christ, Anselm recalls the most relevant

events of the Passion without following any chronological order. He reads them as if he did not take part in their historical course but, at the same time, as if he were emotionally present. He finds in the human suffering the chance to describe some cruel details, beginning from the piercing of the Savior's side: "Why, O my soul, were you not there to be pierced by a sword of bitter sorrow when you could not bear the piercing of the side of your Saviour with a lance?"⁶⁴.

The *vulnera passionis* and their pain are mediated, indeed filtered, by the human gaze that gives emotional responses to everything it sees; this is why the piercing of hands and feet is an unbearable sight, the bloodshed is horrific, the beverage of gall is the source of an inebriating profusion of bitter tears:

Why could you not bear to see the nails violate the hands and feet of your Creator? Why did you not see with horror the blood that poured out of the side of your Redeemer? Why were you not drunk with bitter tears when they gave him bitter gall to drink?⁶⁵

While regretting what it did not live, the soul reenacts each event in its memory, to the point of being present under the cross and of crying for the pain of its Lord. At that very moment and in that very place, the soul moves its own gaze from the body of Christ and, finding out it was not alone, sees Mary by its side: "Why did you not share the sufferings of the most pure virgin, his worthy mother and your gentle lady?"⁶⁶. Establishing a tight parallel between tears and tears, the soul finds in Mary's pain its own main reference point and joins her gaze, overlapping eye on eye. Here the prayer is directly addressed to Mary, begging her to tell her weeping. The result is a re-telling of the son's Passion, articulated in three moments, each of them reconsidered through the Mother's crying eyes. At first, Anselm restores the sequence of events of the Passion by encasing them in one simple image that recalls, through three verbs, the arrest of Christ, his flagellation and his execution:

My most merciful Lady, what can I say about the fountains that flowed from your most pure eyes when you saw your only Son before you, bound, beaten and hurt (*ligari, flagellari et mactari*)?⁶⁷

Then, he moves to the crucifixion scene, introduced by the face of Mary getting wet with tears, while she is looking at the beloved body stretched on the wood, the divine flesh pierced and cruelly transfixed by nails:

What do I know of the flood that drenched your matchless face, when you beheld your Son, your Lord, and your God, without guilt, when the flesh of your flesh was cruelly butchered by wicked men?⁶⁸

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, v. 53-62.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, v. 63-65.

⁶² B. WARD, *The Prayers and Meditations*, op. cit. (n. 56), p. 62.

⁶³ *Prayer to Christ*, transl. Ward, v. 67-69.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, v. 75-78.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, v. 83-84.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, v. 85-86.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, v. 87-91.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, vv. 92-98.

Eventually, the lament becomes the sob of the breast, when Mary hears the Son's words and receives, on His behalf, John, the disciple in place of the master:

How can I judge what sobs troubled your most pure breast when you heard, 'Woman, behold your son,' and the disciple, 'Behold, your mother,' when you received as a son the disciple in place of the master, the servant for the lord?⁶⁹

Anselm's innovation is the 'colour' of tears that, as a rhetorical element, becomes a mnemonic code for each different step of the emotional path. Imagining the maternal weeping like before it had imagined its own, the soul sees now the same things that Mary saw and wants to feel what Mary felt. Looking at Christ with maternal eyes elucidates what the relationship between the Mother and the Son is: an intimate relationship, made of flesh and spirit, which bonds pain and love. By virtue of this relationship, the mother's gaze resounds with Jesus' sufferings, shaping a different meaning of tears that is crucial to the composition of memorative scenes.

The emphasis on Mary's pain is revolutionary. We need only to consider that, up to that time in Western Christianity⁷⁰ Mary had been excluded from the Passion narrative and that the synoptic Gospels did not even testify to her presence during those events. Only John (XIX, 25, 27) talks briefly about the Mother at the foot of the Cross, but makes no mention of her grief and describes a silent and private attitude, sharply conveyed by the laconic verb *stabat*. Nevertheless, the Virgin's sorrow attracted a considerable interest among the Fathers of the Church, if already Ambrose, reflecting on John's verses, supposed an affective relationship between her and the Son⁷¹, and Hrabanus Maurus, having reviewed the body of the crucified *Rex*, wondered what she had felt in witnessing Jesus' pain and how she could be 'standing' without dissolving into tears and showing her grief⁷². Until Anselm, however, the image of the Virgin Mary was enclosed by an intimate and spiritual pain that did not transpire outwardly. In the exegetical treaties on the New Testament, her role in the Passion had been read as instrumental in the Son's mercy⁷³. Anselm, instead, binding her to the Son on account of the flesh, paves the way for an innovative representation and perception of the story of the Passion. He makes an affective revolution *strictu sensu* in relation to the visual device, because he allows the believer to look at the cross from a more intimate and parental emotional posture, which has a

deep influence on the different points of view and attitudes that are unfolding during the course of the prayer.

In fact, it is interesting to note that, right after this scene Anselm, leaving aside the Mother and her intimate sob, recalls the last three moments or acts of the Passion: the deposition from the cross, the unction of the corpse and its burial. In this instance, he reinstates the regret for not being present in person on the scene, this time adding the disappointment that he couldn't help Joseph of Arimathea sharing his caring and merciful actions. In doing so, he imagines to have been by Joseph's side, taking part in that event:

Would that I with happy Joseph might have taken down my Lord, from the cross, wrapped him in spiced grave-clothes and laid him in the tomb; or even followed after so that such a burial might not have been without my mourning⁷⁴.

It is as if the soul projected itself on the inside of the action and imagined to partake in the joyful and comforting dismay of the women, when they saw the dazzling angel and heard the desired announcement of the resurrection:

Would that with the blessed band of women I might have trembled at the vision of angels and have heard the news of the Lord's Resurrection, news of my consolation, so much looked for, so much desired. Would that I might have heard from the angel's mouth, "Fear not, Jesus who was crucified, whom you are seeking, is not here; he is risen"⁷⁵.

Regret recapitulates the whole experience of the Passion: regret of not having seen the undying flesh, regret of not having kissed the holes left by the nails, regret for not having admired the scars which prove the truth of the God's flesh, crying over them with joy:

Kindest, gentlest, most serene Lord, will you not make it up to me for not seeing the blessed incorruption of your flesh, for not having kissed the place of the wounds where the nails pierced, for not having sprinkled with tears of joy the scars that prove the truth of your body?⁷⁶

Therefore, in accordance with the tradition of the Psalms and of the meditative literature of the Middle Age, tears are the main theme of Anselm's prayer. However, the hallmark of the anselmian weeping is the emotional relationship from which it flows. In closing his meditation, Anselm

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, v. 99-105.

⁷⁰ On Eastern tradition see S. STICCA, *The 'Planctus Mariae' in the Dramatic Tradition of the Middle Ages*, Athens-London, 1988, p. 43-67; R. FULTON, *From Judgement to Passion*, op. cit. (n. 9), p. 216-217 and L. BRUBAKER, M. CUNNINGHAM (eds.), *The Cult of the Mother of God in Byzantium. Texts and Images*, Farnham, 2011.

⁷¹ "Maria mater Domini ante crucem Filii stabat. Nullus me hoc docuit, nisi sanctus Ioannes Evangelista. [...] Ioannes docuit, quod alii non docuerunt, quemadmodum, in cruce positus, matrem appellaverit. [...] Nam, si religiosum est quod latroni donatur venia, multo uberioris pietatis est quod a filio mater tanto affecto honoratur" (*Epistola LXIII*, cap. CIX).

⁷² Cfr. HRABANUS MAURUS, *Opusculum De Passione Domini*, in PL, 112, col. 1430.

⁷³ Cfr. AUGUSTINE, *In Joannis Evangelium*, 119, 1-2; ALCUIN, *In Evangelium Joannis*, in PL, 100, col. 984; AIMO OF AUXERRE, *Homilia LXVIII, Feria Sesta Parasceves. Passio Domini nostri Jesu Christi secundum Joannem*, in PL, 118, col. 441; CANDIDUS OF FULDA, *Opusculum de passione Domini*, in PL, 106, col. 95.

⁷⁴ *Prayer to Christ*, transl. Ward, v. 106-112.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, v. 113-123.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, v. 123-129.

reaffirms and underlines clearly that those tears of regret, bewilderment, and desire come from the eyes of an orphan and from a widows' soul; they are very different from each other because they mean in turn the defenseless love of a child bereft of the father and the vulnerable condition of a woman without husband:

I am become a child without a father; my soul is like a widow. Turn your gaze and behold my tears which I offer to you till you return⁷⁷.

These are not tears of repentance, there is no sinner here crying over his sins. There are, instead a son and a wife, lost and alone, crying over their vulnerability, their being defenceless, their need of help. The orphan and the widow are, indeed, figures which represent the difficult condition of social fragility of those who do not have a head of the family in charge of their survival; hence the sense of confusion and lack before the death of Christ ("What shall I say? What shall I do? Whither shall I go? Where shall I seek him? Where and when shall I find him? Whom shall I ask?")⁷⁸.

However, if we read these kinds of tears also through the filter of Mary's crying, we find that Anselm transforms their *intentio* into a feeling of visceral love. In fact, using the eyes of the mother, the worshipper can see Christ as the most loved person, sharing both heart and body: the God-Man, then, becomes a father, a son, a brother, a husband. In other words, the maternal gaze implies that there is no more distance between who is suffering and who is looking at that pain, but there is just one single sorrow, felt simultaneously. The exclusive blood and flesh tie that bonds mother and son becomes a universal tie between human beings. The parental relationship is extended to the whole of mankind and founds the idea of a mourning that is 'relative' and absolute at the same time. Mary's weeping is a 'dramatic key' that adds something special to the devotion towards the humanity of Christ and transforms *visio* into *actio*, because seeing the butchered body of a son is painful. The image of the broken body becomes a scene to be lived.

To conclude, it is interesting to compare and contrast the weeping of the Mother of God with the women's *threnos* (the mourning lament) in Greek tragedy, a key-scene in the history of theatre. As Nicole Loraux has explained, we must distinguish the women's lamentation during funeral rites from the dramatic scene of the weeping. The first one was referred to *ghenos* and expressed a familial grief (literally *oikeion kakon*), which could have implications that reached beyond the social order and, for this reason, could endanger the very ideology of the city-state, one that eschews internal conflict. For the 'race of women', in fact, the mother-son bond was more important than any other bond; the son was

the only treasure, more precious than the *polis*. The maternal weeping was the voice of a personal and exclusive mourning, which revealed its nature in the vision of the son's corpse: in that very moment the memory of the intimacy between bodies produces excessive pain and becomes wrath and vengeance. Mothers could kill, also against the law of the *polis*⁷⁹. For these reasons the city-state regulated mourning and ritual laments, relegating it into the *oikos* and domesticating feminine excess, according to what Loraux calls a "practice of forgetting"⁸⁰.

Tragedy avoided representing historical suffering and, after the case of Phrynicus's *Capture of Miletus*, it did not engage with a grief that could be intended as personal or - above all - shared by the whole city-state. It is well known that Phrynicus, playing the misfortune of the Milesians, had made the whole theatre audience cry, because Athenians considered them very close friends and, as a consequence, shared the grief portrayed on the stage. Following *The Capture of Miletus*, tragedians preferred to set their plays at some previously established distance, at a moment between the remote past and current events, instituted by the mythical reference. Once this distance was established, it was once again possible to dramatize on the stage pain, conflict, revolt, and sometimes resignation. So, also "the suffering presented in a tragedy was only that of the tragic characters. These mythic heroes were the embodiment of the distant past, and the Athenian public felt their agony only in a remote way"⁸¹:

To see the self in the other requires distance: without that distance, the Athenians, caught in the trap of a representation (*mimēsis*) indistinguishable from reality, could mistake the choreutes and actors for authentic Milesians massacred by the Persians, and the outbreak of mourning would overcome the theater. The place of mourning is on the stage, not in the city-state⁸².

Tragedy only represented either very 'ancient' weeping or a crying that pertained to Athens's rival cities, like Argos, Corinth, Thebes, or Sparta. The examples are numerous: from the sufferings of Ajax or Antigone, to the parental grief of mothers such as Eurydice or Hecuba upon hearing of the death of their sons. Thus, if Athenians could cry in the theater over the 'suffering of heroes', it happened because there were not real consequences: it was a contrived and generalized feeling, not linked to a particular reason⁸³. This kind of emotive reaction is the 'feeling like a spectator' Augustine had clearly explained in *The Confessions's* third book, underlining the paradox perceived in attending a show, when fiction does not involve the beholder so much as to cause a real affective identification:

Why does a man like to be made sad (*dolere*) by viewing doleful and tragic scenes, which he himself could not by any means endure (*pati*)? Yet, as a spectator, he wishes to

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, v. 165-168.

⁷⁸ "Quid dicam? quid faciam? quo vadam? Ubi eum quaeram; ubi vel quando inveniam? Quem rogabo? quis nuntiabit dilecto quia amore languo?" (*ibid.*, v. 144-159).

⁷⁹ N. LOREAUX, *Mothers in mourning. With the Essay of Amnesty and its Opposite*, Ithaca-London, 1998, p. 37. See also H. P. FOLEY, *Female Acts in Greek Tragedy*, Princeton, 2002.

⁸⁰ N. LOREAUX, *The Mourning Voice. An Essay on Greek Tragedy*, Ithaca-London, 2002, p. 27.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 52-53.

⁸³ Cfr. *ibid.*, p. 44.

experience from them a sense of grief, and in this very sense of grief his pleasure consists. What is this but wretched madness? For a man is more affected by these actions the more he is spuriously involved in these affections. Now, if he should suffer them in his own person, it is the custom to call this "misery". But when he suffers with another, then it is called "compassion." But what kind of compassion is it that arises from viewing fictitious and unreal sufferings? The spectator is not expected to aid the sufferer but merely to grieve for him⁸⁴.

Beholders partake fictitiously in what they see, experiencing only emotions that are from distance and can be controlled. In the case of Mary's weeping, something opposite happens, in a process that moves from distance to proximity: firstly, the mother's grief is imagined as an interior scene of the mental and mnemonical theatre of the Passion of Christ. Secondly, her tears were seen using the heart's eyes and vividly felt. Then, they became the prayer's words and images. Finally, her crying embodied itself in a merciful *actio*,

as social as dramatic. This is because the Virgin's tears refer to a radically different idea of *oikos*, an house or race which does not correspond to an exclusive blood with the personal and restricted values it brings, but goes beyond the ancient values founding the concept of an inclusive family, the human race, in which everybody partakes in a unique blood and flesh, that of Christ. To represent or play on stage this particular mourning means stirring up emotions of universal piety and compassion, really and closely felt.

The old Greek piety was only allowed only on stage in theatre, for show, but in real life had to be regulated, because to see the others as fellow human beings and to share their pain could be threatening to society. Christian piety, instead, had to be truly felt because it laid the foundations of brotherhood relationships and peacekeeping social actions. The monastic 'revolution of the tears' changed the meaning of the Passion and set off the anti-tragic and anti-cathartic 'theatre of Mercy' in which one feels the others through the grieving heart of a mourning mother.

⁸⁴ AUGUSTINE, *Confessiones*, II, 2, 2, transl. by A. C. Outler.