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The Body on Stage
Otherness, Image and Gaze from Late Antiquity to the Late Middle Ages

Luigi Canetti, *Introduction*

The Christian view of history as a story of salvation transforms earthly life into what the theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar defined as "Theo-Drama". Man is no longer the spectator of a theatrical scene but together with God, the real spectator, he is also always an actor and co-protagonist in his redemption. From St. Paul onwards, the concept of redemption was seen as the recovery of the resemblance to the Creator through the imitation of Christ. This entailed moving on from the ancient philosophical and literary metaphor (which survived from Plato until Shakespeare) of the world as a theatre of insignificant appearances, a puppet show without meaning or purpose. As the philosophy of the revealed truth, Christianity claims to confer absolute value on the contrast between true and false: the cultural construction of the diabolical is therefore both the condition and consequence of this projection of absolute truth onto a God that guarantees justice and truth.

According to the Fathers of the Church, the ancient system of theatrical spectacles symbolizes the mechanism of falsehood, as it features a threefold distance from the truth through deformation, separation and frenzy. The effect is an overlapping of reality and fiction. This leads to the idea of theatre as a form of idolatry and therefore as the domain of the Devil and his demons, who conspire to camouflage reality and divert men from knowledge and worship of the true God. The Devil reveals his nature as a falsifier and liar more effectively in his occult direction of the theatrical machine than in other fields. No scenic artifice can justify the separation between dramatic action and real action. To a Christian, seeing, feeling and acting are all the same. For the Fathers of the Church, the pleasures experienced and the tears cried at the theatre are a dangerous simulation or even a replacement for real feelings. They do not produce effects of real involvement with the suffering and joy of men living in the real world. Only by empathizing and assimilating a neighbour's wounds and tears can one really enter into the drama of historical reality. The script is learned at the theatrical company of God, the only director, producer, protagonist and spectator. A Christian's gaze is no longer that of a passive spectator, but a performative and responsible gaze. According to Christian intellectuals, in the torment of the cross Christ accepted to become a spectacle to the eyes of the world to show the perverse mechanism of appearance and duplicity, which forms the basis of pagan theatre. In this way, he demonstrated that what is seen is the result of the way of looking, because believers will see God in Christ the suffering servant, while all the others, the non-believers, will continue to see the theatrical execution of a criminal through their inability to feel empathy or gaze responsibly, which can only be activated by piety. The impious gaze typifies those who love the world and remain far from God. For authors like Augustine of Hippo, rejecting piety means rejecting knowledge of the Truth, or the resemblance to God, the same God that lowered himself to come closer to us, take care of us and be charitable to us.

The Greek term *Théatron* (*spectaculum* in Latin) refers to a collective gaze. The act of seeing therefore comes before any written text. Our session will focus on theatrical performances in which the gaze assumes a doubly significant role, as the medieval religious theatre excludes the passivity of the mere repetition of texts or the exterior celebration of events. From the XII century on, the theatre of the Passion is based on the presence of a gaze that transforms the observer into an actor in the holy drama. The profound sense of what is performed is attained in him and through him. The Christian God needs man

as an agonist and ally to perform the drama of salvation. This revisits the experience of theatre as a feast in which everyone performs, regardless of their specific roles. This performance eclipses the distinction between audience and actor by virtue of an empathy which removes the interior distance and hypocrisy that the Fathers of the Church attributed to pagan theatre. The alternative to the diabolical machine of the ancient theatrical gaze is the 'theatre of God', which was not a concrete practice for many centuries. The theatre of God includes three elements. Firstly, the manifestation of glory, or the contemplation of the beauty of creation and praise of its maker. Secondly, the theatre of memory, or meditating and listening to the word of God, which is radically opposed to pagan myths. Finally, the theatre of mercy, which entails being part of the scene as witnesses or actors, a physical and emotional sharing that can be defined as the re-presentation and reactivation of the piety or mercy needed by man to become an image of God in the theatre of the world.

Also, to establish the boundaries of the global theatre that was dancing in the ancient world, it is necessary to interpret sources through a critical reading of the intention of the gaze. As historians, we have to consider the way in which ancient accounts saw and imagined dancing. Intent therefore mainly depends on the observer rather than the performer, being situated within a perspective that we can only presume to be shared by the 'dancer'. The source always suggests which gestures are choreutic and which are the values associated with these bodily expressions. Just like pagan philosophers, Christian authors unreservedly condemned frenetic gestures that seemed to indicate a loss of self-control, which could be connected to the frenzy of the cults of possession. They also exploited sacred dances to highlight the distinction between those who were inside and outside the boundaries of Christianity and orthodoxy (Jews, pagans and heretics in the latter case). On the other hand, the Platonic and biblical legacy, together with the developments in liturgy, gave dancing new performance space, which medieval studies have finally started to address critically after decades of silence.

The reflections on the theatre by the Fathers of the Church were not imposed from one day to the next and it took many centuries to develop a Christian theatre. As Carla Bino has demonstrated, this development became possible in the West between the IX and XI century as a result of a new aesthetics. Naturally, we cannot examine the stages of this process of Christian thinking in this session. Instead, we have decided to provide two representative examples: the image of dance in Late Antiquity and the meditative and theatrical literature on the Passion written in the late Middle Ages. This thousand-year journey could also be seen as a transition from a position of suffering diabolical otherness to the desired divine resemblance. On one hand, Christianity needed to establish a new identity by excluding the competing alterities (leading to the sense of dancing as the ideal model of corporeality integrated with the schemata of the new Christian civilization). On the other hand, it was necessary to justify a form of psycho-corporeal identification with the divine. It was also a slow transition from the primacy of the prophetic voice as a sign of otherness in which man is an instrument to the primacy of the gaze in which man is responsible. It was not the emergence of a general feeling of piety, but an emotional and cognitive relationship that was perceived as reciprocal desire between God and man from the time of St. Bernard and Cistercian theology onwards. The recognition of divine otherness made it possible to recover the resemblance with the humanity of Christ through identification. God himself becomes an otherness through incarnation and man responds by identifying with Christ's torment in his body and soul. Like Dante at the end of his journey, a redeemed man will be able to see his face reflected in God's face. The visual and emotional identification with the flesh of the Man of Sorrows is an opportunity to transform submission to sin into the recovery of the resemblance to the Creator. In this way, tears become the bodily sign of involvement in Christ's suffering that the meditating actor in Passion theatre relives by adopting Mary's gaze, tears and emotions at the feet of her son nailed to the Cross. The incarnation implies an empathy that the maternal relationship expresses in its most intense degree. While someone possessed by the Devil loses even memory of himself, the devout who meditate and pray by reliving the memory of the holy story can see the Son, image of the Father, in the highest act of his love, in which he becomes

other to himself and similar to man, allowing the latter to recognize the resemblance and perceive the other as similar to himself.

By making the visible the centre of meanings, the anthropological gaze has reversed the theological perspective by enhancing the theatrical aspect of everyday life. Ancient wisdom, on the other hand, belittled daily life as fiction, claiming that it masks the invisible truth. The paradoxical script of the holy fools of Byzantium (known as *salói*) essentially aimed to unmask the drama of everyday reality. After Victor Turner's work, historians also became more sensitive to the theatrical aspect of rites, thereby avoiding the rigid choice between truth and fiction, experienced theatre and acted theatre, which formed the basis of patristic thinking on drama. Johan Huizinga and Roger Caillois helped us to understand to what extent play can be a serious matter, while Ernesto de Martino saw the ritual tears of mourning as the drama of the 'as if', which becomes effective and therefore authentic. Like the verbal language that defines emotions, ritual language allows us to control and manipulate experience by directing it towards certain outcomes: knowledge, decisions and therapies. The effectiveness of the rite is based on the symbolic potential of the myths that it embodies and reworks. Pretence is therefore a result of belief, while the modern perspective tends to insinuate the contrary. The possessed are actors, but the role that they assume implies total trust in being manipulated by divinities. Gilbert Rouget saw modern opera as the rebirth of poetic-musical madness, which is one of the forms of divine mania mentioned by Plato in *Phaedrus*. The actor-singer's mania is a form of lucid possession, an altered state of consciousness under control. I wonder if this insight would not be better suited to medieval holy drama, in which the liturgical representation of the Passion of Christ induces a kind of possession trance in the actors, to use Rouget's term. Under the direction of the divine playwright, the actor-interpreter is also the medium for a word that comes from elsewhere, with which the audience can also identify. The performance is therefore like an exchange of inspired words and gestures, like a scene of possession whose outcome may already be known by the actors and audience, but nevertheless leaves everyone on tenterhooks and produces emotionally effective reactions.

Donatella Tronca

Out of the Mould: Defining Otherness through Choreutic Gesture

When we talk about choreutic gesture, namely dancing, we are referring to bodies in movement, but when we deal with non-contemporary history, we have to use dead sources (written texts or images). For this reason, the distance between us and the bodies in our sources is not only temporal, but also perceptual and sensorial.

I will start by referring to an early scene from Ken Russell's 1971 film *The Devils*, inspired by Aldous Huxley's non-fiction novel which tells the well-known story of a case of diabolical possession that affected the Ursuline Sisters in the French town of Loudun in 1634. What interests me is that when we see the abbess Sister Jeanne des Anges, played by Vanessa Redgrave, we have the immediate impression that she is in some way out of the mould, above all because of her deformity <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nBrsV7ouSLQ>. The spectator's impressions are later confirmed, as the abbess is deemed to be possessed by the devil.

This image recalls a form of movement that the Middle Ages often ascribed to the worst dancer in the history of Christianity – or perhaps the best, depending on your point of view, considering that she got what she wanted. I am naturally referring to Salome, who is often depicted executing a movement that is comparable to the hysterical arch of the possessed.

Salome, Basilica of San Zeno (Verona, XII century)

Leçons du mardi de la Salpêtrière,
policlinique 1887-1888: notes de cours de MM Blin, Charcot et H. Colin, I, Paris 1882, p. 72
[engraving by P. Richer]

Returning to the film, I believe that the director uses our familiarity with the immediate impact of the moving image to make the spectator instantly wary of this controversial figure. What I would like to highlight is that in the ancient and medieval world, certain expressions resonated with those that heard them as powerfully as these vivid images now resonate with us, because their meanings were characterized by a form of corporeality that we can no longer fully grasp. One of these concepts was the ancient Greek *aschemosyne*.

The term generally indicates lack of form, ugliness and deformity, but it was much more than this, encompassing everything that did not comply with schemata, which played a role of fundamental political importance in the ancient Greek world.

The concept of schemata is directly associated with *mousike*, which does not, however, correspond exactly to our term music, because in the ancient and late antique world it was always a combination of word, melody and choreutic gesture. *Mousike* is the determining factor in the association between specific schemata and specific values, which include the way of speaking, walking, relating to space, appearing in public and – even though it isn't really an appropriate term – etiquette. In ancient Greek thinking, it was essential to maintain the traditional schemata: those who tried to change and manipulate them represented one of the most dangerous threats to society, as they questioned the fixed nature of social rules. A disorderly choreutic performance was referred to as *aschemon*, indecent and depraved. It is important to stress that these terms did not have an abstract meaning. Instead, they always referred to physical appearance and concrete expressions of bodily attitude. This is shown by the fact that the term *aschemon* was also used in medical literature to indicate deformity.

I feel that this analysis of the concept of schema helps us to understand why, for example, in one of his homilies John Chrysostom invited the people of Antioch to avoid public *aschemosyne* during festivities. As it seems reasonable to assume that the terms used by Christian authors had not lost the concrete nature that characterized them in antiquity, I think that he was referring to specific bodily gestures that had to be avoided as they interrupted the gestural harmony that he wanted people to comply with.

Another concept worthy of consideration is *choreia*. This term is generally translated in modern languages as 'choral dance', but only a tiny part of what we now describe as 'dance' encompasses the wide variety of meanings and the pervasiveness that this concept had in the ancient and late antique world, extending, for example, to include processional movement as well as singing. In Plato's political thinking, the *choreia* is an instrument of education and learning to dance properly can lead to the acquisition of moral and civic virtues. The term *nomos* means 'law', but also 'melody' and 'musical

mode'. In this way, just as *nomos*, in the sense of 'law', is the foundation of social order, it is by following the musical *nomos* that the collective *choreia* can guide the social body harmoniously. Only those who are trained to follow this harmony can live in the Platonic City, while a man who cannot dance is defined as *achoreutos* and excluded from the ideal City because his inability to move in harmony with the rest of the civic *choreia* is considered immoral and depraved.

As we know that Christian authors in the early centuries were particularly steeped in Platonic culture, I am firmly convinced that when Basil of Caesarea invited Christians to imitate the *choreia* of angels on earth, he attributed the same Platonic value to the term. As Christian society had to aspire to this musical harmony, frenetic dances were prohibited because they were associated with dancing by demons and non-Christians, namely Otherness. It is therefore unsurprising that John Chrysostom stated in one of his homilies that Jews danced barefoot in the square, bringing together camp dancing choruses and a pack of whores, and dragging the theatre along with all its actors into their place of worship, because in his eyes there was no difference between the theatre and the synagogue.

The Christian intellectual aversion to dancing emerges above all in texts of a homiletic nature, namely those that had the precise aim of training and educating the faithful. The reasons for this aversion also included the not always deliberate construction of a religious otherness that expressed the need to develop a Christian religious identity. They immediately felt compelled to distance themselves from certain practices that had to be rejected, including customs attributed to pagans, Jews and heretics, collectively perceived as a single major threat.

The Christian aversion to dance can also be explained by the way in which Christianity was influenced by the Roman tradition with its somewhat ambiguous concept of the profession of actor and dancer. Although the Romans were keen theatre-goers, Roman law categorized actors and dancers as *infames*: *infamia* consisted of the loss of political rights and the restriction of civil rights. Even if actors and dancers acquired a high level of fame, they always remained *infames* (infamous). Their marginal status in the Roman world was due to the act of *prodire in scaenam* or performing on stage. We know that this feature remained intact in the thinking of most Christian authors. For example, Augustine of Hippo praises the ancient Roman constitution for having assigned the lowest social ranking to actors and distinguishing them from respectable people. His words also show the fear of contamination that we often find in Christian polemics against performance and dancing: when speaking out against the Donatist ritual, for instance, he mentions *pestilentia saltatorum* (the pestilence of dancers) at the basilica dedicated to the martyr Cyprian.

When Christians accused pagans of idolatry because they celebrated feasts in honour of demons, they also criticized these celebrations as ridiculous and the figure of the dancer/actor was denounced for being non-human and bestial due to the ambiguity of the mask worn and the characteristic depraved gesticulations, almost as if the performer were possessed. The circus was condemned by Christian apologists because it was a place of mania and furore, where one risked losing self-control. The theatre was a place of perdition, where Christians now also had an extra duty compared to pagan Romans, because in Christian philosophical reasoning those who watch a theatrical performance are no less deplorable – we could even say *infamis* – than the person acting. The Christian believer is responsible for his gaze as well as his actions.

Christian feasts had to be celebrated more in the spirit than in the body, occupying the inner space of the family and the church, because feasts on earth were an anticipation of the celestial feast, where excess and intemperance were not allowed. However, it is also important to underline that Christian moralists never invoke religious reasoning in their criticisms of certain ways of celebrating. Indeed, the same disapproval of bodily excess can also be found in pagan moralists, as well as in the Jewish biblical and Talmudic tradition. The attribution of these bodily expressions to pagans and Jews were a topos, a way to connote religious otherness and therefore, by contrast, the Christian identity. In one of his homilies,

Gregory of Nazianzus explicitly said that Christians must not celebrate a feast in the same way as Jews or Greeks, who party in honour of their demons.

I believe that dancing per se was not a problem for Christians. What was required of the faithful was to stay within the mould or comply with the schemata, because gestures that strayed outside the established schema and space fell within the realm of the undefinable, the depraved and the diabolical. Christian intellectuals were striving to offer an ideological representation of otherness and exploited less controlled forms of dancing to this end. However, this was not a new feature introduced by Christianity, as when the Greeks needed to portray Scythians in a negative light, they followed the same procedure by saying that they drank pure wine and therefore abandoned themselves to the most immoderate excesses.

I think that the tendency was to brand pagans, Jews and heretics with the negative aspects of certain choreutic performances accompanied by excessive drinking and disorderly gesticulating. They were *infames* just like actors, dancers and prostitutes, and were defined as such at the Council of Carthage in 419. This prejudice about gesture was so deep-rooted that it can also be found in much later sources such as Alberic of Trois-Fontaines's XIII-century *Chronicon*, which describes the ability of the Dominican inquisitor Robert Le Bougre to identify a heretic purely on the basis of his gestures.

Defining something as 'dance' and attributing it with a positive or negative connotation depends entirely on the observer's gaze. The authors of our sources establish which movements comply with the schemata of the Christian society and do so in accordance with the categories of thought that are the cultural product of the time in which they lived and worked. For Christian intellectuals in Late Antiquity, these categories came from the Greek and Roman worlds. To my mind, whether they were aware of it or not, they were transmitting the same values desired by Plato in his Ideal City, where some forms of dancing such as the Bacchic frenzy and dances of Nymphs and Satyrs were excluded. Effectively, the ban applied to frenetic dancing that made individuals lose their self-control, thereby interrupting the harmony of the civic *choreia*.

To conclude then, it is not only rhetoric if we define dance in the broadest sense of the term as a metaphor of social and political life, or life in a *polis*, as dancing defines the relationship that the body creates with space and the way in which it interacts with other bodies in the same shared space. By regulating choreutic gesture, Christian intellectuals were attempting to build a Christian *choreia* where there was no room for gestures attributed to those who remained on the margins, namely the *infames*, pagans, Jews and heretics. Christians were not allowed to imitate the depraved gestures of non-Christians because they embodied otherness, they were the devil.

Carla Bino

I feel you. Using the Mother's gaze to see beyond otherness

It has been clarified that *affectus* took on great importance in Western culture during the period from the Anselmian revolution to the 13th century. In particular, the ongoing debate over a «historical anthropology of emotions» has shown that the *affectus* is not simply a keyword to understand the rebirth of the period: rather, it is a «form of the representation» which indicates both one kind of relationship and the identity of those involved in it.

As Pierluigi Lia has pointed out, the idea of *affectus* as a form of the representation permeates the cistercian theology. In Saint Bernard's thought "to represent" means "to express" and "to show" a vision that is an acknowledgement of the Revealed form: in other words the representation is the knowledge of the order of the Creation, shown through the Incarnation. This order should be understood as a "loving

relationship" between God and the human being; originally, this relationship was conceived as an endless enjoyment of God, but then, after the human being's free choice to renege on it, it has been restored as a "tension to love", a desire "to see" and "to know" the face of God.

Maybe it is possible to better understand how the word *affectus* can indicate this *loving relationship*, if we consider that the passive tense of the latin verb *afficere* means "to be touched" and "to be impressed" and, therefore, "to be modified" and "to be attracted". As a past participle, *affectus* means both the action of God who imprints his own image on the man in creating him, and the human tension to that image. In this sense the *loving relationship* is suitably an affective relationship. If at the time of the Creation the relation between God and man is *loving in likeness* - because man is made *ad imaginem dei* -, instead at the time of the Passion the relationship between Christ and man is *loving in otherness*, because God decides to make Himself like man, but "other" than Himself, in order to restore the original likeness. "The Man of sorrow", therefore, is the manifestation of the *loving relationship* between the defaced man and a god who takes the same condition.

I'd like to focus on the passion of Christ because I think that the *ordo affectus* radically changed the form of its representation, causing a dramatic revolution based on the paramount importance of the maternal relationship. In fact, since the 12th century, the tears of the mother were an unwaivable episode of the story and became an emotional cornerstone. I consider the weep of Mary the dramatic key which moves the perceptual scheme from seeing to feeling.

Although the dramatic and lyric texts of *planctus* are an important element for the development of the Passion theatre, I prefer to concentrate on their expanded form in a new narrative model: the prayer to Mary to obtain the tale of the pain she felt during the death of her Son. I think that this new narrative form is a different dramatic device, which has its linchpin in a very specific *affective gaze*, capable "to see" and "to feel" the likeness at the same time. As a consequence, the concept of "otherness" is defined according to an affective knowledge and must be intended as "unlikeness" to God. I will give you some examples of this new device, trying to underline which kind of gaze they suggest and how they work.

1. *Through the eyes of Mary*

I want to start from the text known as *Liber de passione Christi et doloribus et planctibus Matris ejus* written by the cistercian monk Oglerio from Lucedio in the 12th century; it was very popular in the late Middle Ages as a composition attributed to different authors, above all to Bernard.

The dramaturgical scheme of the *Liber* has two important novelties: it begins with a prayer to Mary and it provides her own first-person account of the passion. The prayer is rather a plea to the glorious mother, asking her to show her grief during the last painful hours of her Son. The context is unique and peculiar: a man living on this Earth is begging Mary who is in Heaven to remember a thing from her past earthly life. This *incipit* could seem just an original poetic expedient but it is not, if we consider that the *Liber* is an excerpt from the *Tractatus in laudibus sanctae Dei Genitricis* written by Oglerio: in fact, the *Tractatus* opens with a wide praise of the Virgin intended as Intercessor of Salvation just because she is *genitrix Dei*, in line with the mariological positions of the period. Reading this praise we can see that, right at the beginning, Oglerio calls Mary *Ianua celi*, gateway to the Word and to the Life and explains that every prayer to the Son must never ignore his Mother, because her motherhood makes her a glorious Queen and an essential go-between:

> Omnis, qui ad nostrum Emmanuhel, hoc est ad Verbum Patris Altissimi, quod caro factum est, et habitavit in nobis, veniret desidera, Virginem, que genuit illum, vinculo totius caritatis astringat. Ipsa est porta celi, ipsa ianua Paradisi. Ipsa est via ad vitam, semita recta ad gloriam sempiternam, summam felicitatis, que Christus est, obtinebit, qui in amore sue sanctissime Matris de toto se in omne, quod est, usque dum vivit, flagravit. Solus ille est felix, felicitate perpetua dignus, qui a caritate Filii huius perpetue Virginis non fuerit alienus (*Tractatus in Laudibus Sanctae Dei*

Genitrix, Biblioteca Nazionale di Torino, Ms. E.V.4 (761) edited by J.B. Adriani, *Beati Oglerii [...] Opera quae supersunt*, Torino 1873, pp. 1-98).

The words that describe her motherhood provide an account of Mary's deep relationship with God, an affective and carnal relationship, which makes Him parent and child, Creator and creature at the same time, but also Father of the woman who gave him birth. Christ, then, is the only-begotten Son of God the Father, as well as he is the only-begotten son of the Virgin Mother.

Ipse generans, ipse est generatus. Auctor fuit generationis ipse, qui gignitur. Ipse creans, ipse creatus. Ipse genitor, ipse genitus. […] Ipse factor, ipse factura. Ipse se genuit, qui genitus est. [...] O miracula, O prodigia! Deu est, qui generat; deus est, qui generatur. Virgo est, que concepit; Virgo est, que peperit. Parit Maria illo, qui fecit de nichilo cuncta. [...] Unigenitus Dei Patris factus est Unigenitus Virgini Matris. [...] Deus Angelorum fieri dignatus est homo. [...] O admiranda dignatio! [...]
Fit in tempore, qui est ante tempora: nascitur de femina, qui creavit omnia. Immensus fit brevis, exclesus humilis, factor factura, creator creatura. O Felix femina [...] cuius uterus fuit reclinatorium Dei […]! Illum in corde, illum in ventre Virgo beata portasti. Illum portasti in ulnis, lactasti uberibus sacris, brachiis totius astrinxisti amoris [...] Totus erat tuus, quia filius tuus. Credo […] qui per immensitatem amoris de eo osculis, et amplexibus satiari non poteras. [...]
«Totus erat tuus, quia filius tuus», says Oglerio at the end of the praise, describing the mother-son relationship through the affective language of kisses and hugs used by the cistercian order.

On account of their commonality, the monk hopes to gain a specific favour: to be allowed to see Son and mother together. But it is not the time to enjoy this privilege yet. And so, it is necessary to use tears and moans, waiting for the Consoler to come.

Tota hec esset felicitas mea, videre Christum cum matre sua. [...] Et quia istud nondum est, lacrimas, et gemitibus utendum est, quousque mitissimum veniat suorum merentium consolator, consolans suorum lugentium. O felix lugens, o beata dolens.

Therefore, the beseecher changes the goal of his plea: the prayer to the sorrowing Mother replaces the praise to the glorious Virgin, overlapping happiness and grief, as it is well expressed by the invocation «O felix lugens, o beata dolens».
From this point on, the *planctus* was screened out from the *Tractatus* and became the autonomous work so popular in the late Middle Ages. However, also in this shorter edition, the text preserves the paradoxical idea of the Virgin Queen, overjoyed with her Son in heaven, who is requested to grieve and cry, telling what she saw in Jerusalem and how she felt.

Obliviscere tamen, rogo, doloris quem te tunc passam fuisse non ambigo. Utinam dolor ille sic cotidie inhereret visceribus meis, sicut inhesit tunc tuis! Utinam die quo assumpta fuisti in celum, ut in eternum cum tuo gauderes filio, michi lacrimas tuas indicasses, quo per illas cognoscerem quantum tibi amaritudinis fuit, cum Iesum dilectum tibi […] clavis in ligno confixum, capite inclinato, suum sanctissimum spiritum exalare videres.

This kind of plea – that puts together past and present, forgetfulness and memory – becomes a highly effective key to the affective representation: the glorious Mary, indeed, has no memory of the pain she was put through, but the beggar, instead, deeply desires to feel it every single day.
It is precisely this intense desire that impels the pleading monk to ask the happy mother to remember and to show him her crying so that he could understand her heartbreak and her sob.

Sed peto ne te moveant verba que dico […]. Quis […] audiens vel mente pertractans quomodo est factus opbrobrium hominum ipse dominum angelorum […] quis poterit lacrimas continere? [...] Michi tamen obsecro lacrimas illas

> infunde, quas ipsa habuisti in sua passione. Et ut id affluat largius de passione filii tui et domini mei ad invicem confereramus. [...] Enarra, te flagito, seriem veritatis, que mater es et virgo summe veritatis.

Tears are the instrument for acceding the emotional knowledge, as if they were a window or, better, a path. The mother is requested ‘to indicate’ tears to the beggar so he can ‘know’ her feelings through them («per illas cognoscerem quantum tibi amaritudinis fuit»), seeing what she saw, that is «Iesum […] clavis in ligno confixum, capite inclinato suum exalare spiritum sanctissimum».
Not words, but tears move Mary to meet the faithful’s request: By virtues of tears, tears are asked, so to cry together and to share the same feeling, speaking to each other about the pain of the Passion. Just after, Mary is urged to speak.

And she, who is in the glory and can’t cry, proposes the faithful to write her tale down using the same tears she shed.

> Ad quem illa: Illud, quod queris, compungitivum est et magni doloris. Sed quia iam glorificata flere non possum, tu cum lacrimis scribe ea, que cum magni doloribus ipsa persensi.
> Cui inquam: Flere peropto et a nihil mihi aliud libet. Da quod iubes, et prebe quod cupio. [...]
> Et illa: In Jerusalem eram, et quando hoc audivi, gressu cuocumque potui ad Dominum meum usque perveni.

She doesn’t propose him to write or to report her crying, but she offers him an “eye-switch”. By accepting it, the interlocutor takes her point of view. Hence, the perspective from which the whole passion is told is expressly the one of the maternal *affectus*, which is pouring from her eyes into the beseecher’s. This is a remarkable innovation, that highlights the emotional side of sight, making it an experience-based device of representation.

To illustrate how it works, I give you as example the scene of the crucifixion, all acted through eye-contact (in few lines, there are ten verbs referring to the context of vision and sight).

> Sequebar eum ego moestissima mater […] quousque perventum est ad locum passionis, ubi crucifixerunt eum ante me. Et ipse videns me fuit in cruce levatus, et ligno durissimis clavis affixus. Ego videns eum et ipse videns me, plus dolebat de me quam de se.
> Aspiciebam ego […] filium meum in cruce pendentem, et morte turpissima morientem. Tanto dolore et tristicia vexabar in morte, quantus non posset explicari sermone. […] Discurrebat namque sanguis ex quatuor partibus rigantibus undis, ligno manibus pedibusque confixis. De vultu illius pulcritudo effluxerat omnis, et qui erat pre filiis hominum forma speciosus, videbatur indecorus. Videbam quod complebatur illud propheticum in eo: ‘vidimus eum et non erat ei species neque decor’, quia vultum illius verberibus iniquorum fedaverat livor.
> Videbam me deseri ab ipso quem genueram; nec supererat alius, quia michi erat unicus, et ideo non potuit in me capere dolor meus. Vox mea fere pertransierat omnis, sed dabam pro gemitibus suspiria doloris. Volebam loqui, sed dolor verba rumpebat, quia verbum iam mente conceptum, dum ad formacionem procederet oris; ad se imperfectum revocabat dolor nimis cordis. Vox triste sonabat foris, vulnus denuncians mentis. Verba dabat amor, sed rauca sonabant, quia lingua magistra vocis usum loquendi perdiderat.
> Videbam morientem, quem diligit anima mea, et tota liquefiebam prae doloris angustia. Aspiciebat et ipse ut et benignissimo vultu me matrem plorantem, et verbis paucis me voluit consolari, et nullo modo potuit.

The scene starts with the cross rising in the air after Christ was nailed to it: this moving and terrible moment is told through the mutual gaze between the mother and the son who, eye to eye, are feeling each other’s ineffable pain («Et ipse videns me fuit in cruce levatus, et ligno durissimis clavis affixus. Ego videns eum et ipse videns me, plus dolebat de me quam de se»).

The last part of the scene is the symmetrical, quite specular, description of her, mother melted in pain, before her dying son, and of the son who sees her in tears and tries to comfort her, in vain («Videbam morientem, quem diligit anima mea, et tota liquefiebam prae doloris angustia. Aspiciebat et ipse ut et benignissimo vultu me matrem plorantem, et verbis paucis me voluit consolari, et nullo modo potuit»).

This mutual gaze details the mutual pain and well conveys the continuous exchange between ‘seeing’ and ‘feeling’.

We can not forget that who is feeling the pain is not Mary but the faithful: he is seeing with her eyes. The goal of the narrative is to share with the reader the intimate mother-son relationship.

That is what the writer said at the beginning of the prayer; this is what the last scene clarifies: buried Christ, the grave is closed and Mary goes back to Jerusalem. While she is walking, her tears move from Mary to John, then to the women holding her on the way home and, then, they spread to other women and to everybody she comes across, until they reach even those who are not inclined to weep:

> Accessit Joannes, cui eam commendaverat Christus, et lugens ipse eam levavit lugentem; nam cruciata gemitibus, fatigata dolore, afflicta plorationibus, pedibus stare fere nequibat, et tamen sic portatur, a mulieribus sanctis adjuta, a cunctis plorantibus simul, Jerusalem ingreditur, quam feminae multae videntes, motae pietate super illius dolores ad luctum convertebantur amarum, et illarum quaedam ambulantes post illam etiam lamentabantur. Plorantes plorabant, multaeque condolebant Mariae. Nam dolor ejus multos faciebat dolores. Vix poterat lacrymas continere quicunque videbat eam plorantem. Tam pie plorabat, et tam amare dolebat, quod ex pio suo ploratu multos etiam invitos trahebat ad luctum; planctus fiebant a quocunque transibat. Maria plorabat ipsa, plorabant ambulantes cum ipsa, plorabant multi venientes obviam ei, sic usque deducitur a plorantibus plorantes quousque perventum est ad domum Joannis.

This weep of love which spreads like wildfire, going from eye to eye, is not just *cumplangere*: it is rather shareing a very specific bond of affection, the maternal one.

It is not by chance that the *planctus* ends with a prayer to John, blessed for his love to Mary and for having accepted her in his heart *sicut propriam matrem*.

> O felix et beatus Iohannes. […] Reddit tibi dominus mercedem amoris, mercedem dileccionis quam erga matrem eius tibi commendatam semper habuisti.
> Benedicti sint omnes ab ea qui diligunt eum.

Through John, the bond of love (here expressed by the latin verb *diligere* that is so important in the context of cistercian theology) that binds mother and son, comes down to the human beings: «Benedicti sint omnes ab ea qui diligunt eum».

2. The maternal ‘affectus’ and the vision of likeness

What is the bond of love that binds mother and son and what does it mean to see through it? What do you see through Mary’s eyes? I think that it means both being involved body and soul in a relationship and being able to see the likeness to God or, in other words, “to feel” and “to recognize” the likeness to God.

On the first point Rachel Fulton has interpreted the mother-son bond in the context of the cistercian concept of personal identity, saying that Mary was able to say to her Creator “I am you”, because she herself was una with Christ in spirit and flesh. This was the basis for the medieval elaboration of Mary’s grief during the Passion. I believe that the dramatic device conceived by Oglerio, handing over to the human being the properties of the maternal gaze, would allow him to have an emotional experience that is the earthly experience, here and now, of the ultimate and supreme love: the perfect communion with God and the perfect enjoyment of him. Mary’s tears, in my opinion, indicate this very specific way of looking and is connected to the vision of an image equally very specific.

And this is the second point: what do we see from Mary’s eyes? I think that her weeping eyes do not only show the image of the dying son, but make us feel his wounds and pain as if they were our own wounds and pain. So, using mother’s tears the faithful can feel Christ and recognize him as part of his

own identity, as well he can recognize that Christ is the image of God, but made "unlike" himself, and like man.

In short, the maternal weep is a device that works in the *regio dissimilitudinis* allowing to see God made man, recognizing Him beyond His otherness and, finally, feeling the likeness to Him inside the soul and on the flesh. How can it happen? Thanks to an intimate gaze, a parental gaze, that is "looking closely". Only distance, in fact, causes unlikeness and otherness. Augustin has already said it, explaining that «it is not by spatial intervals that we approach God or distance ourselves from him. By your unlikeness to God you have gone far from him; as you become like him, you draw very near» (in Psalmum 99, 5). In the context of their theological anthropology, Cistercians - especially Bernard - recall and develop the nearness-likeness and distance-unlikeness pairs, and they intend the earthly life the place where man is far away from God, loosing his likeness, the *regio dissimilitudinis*.

Loaning her eyes to man, Mary gives him the chance to acknowledge "the other": she makes him feel "the other" as a son, or a father, or a groom, whose being a mother, a daughter, a bride.

3. Using Mary's eyes: the seal of Bernard and Dante. A suggestion

I would like to finish my speech with a philological note and a suggestion.

If Oglerio's *planctus* became very popular in the Western Europe of the late Middle ages under the Bernard's name, it was also the model of some subsequent texts, both in latin and vernacular. Among these, the most popular and widespread texts are two. The first one is the work that we know as the *planctus magistrae doloris*, well known in Italy between the end of 13th century and the middle of the 15th. The second one is the *Lamentatio Beate Virginis Marie* composed in the early 30 years of 14th century by the augustinian friar Enselmino from Montebelluna; this work was weel known above all in Northern Italy.

Both texts follow the narrative paradigm of Oglerio: the prayer to the glorious Mary and the first person tale of the Passion.

The *planctus magistre doloris* opens with a short plea to Mary asking her to reveal (note the verbs *aperire* e *indicare*) her pain and to share her tears (*ut et nos tecum plangere valeamus*). I quote here the *incipit* of the poetical text as it is written in the manuscript held in Bergamo's Library:

> Rogamus enim te, dulcissima,
> ut nobis aperias quid fecisti;
> indica nobis que dixisti
> in morte unigeniti fili tui
> ut et nos tecum plangere valeamus.
>
> O filie, quid queritis?
> Rem utique magni doloris exposcitis;
> sed, caritate vestra compulsa,
> negare non possum peticionem vestra.

Mary answers shortly, emphasising her deep sorrow, but accepting to tell it on account of a common affection. What follows, is her first person tale of each event of the passion. Also in this case there are several verbs referring to the semantic context of sight, and seeing is of course intended as an affective sharing of the pain of the body and of the soul. Just by way of explanation, I give you the test of the scene in which Mary sees her son for the first time after his capture, coming out of the Sanhedrin: immediately,

she feels her guts twisting, her heart languishing, and she can't recognize his face and is incapable to speak:

> Aperta est igitur ianua templi: et ecce adducunt filium meum in multitudine armatorum, manibus ligatum in modum latronis.
> Quem cum vidissem tam turpiter ligatum, commota sunt omnia viscera mea super filio meo; et elanguit cor meum pre multitudine doloris. Aspiciebam eum, et vix conoscebam vultum eius: nam manus iniquorum velaverunt faciem eius. […] Videbam illum quasi mortuum, et pre nimia angustia ei loqui non poteram; coram oculis meis ignominiose deducebatur, cui appropinquare non poteram.

The *Lamento* written by Enselmino from Montebelluna, instead, is wider and more sophisticated: the text consists of 1513 verses in "terza rima" and opens with an intense prayer to the glorious queen Mary.

Ave Regina, Virgo gloriosa,
che de Dio Padre te chiamasti ancilla,
del Figlio fusti madre, figlia e spoxa. 3

[...] Cossì ti prego, o dolce Madre pia,
ched el ti piaça de mostrarme arquanto
dela gran doglia toa, Vergen Maria, 27
e dela forte pena el grave pianto
che tu portasti quando il tuo figliolo
fo posto sula croxe [...]

Dimi, Raina, quanto - ch'io ti prego -
fo quel dolor ch'el cuore t'avea sì tolto, 36
açò ch'io possa sempre piançer tiego
la passion del to fiiol benegno,
e cascadun fedel cristiano miego. 39

The request to Mary is the same: "to show" an emotion and, then, "to tell" it, in order to allow the beseecher and the faithfuls to join her tears and to start an universal weep. She agrees to tell and, for one thing, she claims the tears of everyone (*tuti quanti*), skys, Earth, creatures.

Piançete, cieli, che del'alto gremio 57
Nel mio sparsesti quel Santo d'i santi.
[…]
e pianç i, terra, e fa ch'el mostri pianti 60
ogni criatura e tiego se aconpagne
ogni ellemento e piança tuti quanti.

Also in this case, follows an heartfelt first person tale of sorrows, death and the burial of Christ, divided into nine chapters.

Some recent philological studies have proved that the work of the Italian friar Enselmino owes much to the poetical model of Oglerio and of the *Planctus Magistre doloris*, and also to the *Commedia*, *Paradiso XXXIII* that is an important source, for the choice of metre, rimes, vocabulary, and rhetorical processes.

In my opinion, the element that these four texts have in common is the compositional scheme of the prayer to the glorious Mary in order to obtain the possibility to see God. If the three *planctus* ask her eyes to see the passion, in *Paradiso XXXIII* the beseecher aims to get the access to «l'ultima salute» with the

eyes of a living man. In the *planctus* the faithful asks Mary to experience the painful “loving relationship” which allows to feel one with the Son. In the *Commedia*, instead, the request for Mary is to experience the glorious “loving relationship” which allows to be *unus cum Deo*.

But, wasn’t this one the same vision Oglerio wanted to obtain from Mary, when he prayed to her in heaven («Hec est gloria super gloriam, videre Christo in abundantia glorie sue»)? And didn’t he opt to share tears and sobs just because the ultimate joyful vision was not possible to him, during his life on earth (Et quia istud nondum est, lacrimis et gemitibus utendum est»)?

To conclude, I think that the dramatic device of the prayer to Mary as intercessor to the affective vision of God, would be widely known during the late Middle Ages. Passed down under the name of Bernard, this device should be well known also to Dante, who relies exactly on Bernard to ask from Mary her eyes «da Dio diletti e venerati».

And she, looking towards «l’etterno lume», opens the way to the ultimate vision: the vision that, looking at God, lets Dante see «la nostra effige». Our likeness.