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The Decorum of Grief: Notes on the Representation of Mary at the Cross in Late Medieval Netherlandish Literature and Painting

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INTRODUCTION

'How often did she [Mary] embrace and kiss that Cross with sad longing, especially where the blessed blood of Jesus flowed down along the Cross. And she kissed the earth there on which the blood of Xpi [Christ] fell, *and she licked that blood from the earth with such longing that her face was full of blood.* Oh, how sad Mary was.'¹

For many modern readers this quotation from an early 16th-century book about Christ's Passion would seem to go far beyond the realms of sensibility. Even for a researcher specialized in the world of religious experience of the late medieval Netherlands and used to heartrending descriptions of Christ's Passion and Mary's compassion, this evocation of Mary's suffering is unusually crude. Historians, art historians and literary historians generally reach for the term 'realistic' to describe late medieval texts which employ dramatic anecdotal digressions to raise the sympathy-quotient in a Passion story which appeared rather short and unemotional in the Bible. It is clear, especially since the publication of Marrow's book on late medieval Passion iconography, that this kind of anecdotal embellishment of the Passion story is not so much the product of the 'natural' propensity of the Dutch towards a often extravagant realism.² It is more the late, or perhaps overripe, product of a long exegetic tradition

harking back through the Middle Ages in which the Bible principally, but also the Church Fathers and all manner of theological writings were minutely examined for passages and motifs that might be interpreted as metaphorical indications of specific events in the life of Jesus about which the Gospels said nothing. In late medieval devotional literature these motifs – selected not for their theological profundity but more for the graphic portrayals of the suffering – crystallized to become part of the 'historical' narrative of the Passion itself. The motivation behind this search for and use of non-Gospel Passion motifs is the need to provide believers with a story of suffering to stimulate their compassion with Jesus and Mary. This need is rooted in the idea that the believer's ability to empathize and identify with the Virgin and her Son in the present is a guarantee of their intercession at the Last Judgment and a ticket to everlasting life. In the Middle Ages meditation on the various events of the Passion became, not least for lay persons, one of the principal ways in which to obtain this salutary empathetic condition of the soul. The compassion, the deep inner emotion, with which Mary accompanied the suffering of her son is presented to the believer as the great example.³

From the 13th century all manner of descriptions emerged of the life of Christ, often in the vernacular, in which the Passion story was told in

detail with heartrending anecdotes illustrating Jesus' suffering and Mary's compassion for the benefit of the reader's empathetic reflections. This meditative literature grew in the 15th and 16th centuries into a broad stream of *Vita Christi* literature to which the book from which the above passage is taken belongs.⁴ This volume is a good example of the sort of *compassio Mariae* motif designed to stimulate empathy. The Gospels did not act as source but – through a marvel of late medieval inventivity – they became an interwoven component of this Passion narrative. I know, in any event, of no biblical or exegetic tradition on which it would be possible to base the story of Mary licking the blood of Christ. There are, on the other hand, a number of *Vita Christi* descriptions that contain similar, although less gruesome passages about Mary kissing the blood that ran down onto the ground after Jesus had died:

'And the Mother of Mercy sat near the Cross covered in the holy blood of her dear son which she regarded so lovingly and which she kissed with such respectful reverence.'⁵

While the vocabulary in the first quotation is downright distressing and seems almost improper, this second quotation illustrates the need to dress Mary's excessive expression of grief in dignity, honour and controlled emotion. A third text has Mary kissing Jesus' blood on the ground because only this deed can offer her succour:

'And when she was unable to find comfort she kissed with longing the earth on which Jesus' blood had fallen so that it made her sweet visage bloody.'⁶

These passages contain no suggestion that the compiler thought the reader might find the text improper. It is therefore surprising in an earlier passage describing Jesus carrying the Cross to find the following text:

'Again, although her sorrow was so great and unspeakable when she saw her own loving son

being taken to his death so scandalously, the Holy Mother made no improper gesture or immodest display, but like an honest noble woman she contained her tremendous grief properly inside, without the least clamour.'⁷

What these passages show when compared is that, whatever the precise source of the motif of the kissing or licking of the blood (did it refer to the Eucharist?), the tendency towards distressing details of suffering was not always taken to the very extreme. Some of the writers of Passion narratives appear at various times to have found themselves confronted with the problem of decorum. How far could one go in portraying the suffering; where did the boundaries of religious respectability lie? That this idea of decorum is not easy to understand for the modern reader is clear from these passages: surely kissing Jesus' blood is exactly the kind of 'improper gesture or indecent display' (ontamelic gebaer of onsedelicheit van buten) that had been repudiated earlier and the kind of behaviour that is improper for an 'honest noble woman' (eerlijcke statelike vrouwe)? How is it possible for these passages to appear in one and the same Passion narrative? Does the question of decorum even arise?

Various modern authors have shown that this question did indeed arise and not only in the late Middle Ages. In fact it had been troubling the faithful from the time of the Church Fathers. In general, there are two traditions in the Middle Ages regarding the theological and devotional approach to Mary's compassion and expressions of grief. The first is based on the idea that the Gospels, where they mention Mary's presence at the Crucifixion at all (cf John 19:25), are silent about her emotional state. In this tradition the fact is presented theologically as Mary naturally being moved by the suffering of her son but nevertheless steadfastly believing in the coming resurrection. That is why she reacted in such a reserved manner to the various moments of the Passion and why, as she stood at the Cross – and standing is interpreted in this tradition as an

outward sign of her inner resolution – she gave no sign of her grief. This approach found its first influential defender in the Latin world in St Ambrose who noted rather dryly that 'Holy Mary stood near the Cross of her son and the Virgin saw the suffering of her only child. I read *she stood* not *she wept*.'⁸

From Ambrose's formulation it is clear that in his day Mary's compassion and expression of grief had already become a subject of dispute.⁹ Nevertheless, this relatively sober view of Mary's compassion continued to dominate until the 12th century when theologians such as Anselm, Eadmer and especially Bernard of Clairvaux began to allow the subjective element in the devotion to Christ and therefore the personal experience of Mary as a participant in the Passion. Sometimes the tears Mary shed at the Cross are mentioned, but no other outward manifestation of sorrow, in word or gesture.¹⁰ The 12th-century Latin lamentations of Mary *Planctus ante nescia* which also influenced subsequent ideas about Mary's compassion remains reserved in the portrayal of her suffering.¹¹ Mary suffers, tears swell and she sighs; yet she knows salvation will come and remains dignified in her expression of grief.

After Bernard of Clairvaux the idea began to take hold that Mary bore – literally – with compassion (i.e. as *co-redemptrix* or 'co-redeemer') Christ's suffering for the whole world in herself. This concept turned Mary's compassion into a central focus of the history of salvation and so opened up the possibilities for a tremendous intensification of devotion to and mental portrayal of her suffering. The 12th-century *Planctus Mariae* set the tone for the intensity and outward expression of grief that now began to dominate in all manner of devotional writings.¹² In this portrayal Mary's tears flowed abundantly, she cried out loud, at times she was inconsolable and unable to speak, she even fainted. And yet, according to this lamentation, Mary's sorrow was 'proper, measured through love; she did not

despair, but mourned in an inward and fitting fashion' because she believed in Jesus' resurrection.¹³

De Vries provides an extensive summary of late medieval Dutch texts that stem from the *Planctus ante nescia* and of works that took their example from the *Planctus Mariae*. Somewhat against the general image that most modern authors present of the excessive attention paid in the late Middle Ages to the suffering of Mary and Jesus, De Vries showed that both traditions – not just the 'flexible' tradition of the intense and public suffering of Mary, but also the 'rigid' tradition of the self-controlled empathetic *co-redemptrix* – continued to effect devotional literature in the Netherlands in the 14th, 15th and 16th centuries. De Vries even concluded – in contrast to what others have claimed – that for many compilers of these texts in this region there were limits to the level of drama with which Mary's suffering was portrayed and that reactions against this kind of portrayal grew increasingly strong in the 16th century.¹⁴ He points out in this respect that it was Erasmus who explicitly referred to those

'disturbing paintings that show her [Mary] collapsing feebly, unable to speak and faint from grief. But she did not lament, nor did she tear her hair out, hit her chest or shout out in a loud voice 'Oh poor me'. In fact she drew comfort from the salvation of mankind rather than mourn the death of her son.'¹⁵

This formulation clearly shows that when it comes to the pictorial portrayals of Mary's suffering it is not simply a question of theological opinion, but one of decorum, too.

I intend here to explore where the borderline of decorum in the art and literature of 15th- and 16th-century Netherlands appears to be crossed, in particular what happens in dramatic portrayals of Mary's suffering. This aspect of late medieval religious mentality is difficult to measure in the field of art and demands a far deeper and broader study into the boundaries of religious respect-

ability in the late medieval experiential world than this limited contribution can hope to provide. I can do little more here than map this sensibility. I have limited my research to an analysis of a number of Dutch devotional texts, particularly those that found wide audiences, not least among lay persons, in printed editions, and have concentrated especially on the Passion narrative with Christ hanging on the Cross and Mary standing nearby or collapsing incapably. Based on this material I have attempted to make a number of observations about the decorum of Mary's expression of grief in 15th- and 16th-century Netherlandish panel paintings showing Mary at the Cross.

COMPASSION-DECORUM IN LITERARY WITNESSES

At the end of his study about Mary's lamentations De Vries remarks that late medieval writers were faced by a rather confusing profusion of text passages and opinions that had been adopted and adapted to describe Mary's suffering.¹⁶ De Vries concluded this after noting that some writers employed both Ambrose to emphasize Mary's fortitude, and Bernard, i.e. the *Planctus Mariae* tradition, in order to show that when Mary saw Jesus suffering under the weight of the Cross on the way to Golgotha, she fell in a faint. For the modern researcher these appear to present diverging opinions that are not complementary. However, as we have seen, and as many other examples show, this is far from unusual. It is not so much a lack of insight on the part of the compiler; it is more that in order to portray Mary's behaviour at different moments of the Passion various texts from the exegetic tradition were employed of which the vocabulary and ideas were all loyally taken on board. This was the generally-accepted, centuries' old method of exegesis that compilers of theological and devotional texts used. However, one result of this method was that, the more detail the author employed to describe the Passion, the more the story betrayed the

diversity of the sources, turning Mary into a highly inconsistent character. This, in any case, is the impression that a modern reader might have on the basis of the (modern?) psychological notion of the unity of personality of a mentally 'healthy' person. Yet clearly this is not the way to read a late medieval text. It is not whether Mary comes across as a consistent character, but whether Mary's various actions described in the traditional authorities conflict individually with the feelings of decorum of the compiler or with those of the intended audience for the book. That is the problem that faced the writer of a Passion narrative and which can be seen operating in a number of *Vita Christi* tractates.

The Pseudo-Bonaventura Ludolphian *Life of Christ* is a typical compilation text written in the late 13th century and widely popular (in handwritten copies) in Dutch translation.¹⁷ The following extract appeals both to the 'exalted' (Bernardian) and the 'austere' (Ambrosian) traditions of the depiction of Mary's suffering in her pain-filled identification with Jesus hanging on the Cross:

'... for in the sorrow of her heart she too hung on the Cross with her son and would have rather died with him than continue to live, of which the teacher St Bernard said: "Oh, good Jesus, how you have suffered physically, but even more in your heart through the compassion of your mother who has shared all your pain." One may feel the pain and torment totally, but one may not express this completely. Mary stood near the Cross while the Apostles fled and looked with mercy on the wounds of her child.'¹⁸

Here, the fact that 'one may not express this completely' is probably a (general) rhetorical device to increase the reader's empathy while avoiding a detailed description of Mary's suffering. But it is not impossible, since this is followed immediately by the Ambrosian 'Mary stood near the Cross', that this was also intended to ensure that she was not dishonoured, as suggested in other texts.¹⁹

A little further the narrator suddenly transfers Mary's location and relates how bitterly she wept: now Mary, John and the other women who had followed Jesus are standing

'at a distance and are not comforted by anyone [...]. Oh, how mournful were the voices and weeping that were heard from his friends and especially from his mournful mother!'²⁰

When Jesus dies it is all too much for Mary: twice she faints – 'deathlike' – the first time she 'fell onto the ground on her face'; the second time, after Longinus had pierced Christ with his lance 'Mary fell deathlike into the arms of Mary Magdalene'.²¹ And when Christ was buried Mary

'cried with unbearable tears and her tears made her face wet and the dead body of her child and also the tomb, in which it is said that her tears are still embedded [...]. And at the same time all the others cried so much that they began to feel faint from mourning.'²²

The embellishment in this tradition of the Passion narrative culminates in this text in fainting and intense weeping. In the late Middle Ages no one actually complained about Mary being portrayed as letting her tears flow freely; on the contrary, it was an expression of mourning that was felt to be characteristic of the truly pious and holy.²³ What is more problematic is the idea of Mary fainting. Several medieval theologians raised objections to this. It is true that in some areas the Church accepted Mary's collapse (*spasmus*) as an event to be celebrated in the liturgy,²⁴ but 16th-century theologians were still treating the motif with reserve. A good example of this – of particular interest here for the terminology – is a passage written by the Dutch theologian and humanist Joos Clichthove in 1513:

'The sadness of the Holy Virgin [...] was accompanied by an outward temperance, properness and decent sobriety [...]. Outwardly [...] this sorrow was apparent only from her tears, a

very sad and mournfully pale visage [...]. At times the extreme sadness of her motherly heart was reflected in the faintness of her body and her loss of strength as well as other signs: *yet always with decent and virginal modesty. Indeed it should be considered by one and all beyond all doubt that this motherly compassion reflected the extent and measure of correct judgment. And in each case, correct judgment warns the person not to go too far, or to do that which is unworthy or ugly.*'²⁵

Seen in this light the description of Mary's suffering in the Pseudo-Bonaventura-Ludolphian *Life of Christ* which is based on the *Meditationes Vitae Christi* and had the status in devotional literature here which that far more renowned work had elsewhere, reflected something of a middle-of-the-road approach. Shocking details such as the licking of blood were avoided, but then this meant that there was no need for protestations that it was all very proper, even when Mary collapsed.

It is quite a different matter in Dutch adaptations of the Passion narrative based on the major 14th-century *Vita Christi* compilation by Ludolph of Saxony.²⁶ *Dit is dleven ons heeren Jhesu cristi* is one such adaptation which appeared in 1536 in Antwerp.²⁷ Narrating the episode in which Jesus is crucified and the Cross is raised, the text notes:

'Oh people, how the mother of God and those worthy women mourned and the many others who had followed Jesus out of love, there was such weeping and crying [...] Oh how heavy that load was and there was such crying, but the despondent mother of God did not make the least clamour.'²⁸

While in this version there was no fainting, on the other hand, the episode of Mary kissing Jesus' blood after he had died is included:

'That sweet mother of God raised her arms in heartfelt longing to reach her son. And when she was unable to find comfort she kissed with great longing Jesus' blood as it fell onto the ground so that her sweet face became covered in blood.'²⁹

Nevertheless, in the 'moralization and meditation' in the passage on the descent from the Cross Mary is described as follows.

'No one can express the sorrow of the Blessed Mother Mary too fully for she was decent and mannered in her distress, as has been described'³⁰

The addition of the words 'as has been described' is a reference back to the initial passage dealing with the nailing to the Cross in which Mary is described as making no outward clamour; Mary's behaviour in the interim period, including the kissing of the blood, is therefore automatically sanctioned as 'decent and mannered'. But what kind of clamour was it that was felt to be so terrible?

In the first place it is important to realize that a clamour and the kind of behaviour this would have included would not necessarily have been considered to be negative in this context. Jacob van Maerlant employed the word in his *Eene Disputatie van onser Vrouwen ende van den Heilighen Cruce*:

'What could Mary have said there
When she, her heart heavy with sorrow
Saw her son suspended on the Cross
[...]
What a clamour she must have made
Silently in her heart and publicly;
To die would have been preferable.
She must in truth have cried out
Wringing her hands, tugging at her hair.'³¹

And in a 15th-century manuscript with the *Ghetude van Onser Vrouwen*:

'Weeping with such excessive grief,³²
Beating herself on her holy breast
With her mournful cries
And so did many friends and maidens
Mourn and show their sadness.
[...]
[She] clamoured
Crying out and weeping profusely

[...]
When you saw your child dying
You spoke not the smallest bad word
But striking your hands and weeping
You pined alone and inwardly.'³³

Public clamour is therefore equated with crying out, wringing one's hands, tearing out hair, beating one's breast as well as the weeping that goes with this – in other words, public, ritualized signs of grieving and mourning.³⁴

In a number of 16th-century meditation books for the new cult of the Seven Sorrows of the Blessed Virgin that emerged in Flanders at the end of the 15th century the word clamour (misbaer) appears again, but this time in a negative sense. These meditation books also contain detailed descriptions of the Passion and follow the layout of the *Vita Christi* texts.³⁵ The book *Een suverlic ende devoet boecxken vanden seven ween* [. . .]³⁶ relates that Mary fainted first when the Cross was lifted and then when she had recovered 'she cried so much, I have read, that blood ran from her eyes'.³⁷ But later too she stood 'uncomforted, full of grief and pity, steadfast near the Cross'.³⁸ When Christ died Mary burst into an indescribable flood of tears and all her strength of soul and body gave way.³⁹ But, the text continues:

'even so she remained mannered in all her suffering: and held this in her innermost heart with such dignity without any clamour such as crying out loud, wringing her hands or suchlike, and stood at the Cross patiently, crucified with her child, in pain, fulfilling her desire and her longing.'⁴⁰

It is clear from this passage that, as with the term 'zedelykheid' (decency), the Dutch 'manierlykheid' (being mannered) has little to do with our present-day 'good manners' inasmuch as this refers to outward and public behaviour. It represents the dignity of Mary's inner nobility.⁴¹ Mannered behaviour (manierlykheid) here is the opposite of clamour (misbaar), which belongs to the domain of public communication.

Another early 16th-century meditation book of the same genre takes us a step further.⁴² It contains a long resumé of Mary's suffering in an extensive anecdotal narrative. For example, in the passage about the raising of the Cross: when she saw the event from afar Mary pushed her way through the crowd and 'crept under the horses' to get to the Cross where she

*'threw herself onto the ground at the foot of the Cross. John who was always by her side and saw this was unable to help her because he was also faint from the pain [...] again he did his best, he held her tight, he pulled at her, rearranging her clothes, he was able to place some herbs in her mouth, alas he had no idea what to do to comfort her. [...] If only she had been able to call out when she became so tired the world would have trembled but in order not to succumb to the load God gave her the strength to bear the suffering.'*⁴³

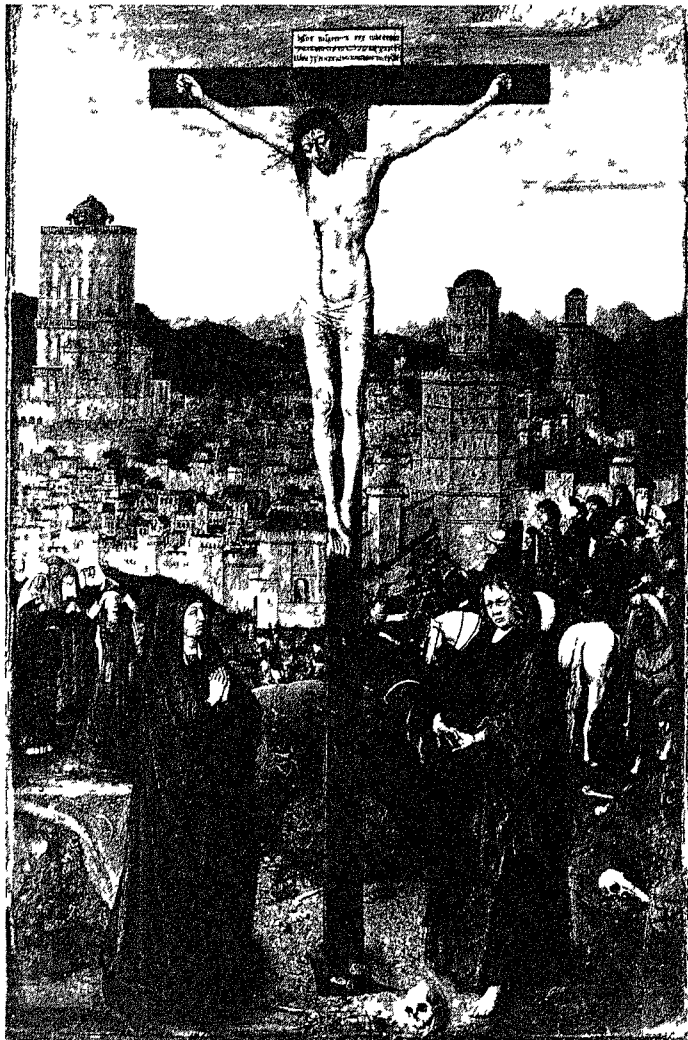
Together, the sections in italics show that the anecdote related here appears – at least to our modern ear – to undermine Mary's dignity (crawling under the horses, tugging at Mary's garments) this was apparently no problem for the compiler. What he found more dangerous was Mary's desire to cry out loud; to prevent this public spectacle taking place he has God infusing Mary with inner strength. For the writer there was nothing wrong with Mary's flood of tears 'so that a beautiful red blood flowed from her eyes', nor that 'several times her legs gave way' as she stood 'half dead' near the Cross. Then he continues bluntly to describe Mary Magdalene's clamour at the Cross! 'Oh who can describe to you Magdalene's weeping, crying and clamour for her master.' For Mary, however, this was unacceptable behaviour.⁴⁴ When she grew pale after Jesus had died – 'seeing this, John rushed toward her immediately and grabbed from behind in his arms' – she fainted and after clamouring was raised by those around her she finally came to and opened her eyes to see her son. The text comments:

'Here we learn that in her suffering Mary was patient and mannered; that she never spoke an

impatient word, never clamoured, screaming or crying or wringing her hands, but that the way she stood or lay was so mannered that she held her suffering inside her heart. It was impossible to see her sorrow but for her abundant tears and her mournful expression.'⁴⁵

From these and a number of other texts it is clear that as far as religious decorum is concerned the concept of Mary's faint was considered problematic in the late Middle Ages. This is not so much a question of the theological fortitude of faith as the conflict between inner and outward suffering, or more precisely: introverted, resigned and controlled suffering as against outward, 'theatrical' and uncontrolled mourning. By calling Mary's collapse mannered (*manierlijk*) it becomes clear, paradoxically, that despite her physical weakness, Mary did not lose her self-control and held her outward expression of grief under command. In other words, in her faintness she still managed to keep control of the physical expression of her grief.⁴⁶

The ideal of piety that emanates from these texts can, I feel, be seen as symptomatic of the influence of *Devoto Moderna* piety on the Passion narrative, and in particular on the cult of the compassion with the suffering of the Mother of God. Within this ideal of piety any portrayal that hints at an outward display of Mary's compassion is unacceptable. On the face of it, it seems strange that passages describing excessive expressions of grief, such as the abundant, often bloody, flood of tears and kissing, or indeed licking of Jesus' blood are not avoided: however, these are the ultimate, subjective expressions of Mary's inner grief. They are not *meant* as public expressions of pain or mourning, and not intended to get bystanders to join in the crying and to encourage others to wail – although most texts agree that this is in fact what happened to (especially) Mary Magdalene and the others.⁴⁷ The form of empathy that these texts stimulate in the reader is an inner empathy, an inner *imitatio (com)passionis*, as one of the texts makes explicit:

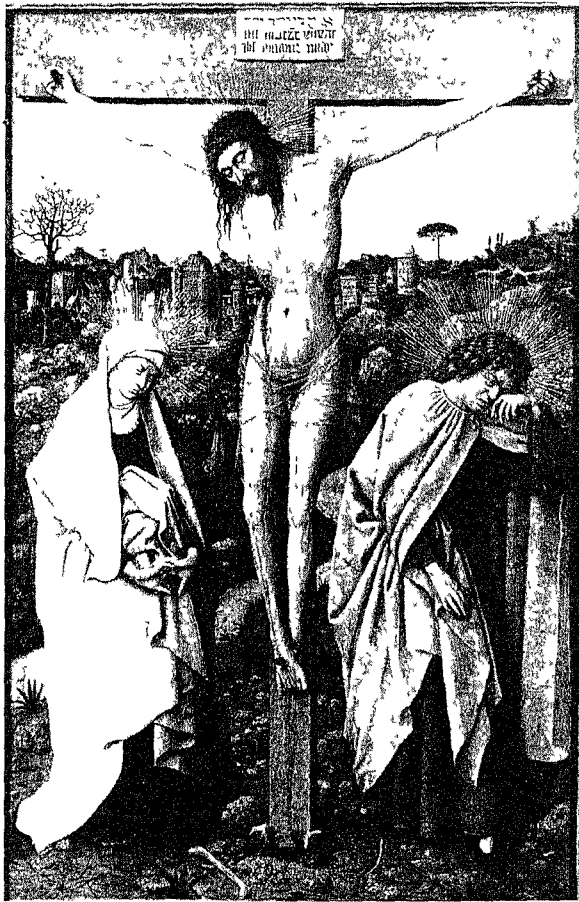


I Jan van Eyck (follower), Crucifixion Venice, Ca d'Oro

'Oh pious hearts rise up inwardly and hurry to penitence and inward mourning and help Jesus your Lord and Saviour to bear his Cross [] And bear your suffering secretly with Mary the Mother of our Lord Jesus',⁴⁸

Moreover, terms such as 'mannered', 'decent' and especially words such as 'like an honest noble woman she contained her tremendous grief properly inside, without the least clamour',⁴⁹

indicate that the inner suffering is associated with self-control over emotions while outward expressions of mourning are associated with 'letting go'. These texts betray a sense of decorum and at the same of the violation of this decorum – although this is not always the case in every text (e.g. Jacob van Maerlant and in the *Ghetide van Onser Vrouwen*). There is of course a danger that conclusions drawn on the basis of this small selection of surviving late medieval texts



2. Jan van Eyck (follower), Crucifixion. Berlin, Gemaldegalerie der Staatlichen Museen Preussischer Kulturbesitz.

containing descriptions of Mary's compassion are hurried ones. It is not, however, implausible given the social terms in which the ideal of inward suffering was propagated and the *controlled* expressions of grief were shaped – 'mannered', 'honest noble woman', etc – to see in this a manifestation of what Norbert Elias has called the 'civilization process'.⁵⁰ According to this theory, in the late Middle Ages, particularly among the burghers of Netherlandish towns, there was an increasing belief that passions ought to be kept under control and that physical acts which had once been openly performed in public should be kept within doors. Erasmus's book of etiquette *De*

civilitate morum puerilium (1530) played a major role in the propagation of this burgeoning pattern of social values and decorum, incorporating manners and gestures, too.⁵¹ True, Erasmus did not say anything in this book on the subject of weeping and other expressions of grief (although laughing was dealt with), but his disapproval of paintings that show Mary fainting and clamouring (see above) fit neatly into this civilization ideology. It is not unthinkable that further research into this matter will show that both this change in social mentality and the *Devotio Moderna* ideal of piety were important factors in the decreasing use of motifs in late medieval Passion narratives that might have been considered offensive to public religious decency. This in any case would explain why some compilers of Passion narratives not only characterized Mary's controlled pose near the Cross as 'decent', but also excused the much criticized fainting, even the complete collapse to the ground as 'mannered' – thereby creating the paradox that Mary may have swooned, but that she was in full control.

This is the global view. Naturally, it has to be adjusted if the sensibilities regarding Mary's expressions of suffering of individual writers of Passion narratives are to be examined in any detail. As we have seen, there often appears to be no consistent sense of decorum relating to Mary's various expressions of grief in one and the same Passion narrative. The different episodes in the story are treated quite separately, each having its own exegetic tradition and values – a fact that is as true of medieval theology as of *Vita Christi* literature.⁵² Moreover, if one were to take the differences in the reading public for which the various manuscripts and books were produced into account, the picture would be different again.⁵³ Nevertheless, on the basis of the above *Gesamtbild* I propose to explore the sensibility regarding the question of decorum in contemporary Netherlandish paintings of 'Mary at the Cross'.



3 Rogier van der Weyden (follower), *Crucifixion* (central panel) Brussels, *Musees Royaux des Beaux Arts de Belgique* Copyright A C L, Brussels

MARY IN PORTRAYALS OF THE PASSION

The descriptions of Mary's compassion mentioned above provide good comparative material for an examination of paintings of Mary at the Cross from the period beginning with Jan van Eyck and ending in the mid-16th century which are documented so thoroughly in Friedlander's *Early Netherlandish Painting*.¹

One would expect, judging from the above, that pictures of Mary *standing* at the Cross would be commonplace in Netherlandish art of the period 1425-1550, following the introverted line based on Ambrose's views regarding Mary's

expression of grief.² To a large extent this is the case. But there are a number of significant exceptions representing the more exalted approach and it is noticeable that these are mainly found at the start of this period. Two paintings by followers of Jan van Eyck can serve as examples of each of the two conceptions, one a *Crucifixion* in Venice (Fig 1), the other a *Crucifixion* in Berlin (Fig 2).³ In the Venetian work Mary stands upright and rigid near the Cross, her hands together and her expression serene. On John, at the other side of the Cross, the sorrow is more immediately visible in his face because of his frown, his hands are intertwined and turned

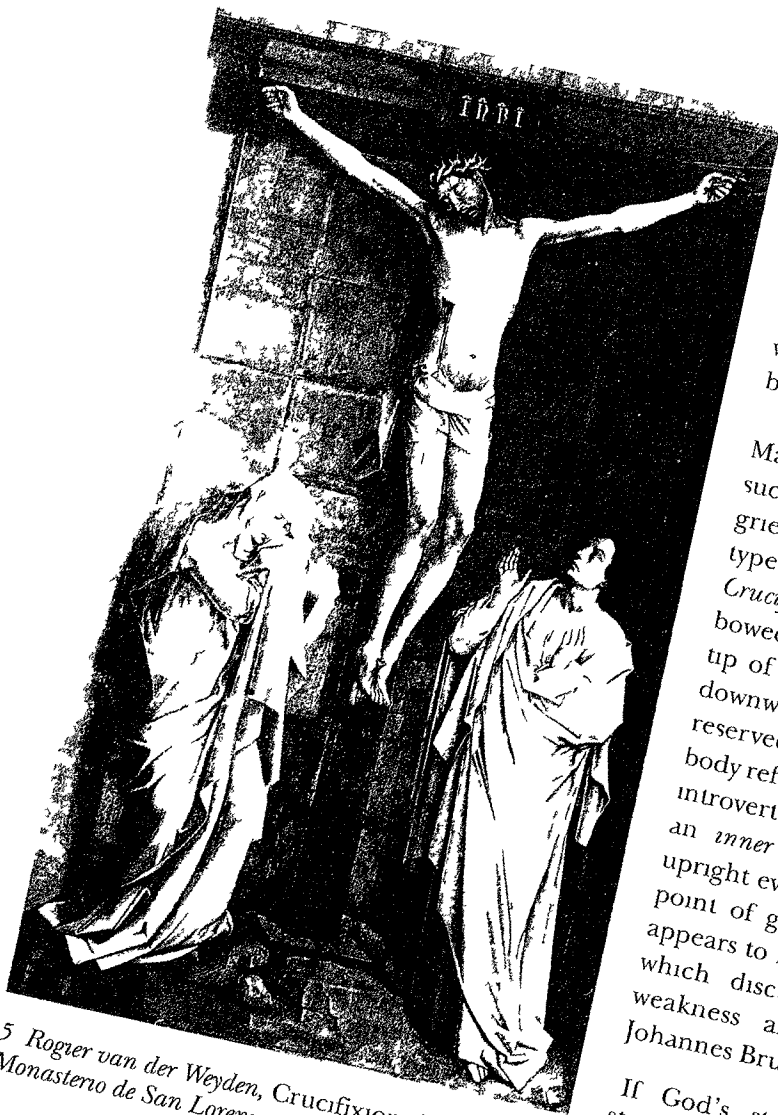
inward: a torsion closely resembling the wringing of hands mentioned in several texts. Yet the pose and facial expression of John is, in Panofsky's phrase 'nobly restrained'.⁵⁷ Mary and John are far more emotional in the Berlin painting. Here Mary is portrayed with the physical pose and facial expression reserved in the Venetian work for John; indeed her face is even more contorted from sorrow. John is so overwhelmed by the pain that he is seen here in a fit of weeping with one hand raised to his eye to wipe away the tears; consumed by grief, he has turned away from the dead Christ.

It would be wrong to accuse the second painter of having broken the rules of decorum on the basis of the cited texts. It should be clear from the start: no panel showing a Passion scene would ever have offended the public sense of decorum. Panels were expensive items in this period and even those meant as *Andachtsbilder* for private devotion and not intended for public display in church or chapel would have had to be presentable, if only to indicate the owner's piety. With minor differences – and this is what it is all about – these paintings always follow the main line of iconographic and pictorial traditions. Yet it is clear that the Berlin painting – although of course always within the limits of the 'Mary standing at the Cross' iconography – reveals a degree of expression of grief in her pose and her facial appearance that few followed in later Netherlandish panel painting. Inasmuch as panel paintings of the period c. 1425–1550 show Mary standing at the Cross artists tended to prefer the introverted tradition, as in paintings by the various followers of Rogier van der Weyden, Dieric Bouts, Gerard David, Quentin Massys, the Master of Hoogstraeten, Hieronymus Bosch, Joos van Cleve and Adriaen Isenbrandt.⁵⁸ Here Mary is often portrayed with tears on her face, but otherwise, her expression is generally serene, her eyes sometimes look up toward Christ hanging on the Cross, but generally they are cast down in an expression of meditative reflection. Sometimes



4. *Quinten Massys, Crucifixion. London, National Gallery.*

Mary holds one hand to her head, or her head leans on a hunched shoulder but this does not detract from the serenity of her facial expression and the suggestion that she is meditating on the suffering of her son (Fig. 3).⁵⁹ In some paintings this serene figure of Mary is contrasted with the more expressive gestures of Mary Magdalene, John and other women standing near the Cross. One good example is Quentin Massys's *Crucifixion* in London (Fig. 4).⁶⁰ While Mary Magdalene sinks to her knees and grabs at the Cross, fixing her eyes on the dead Christ, John also looks up, hands together and his mouth slightly open, as if he were lamenting. Another woman is contorted in grief, she wrings her hands as her friend, weeping and



5 Rogier van der Weyden, Crucifixion Escorial, Monastero de San Lorenzo

with hands together holds a kerchief ready to catch the flood of tears. In contrast, Mary's pose is remarkably undisturbed with a straight posture and a slightly sideways glance she holds her hand up in the rhetorical pose of a speaker, as if she were explaining the meaning of Christ's suffering to her companions – and the viewer. It is unclear whether Massys intended to allude to the theological explanation harking back to Ambrose according to which Mary's standing at the Cross was a sign of her strength of faith or whether he

painted her facial expression in a reserved manner because of the dictates of decorum. It seems clear that the contrast of Mary's introverted expression with those of the weeping bystanders was the result of a conscious choice. Massys's portrayal appears to agree with the cited text which allows bystanders to create a commotion but which considers this inappropriate for Mary.

Far fewer in number are the paintings in which Mary is shown standing near the Cross, but succumbing to a far more vehement expression of grief. One of the most famous examples of this type of portrayal is Rogier van der Weyden's *Crucifixion* in the Escorial (Fig. 5). Here Mary is bowed in sorrow and is drying her eyes with the tip of her mantle. In contrast, her face, with its downward meditative expression has a far more reserved seriousness and sadness. It is as if Mary's body reflects the degree of her sorrow but that her introverted facial expression makes clear that this is an inner pain, an inner grief that keeps her upright even though her knees seem to be at the point of giving way. In this Rogier's invention appears to match precisely the 15th-century texts which discuss the tension between physical weakness and spiritual strength. To quote Johannes Brugman:

If God's strength had not filled her and strengthened that motherly heart in pity she would never have borne it.⁶¹

Or Jan van Schoonhoven

Despite her immense grief she held back within herself, wisely, through God's power and spiritual strength and suffered her torment completely within herself.⁶²

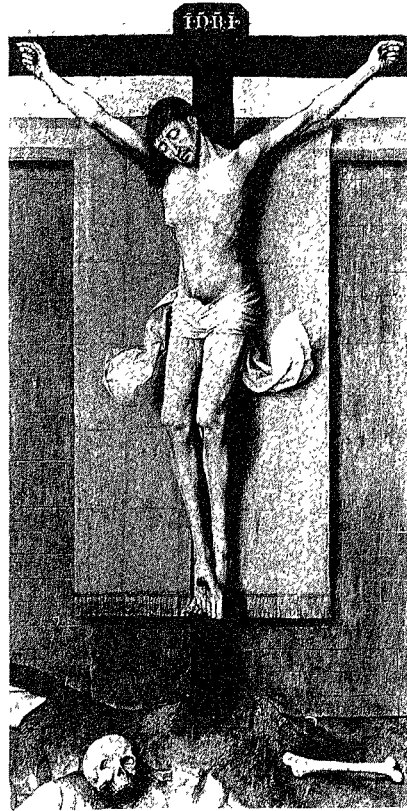
Paintings of the Crucifixion in which Mary lets herself go and in which she visibly clamoured are exceptionally rare in Netherlandish art of the period. The only unequivocal example that I know is the *Crucifixion triptych* attributed to an artist from the circle of Rogier van der Weyden in Bern (Fig. 6).⁶³ Mary's position is somewhere



6 Rogier van der Weyden (circle of), *Crucifixion* Riggisberg (Bern), *Abegg Stiftung*

between a grief-stricken collapse as in Rogier's *Crucifixion* in the Escorial and a swoon into the arms of John, a type that we will examine presently. And indeed, Mary, her face contorted with grief, holds her hands entwined above her head: this is not inner control and fortitude but a purely physical expression of hopeless sorrow. This unusual scene, apparently contrasting with the basic idea of fortitude which connects the

tradition with the iconographic type of Mary standing at the Cross, may in fact be linked with the fact that the patron belonged to a family originally from Italy (De Villa). Moshe Barasch has shown that paintings portraying Mary clamouring, despairing and grieving are far from unusual in Italian art of this period.⁶¹ In any event, it is clear that after Rogier this invention was not continued in Netherlandish art and that here



7. Rogier van der Weyden,
Diptych with Christ on
the Cross; Mary
supported by St John.
Philadelphia, The
Philadelphia Museum of Art,
John G. Johnson Collection.
Copyright A.C.L., Brussels.

control of outward expressions of grief was the preferred form for scenes of Mary standing at the Cross.⁶⁵

It is possible to argue that the last example was not properly interpreted since it was not a standing Mary but a collapsed Mother of God. Surely the Mary figure in Bern is similar to the feeble Mary in Rogier van der Weyden's *Diptych with Christ on the Cross and Mary supported by St John* in Philadelphia (Fig. 7).⁶⁶ This frail Mary, while being supported by John, is able at the same time to hold herself up and to raise her arms in prayer as a sign of intense grief and simultaneously of reverence. What are these strange poses in which Mary appears to be somewhere between standing and collapse? That this question is indeed crucial to the decorum issue in the types of scenes portrayed here I hope to show presently. But first let us turn to pictures of Mary collapsing at the Cross.

This type is also superbly illustrated in a work by Rogier van der Weyden, namely his famous *Descent from the Cross* in Madrid (Fig. 8).⁶⁷ Although it concerns a later episode in the Passion story, Rogier's invention, a visualization of Mary fainting as an expression of her *conformitas* with the dead Christ,⁶⁸ can help in the examination of the characteristics of the complete collapse in pictures of the crucifixion. I consider it a complete collapse if Mary becomes incapable – 'deathlike' –, as the contemporary texts call it lying on the ground and unable to control her physical pose. The fallen body held up by John and one of the women, the weak arms hanging down and the (nearly) closed eyes in Rogier's painting make her condition clear. Scenes in which Mary lies completely collapsed on the ground are particularly scarce in Netherlandish art in the period 1425–1550. In fact, this type of painting occurs after Rogier a few times towards



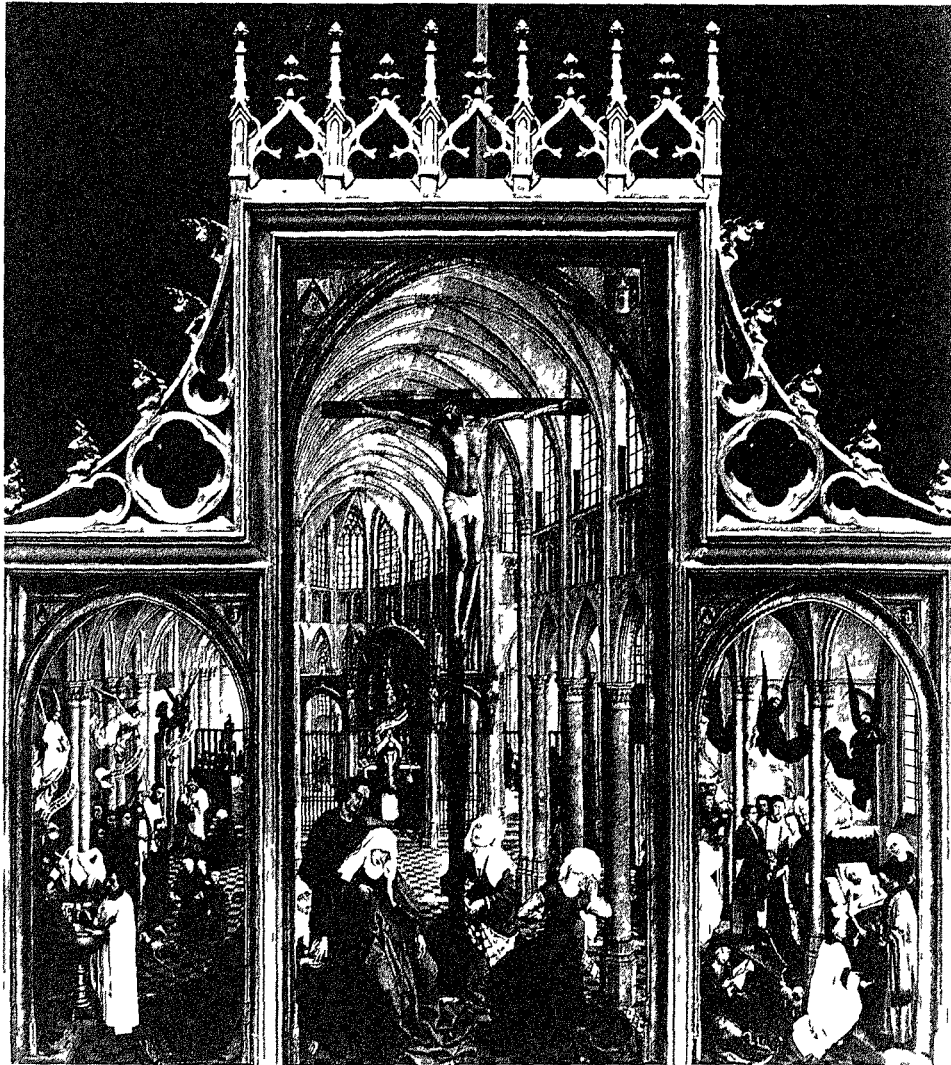
8 Rogier van der Weyden, *Descent from the Cross* Madrid, Museo del Prado

the end of the period in pictures by artists influenced to a greater or lesser extent by the Italian Renaissance such as Jan de Cock, Jan van Scorel and Frans Floris⁶⁹ Somewhat more frequent but still rare are paintings in which Mary sits on the ground in a faint, held up by John or one of the women and in which Mary's physical incapacity is visible in her closed eyelids and her weak limbs This is found in works by Dieric Bouts, Joos van Cleve, Jan Mostaert, Adriaen Isenbrandt, the Master of 1518 and Pieter Coeck van Aelst⁷⁰

There is also a small series of paintings in which Mary appears again to have fainted completely from her feeble, drooping head and limbs, but in which she leans almost upright in the arms of John This occurs first in a work by Rogier van der Weyden, his *Altarpiece of the Seven Sacraments* (Fig 9) and in works by an immediate follower, Gerard David, Adriaen Isenbrandt and the Master of 1518¹

If one accepts the strict norm of complete physical weakness then there are not many Netherlandish paintings of the period 1425–1550 that show Mary in complete collapse Whether this is in itself an indication that the completely incapacitated Mary, especially the Mary who had collapsed on the ground was rarely painted because these paintings lacked the element of inner self-control cannot be taken for granted On the other hand, Mary is portrayed in a faint far less often in Netherlandish art of the late Middle Ages than one would expect from the frequency with which her fainting is mentioned in contemporary devotional literature

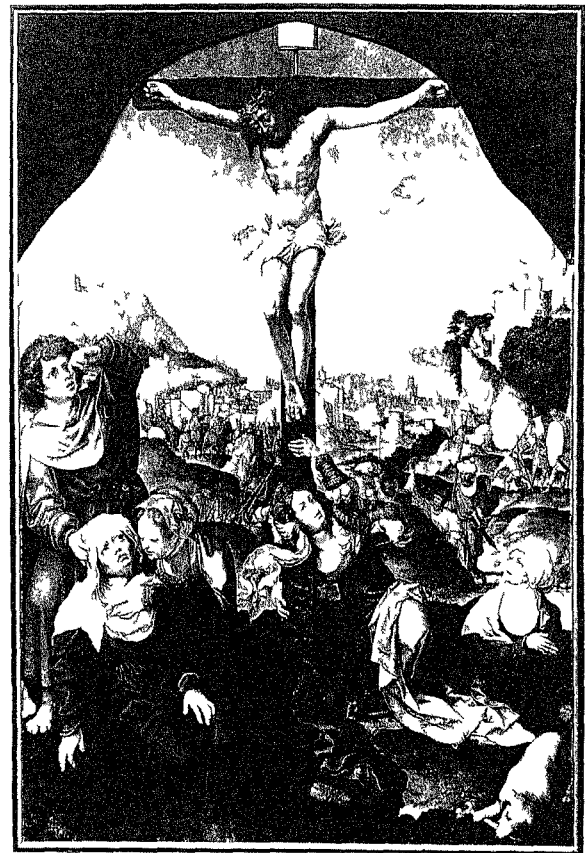
At the same time it is clear that many paintings appear at first sight to fit into this category but nevertheless do not match the criteria of a complete collapse in all its aspects – nor do they match the type of the standing Mary since, either physically or through suggestion, there is always



9 Rogier van der Weyden, Altarpiece of the Seven Sacraments Antwerp, Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten

something inconsistent about her fortitude. All manner of hybrid forms exist between standing and leaning or collapsing, between introverted and controlled sorrow and loss of control. There are paintings with small but salient details that give a standing Mary the hint of a faint and a swooned Mary the hint of control. Perhaps one ought not to be too rigid and make more allowance for artistic freedom and the personal interpretation of the artist, especially since many

paintings in this period of Netherlandish art were the product of a studio or the invention of a master with only modest artistic pretensions who felt little need to adhere rigidly to the pure iconographic conventions and pictorial traditions. Yet it is the sensibility regarding the issue of Mary's mannered behaviour at the Cross as found in the devotional texts which suggests that this rather haphazard approach to basic pictorial types is not so much a question of artistic freedom or



11 Jan Gossaert, *Crucifixion* Hamburg, *Kunsthalle*

10 Albert Bouts, *Crucifixion* Paris, *Musee Marmottan, Institut de France*

limitations but one of this sensibility – and therefore something worthwhile examining more closely

This intermediate form is found especially in portrayals in which Mary is supported by John. Even in a case where Mary appears to be completely overwhelmed by pain and is totally disabled, small signs remain to indicate that Mary remains partially conscious and retains some control of her body. In Rogier's *Altar of the Seven*

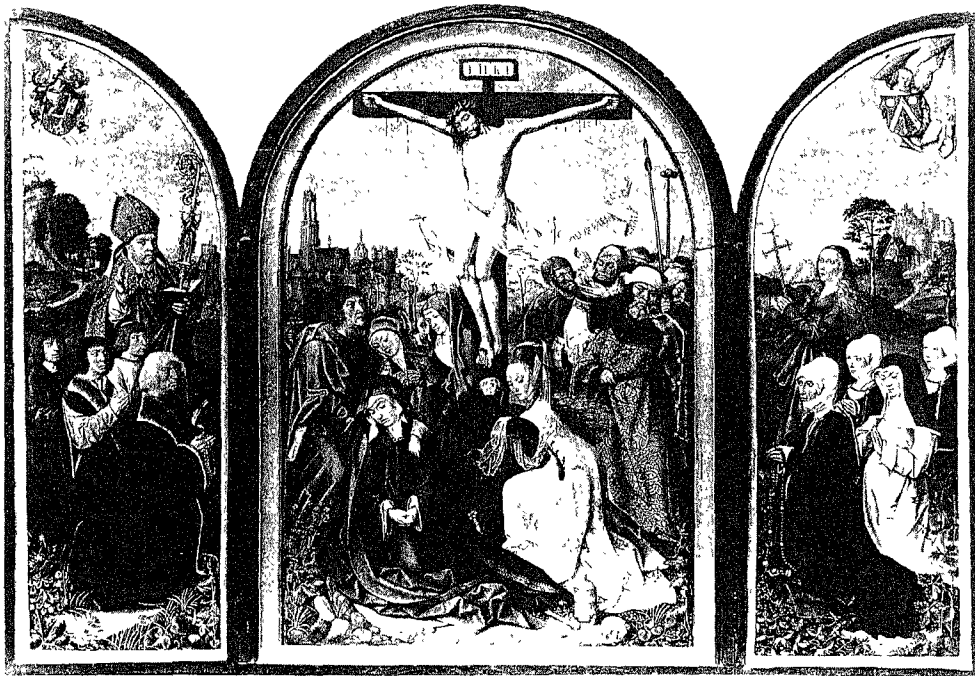
Sacraments (Fig. 9) one of the accompanying women softly touches one of Mary's hands. This motif of comfort and consolation suggests that Mary is capable of appreciating this and continues to be conscious of her suffering. Some painters show Mary sitting huddled and weak but with eyes open, or some other slight physical sign that the pain has not overwhelmed her completely. In the *Crucifixion* by Albert Bouts (Fig. 10)⁷² Mary appears to have collapsed, leaning in the arms of



12 Master of the Tiburtine Sibyl, *Crucifixion* Detroit, Institute of Arts Courtesy of the Detroit Inst. of Arts

John, but while her eyes are closed and her body is weak Mary still has enough strength to press her hand to her breast to express the burning sorrow that continues to pulsate through her body. A *Crucifixion* by Jan Gossaert (Fig. 11)⁷³ shows Mary half seated, half lying on the ground where she is supported spiritually by the sympathetic gestures of John and one of the women, rather than being physically held up by them. Mary's right arm

functions, although obviously rather weak, as a support for the body. Mary also keeps her eyes wide open and staring at the dead body of her son on the Cross, all the other women around Mary have fallen onto the ground, overcome by the weight of intense grief. Mary's condition of not being entirely incapable, or not having completely collapsed, expresses a maximum experience of grief and in fact goes further than the



13. Master of Frankfurt, "Triptych with the Crucifixion". Frankfurt a.M., Städelsches Kunstinstitut.



14. Master of the Legend of St Catherine, Descent from the Cross. Cologne, Wallraf-Richartz Museum.



15. Master of Flémalle (copy), Descent from the Cross. Liverpool, Walker Art Gallery.

paintings in which she is shown with a mournful face and winging her hands (cf Fig. 4). Completely different, although at first sight similar, is Mary's position in the *Crucifixion* by the Master of Frankfurt in Frankfurt (Fig. 13).⁷⁴ Here Mary sits with eyes almost shut, huddled on her knees at the foot of the Cross, supported by John and two women. Despite the presence of so many helping hands Mary seems to be keeping herself upright, while she holds her hands together revealing that she is not in fact incapable but is actually engaged in meditative reflection. This type of scene is found in Memling's work as well as that by Jan de Beer.⁷⁵ Closely associated with this is the type of portrayal in which Mary is half seated or kneeling and supported by bystanders; her hands are together and she looks up at her dead son. This type, which suggests only a moment of physical weakness on Mary's part through her general pose while leaving her ample space to continue her inner concentration on Jesus, is found in work by the Master of Hoogstraeten, Jan Provoost, the Master of Delft and Cornelis Engelbrechtsz.⁷⁶

Inclined again more towards a complete collapse are a number of pictures showing Mary with eyes closed, head bowed and arms loose, on her knees but in which, although leaning against John, she has her back straight so that it seems as if she manages to remain upright herself. This type, which is reminiscent of portrayals of the Man of Sorrows displaying his wounds to the viewer, is employed by Petrus Christus, the Master of the Joseph Sequence and Adriaen Isenbrandt.⁷⁷ Although the suggestion here is mainly one of incapability at the same time Mary has an inner strength which ensures that she does not collapse completely.

This ambivalence is also present in a series of paintings based on a 'Mary standing at the Cross' but which modify this type, resulting in something akin to a steadfast-collapsing Mary. Formally, these are based on pictures in which Mary is standing next to the Cross, her hands together held up to Jesus but her head bowed away slightly to the side, looking with tearful eyes at the ground as a sign that she is deep in thought, reflecting on the death of her son (cf Fig. 3).⁷⁸ A *Crucifixion* by

the Master of the Tiburtine Sibylle (Fig. 12) goes a step further.⁷⁹ Mary's hands are together hanging down and her mouth is slightly open. She looks introverted and with her slightly inclined head she seems to be standing quite straight next to the Cross. The support John and one of the women provide shows that her physical fortitude is less than her upright position might suggest. Mary is shown in a comparable pose in a *Descent from the Cross* by the Master of the Legend of St Catherine (Fig. 14).⁸⁰ This last painting shows the paradox that is found in many of the previous portrayals particularly clearly: Mary stands and at the same time she collapses; despite, or rather in her incapacity she is steadfast. That this ambiguity is in fact what is portrayed here is shown again by a comparison between the few paintings that show Mary at the moment she is about to faint into the arms of John as in a copy after the Master of Flémalle (Fig. 15).⁸¹

What is the best way of interpreting this ambiguity? In my opinion we are dealing with

precisely the same sensibility that emerges from the contemporary devotional texts with regard to the decorum of Mary's mannered pose and behaviour at the Cross. It would seem that artists were continually trying to find solutions to the problem, on the one hand to illustrate the most extreme forms of Mary's grief, her collapse, but at the same time to show her inner fortitude and the restrained way she experienced her sorrow. In all the variations of the portrayals of Mary's position at the Cross in late medieval Netherlandish panel paintings it is clear that the majority show Mary's grief characterized as an inner experience, as a state of meditative reflection and prayer that is borne through physical self-control that Mary retains even when she collapses in grief. In this art Mary appears to be, far more than in contemporary Passion literature, the 'mannered', 'decent', 'honest noble woman' whose inner and outer stature becomes visible – not least in paintings in which she is shown collapsing beneath the weight of her *compassio*.

(translated by Sammy A. Herman)

NOTES

¹ *Fasciculus myre. Dat is een sonderlinge ende devote materie van die bittere passie ende haer ons liefs heeren Jesu Christi* (Antwerp: Symon Cock (1526)), cit. from chap. Inc. 'Hier beghint die roen' 'Hoe dicke heeft si dat cruys met droevigen begee ten omhelst ende gecust, bisonder daer dat gebenedijt bloet Jhesu bi dat cruys neder liep. Ende die aende daer dat bloet Xpi op droop die custe si, ende lichte dat bloet vander aenden met groter begeeten, so dat haer aensicht geheel bloedich was. Och in wat droefnisse is maria geweest' (my italics) – The Hague, Royal Libr. 228 G 38.

² J. H. Marrow, *Passion Iconography in Northern European Art of the Late Middle Ages and Early Renaissance. A Study of the Transformation of Sacred Metaphor into Descriptive Narrative* (Columbia: Van Ghemmet Publishing Company, 1979).

³ See for late medieval Passion Piety e.g. B. Spaepen, 'Middelieuwe passiemystiek', *Ons Geestelijk Erf*, 35

(1961), pp. 167–185, 252–299; W. Baer, *Untersuchungen zu den Passionsbetrachtungen in der Vita Christi des Ludolf von Sachsen. Ein quellenkritischer Beitrag zu Leben und Werk Ludolfs und zur Geschichte der Passionstheologie* (Analecta Carthusiana, 44), 3 Vols. (Salzburg: Institut für Englische Sprache und Literatur, Universität Salzburg, 1977); A. Ampe, 'Naar een geschiedenis van de passie-beleving vanuit Marrow's passie-boek', *Ons Geestelijk Erf*, 18 (1984), pp. 129–175. See in particular for Mary's *compassio* S. Beissel, *Geschichte der Verehrung Marias in Deutschland während des Mittelalters* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Heiderische Verlagshandlung, 1909), pp. 379–415, and T. Meier, *Die Gestalt Marias im geistlichen Schauspiel des deutschen Mittelalters* (Philologische Studien und Quellen) (Berlin, 1959), pp. 145–215, cf. H. A. Oberman, *Spätscholastik und Reformation*, (I) *Der Herbst der mittelalterlichen Theologie* (Zürich: EVZ-Verlag, 1965),

- pp 278–282 and 297–300, and C. M. Schuler, 'The Seven Sorrows of the Virgin: popular culture and cultic imagery in pre-Reformation Europe', *Simulacrum*, 21 (1992) pp 5–28
- ⁴ For these texts see e.g. R. Lightenberg, 'Rondom de Meditatie', in *Studia Catholica*, 3 (1927), pp 217–239 and 334–359, Baer, 1977, and C. C. de Bruin, 'Middeleeuwse levens van Jesus als leidraad voor meditatie en contemplatie', in *Nederlands Archief voor Kerkgeschiedenis* 58 (1977–78), pp 129–155, 60 (1980) pp 162–181, 63 (1983) pp 129–173, cf. Marlow 1979 (with bibliography)
- From 'Dit es de heimelike Passie ons Heeren Jhesu Christi' – ed. D. A. Stucke SJ, 'Een brokstuk uit de 'Passie des Heeren'', *Ons Geestelijk Lief*, 11 (1937), pp 121–190, cit. p. 179 'Ende die moeder der ghenaden sat onder t'cruce bedropen metten heelghen bloede haer liefs soons dat su so minnelike eerde ende met so groeter eere wedergeheveverencien custe'. Cf. A. Ampe, 'Losse aantekeningen bij de "Heimelike Passie"', *Ons Geestelijk Lief*, 35 (1961) pp 186–214, 36 (1962), pp 353–371, 37 (1963) pp 188–203
- ⁶ *Dit es de leven ons liefs heren ihesu cristi* (Antwerp: G. van Hombout, 1512), fol. CCLXXX-v 'Ende als si anders ghenen troost en vant so custe si mit groeter begeerlichkeit dat bloet ihesu di upende opte aelden, soe dat haer soete aenschijn wt dyen bloedich werdt – Royal Libr., The Hague 227 A 6
- ⁷ *Ibid.* fol. (C)C(L)XXII-v Nochtans al was haer rouwe soe groot ende onwispelike als si haer lieven eenighen sonc dus scandeliken te doot sach leyden so en bewees dese salighe moeder nochtan gheen ontamelic gebac of onsedelicheit van buten mer als een eerlycke statelike vrouwe behielt dese groten rouwe in haer besloten sechliken sonder eenich misbaer
- ⁸ 'Stabat et sancta Maria iuxta crucem filii et spectabat virgo sui unigeniti passionem. Stantem illam lego, flentem non lego' – PL 33 1431 Corp. Mar. 1939
- ⁹ See K. C. J. W. de Vries, *De Mariaklachten* (Zwolle: Uitgeversmaatschappij W. F. J. Tjeenk Willink 1964), p. 61, which refers to the early description of Mary's suffering in the apocryphal gospel of Nicodemus
- ¹⁰ Cf. G. Zappert 'Über den Ausdruck des geistigen Schmerzes im Mittelalter', in *Denkschriften der kaiserlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften* (Phil.-Hist. Cl. V) Vienna, 1854 p. 127 with further references in notes 264 and 265. Compare D. Denny 'Notes on the Avignon Pieta', in *Speculum*, 44 (1969) pp 213 ff, and J. A. F. Kionenbug, *Maria's Heerlykheid in Nederland* vol. II (Amsterdam: Bekker 1904), pp 236 ff
- ¹¹ Cf. De Vries 1964, esp. pp 56–59, 77–143, 270–272
- ¹² See De Vries 1964, esp. pp 59–66 (cf. 144–198)
- ¹³ Tamen iectus erat amoris continens modum. Non desperat, sed pie iusteque dolebat – cited from De Vries, 1964, p. 65 (cf. p. 66). With thanks to P. of Dr. P. H. Schijveis (Univ. of Leiden) for his help in translating this and other Latin texts. According to Kionenbug 1904, vol. II p. 23 (but unfortunately K. does not give a precise reference to the source), Anselmus also says that Mary stood near the Cross with a majesty befitting her virginal honour (majesteit, gelijk het haer maagdelijcke eerbaerheid betaamde)
- ¹⁴ De Vries, 1964, pp. 224 ff, and especially the very comprehensive note 11 of the conclusion (pp. 262–265). Conversely, cf. Marlow, 1979 'the search for new incidents of Christ's torment and abuse accelerated dramatically and immoderately during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries' (p. 169), and 'In the quest for new and more stunning incidents, however, succeeding generations () tended to subject biblical imagery to increasingly extravagant interpretations' (p. 194)
- ¹⁵ 'Contumeliosae picturae sunt, quae representant eam collapsam ac syncopi stupefactam, exanimatam dolore. Non exulabat non lacerabat capillos, non percutiebat pectus, non se clamitabat infelicem. Plus capiebat consolationis ex redemptione generis humani quam doloris ex morte Filii' – cited from J. J. Bouasse, *Summa aurea de laudibus beatissimae virginis Mariae. De genitricis sine labe conceptae*, vol. III (Paris: Migne, 1866) pp. 856–857 (cf. *idem*, p. 855, for similar words from Petrus Canisius) – after De Vries, 1964 p. 263
- ¹⁶ De Vries, 1964, p. 264, note 11
- ¹⁷ See *1 Leven Ons Heeren Jhesu Christi. Het Pseudo Bonaventura Ludolfiaans Leven van Jezus*, published by C. C. de Bruin (Corpus Sacrae Scripturae Neerlandicae Medii Aevi Miscellanea, Vol. II) (Leiden: E. J. Brill 1980), cf. note 4
- ¹⁸ Ed. De Bruin, 1980, p. 178 'want si mit horen Soen in rouwe des heiten aen den cruce hanc, ende lieve hadde mit hem ghestorven dan langhe gheleef, waer of die leerai Sinte Bernaert dus seit: O goede ihesu, zeer doghestu van buten in dinen lichaem mer veel meer van binnen in dijne herten van compassien dijne moeder, die alle pijn mit di dedelde. Over al mach men pine ende torment bevoelen, mer men mach niet te vollen uutspreken. Maria stont onder den cruce als die apostelen vloeghen ende sach mit goeder tien oghen die wonden hoer kints'
- ¹⁹ See below
- ²⁰ Ed. De Bruin 1980 pp. 178–179 'van vette ende en worden van niemant ghetogest. Och wat bedoefde stemmen ende wenighen wert daer ghehoert van sinnen vrienden ende sonderlinghe van sijne bedoefde moeder'

- ²¹ Ibid., pp. 183 and 185: 'als doet ... viel neder ter aerden in hoer aensicht'; 'Doe viel Maria als doot neder twisschen die amen Marien Magdalena'
- ²² Ibid., p. 186: 'screvede mit onverdrachliken tranen ende maecte mit horen tranen nat dat aensicht ende dat dode lichaem hoers kints ende oec den sac, daer men seghet, dat noch hoer tranen in staen ... Ende des ghelijcs alle die ander screyeden so seer, dat si van rouwen seer schenen ghebreken'.
- ²³ For shedding tears of compassion as a sign of religious status, see eg. M. Baasch, 'The Crying Face', in: *Artibus et historiae An art anthology*, 15 (1987), pp. 21–36.
- ²⁴ Cf. Kronenburg, 1904, vol. II, pp. 238 ff.; De Vries, 1964, p. 56; and R. Bäumer & L. Scheffczyk (eds.), *Marienlexikon*, vol. IV (St. Ottilien: EOS Verlag, 1992), p. 684. See also H. E. Hamburg, 'The Problem of *Lo Spasimo*, of the Virgin in *Quattrocento* Paintings of the *Descent from the Cross*', in *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 12 (1981), pp. 45–75. (H. explores the theological implications of Mary's swooning, not, however, matters of decorum).
- ²⁵ *De dolore beatae Virginis in passione Filii sui* (Paris: Henri Etienne, 1513), fols. 67v–68r – cited from the translation by A. Duclos, *De eerste eeuw van het Boederschap der Zeven Weedommen van Maria in Sint Salvators te Brugge* (Bruges: Société d'émulation de Bruges, Mélanges (9), 1922), pp. 85–86 (my italics).
- ²⁶ Cf. Baier, 1977.
- ²⁷ *Dit es dleuen ons heeren Jhesu crist* (Antwerp: Claes de Grave, 1536). (Univ. of Leiden Libr., 1497 A 8).
- ²⁸ Ibid., fol. CCXXXIII–v: 'Acl mensche wat rouwen heeft die moeder gods ende die eersame vrouwen gehadt ende veel ander die Jhesum wt minne nagevolcht waren wat weenen en scieien is daer geweest . . . O wat swaerder druc ende screyinge is daer geweest, mer die bedructe moeder gods hielt haer nochtans sonder eenich misbaer van buten'.
- ²⁹ Ibid., fol. CCXXXVII–v: 'Die soete moeder gods hief op haer handen met hertelijke begeerte begerende te ghenaken haer soue En als si anders gheenem troost en vandt soe custe si met grooter begheerlicheyt dat bloet Jesu diupende opter aerden, soe dat haer soete aenschijn van dien bloedich wert'.
- ³⁰ Ibid., fol. CCXXXIX–v: 'Die doefheyt vander gebenedide, moeder Maria en mach niemant te vollen wtspreken, nochtans was si in haer beductheit seer zeechlic ende mamelijc, als voergheseyt is'
- ³¹ 'Wat moest Maria zeggen daer,
Toen zij, het hart van rouwe zwaai,
Zag aan het kruis haar Zone hangen,
...
Wat moest zij drijven groot misbaer,

Stil in heur hart en openbaar;
Te steiven moest zij toen verlangen.
Dus moest zij klagen toen voorwaar,
De handen wringen, rukken 't haar'

Cited after Kronenburg, 1904, p. 236. Compare De Vries, 1964, p. 23, 142–144 (ed.: *Uit de Strophische Gedichten van Jacob van Maerlant*, by Prof. Dr. J. van Mieelo S. J. (Zwolle: Tjeenk Willink, 1954), pp. 98–137).

³² 'Ongheuoouch' can be translated either as 'unseemly behaviour' or as 'grief' – see W. J. J. Pijnenburg & J. J. van der Voort van der Kleij, *Woordenboek Middelbenedlands* (Utrecht & Antwerp: Uitgeverij Het Spectrum, 1984), p. 119; cf. note 33.

³³ *Dit zijn die Ghetide van Onser Vrouwen*, Bisschoppelijc Semmarie, Bruges, Hs. 72/175, fol. 13r–33r, lines 98–103, 431–432, 630–632 – cited after De Vries, 1964, pp. 148–149:

'Soe weende ende dieef onghueouch,
Up hare heilige boist zoe slouch;
Met hare jammeliker claghe
Dede zoe vele vrienden ende maghen
Hebben rauwe ende wezen onvro

...
dreef mesbaer
Roupende ende wenende zere

...
Doe ghi sterven saecht u kint
Ghine spraect ten quaden niet een twint
Maer met hantgheslaghe ende met weene
Pnedi u selven allene'.

³⁴ Compare M. Baasch, *Gestures of Despair in Medieval and Early Renaissance Art* (New York: New York University Press, 1976), passim, which describes these expressions of grief as 'violent gestures'.

³⁵ For the earliest history of this cult see Duclos, 1922, and E. H. F. de Ridder, 'De devotie tot O. L. Vrouwe van VII Weeën, haar ontstaan', in: *Handelingen van het Vlaamsch Maria-congres 1921*, Brussels, 1922, pp. 87–104.

³⁶ *Een suuerlic ende devoet boeckken vanden seuen ween van onser heeren vrouwen (...)* (Antwerp: Machiel van Hoochstraten [no date] – Royal Libr., The Hague, 230 G 11).

³⁷ Ibid., fol. 43-r: 'so overvloedelic weenende als ic hebbe ghelesen dat wt haren ogen is bloet gelopen'.

³⁸ Ibid., fol. 47-v: 'ongetroost vol rouws ende medelydens so volstantelyk onder den cruce'.

³⁹ Ibid., fol. 57-v.

⁴⁰ Ibid., fol. 58-r-v: 'Nochans was sy in al haer lijden so manierlyck: ende hielt dat so sedelijc int binnenste haerder herten besloten sonder enich wtwendich mesbaer als luyde te cryten, haer handen te wringen ende deser ghelijc, ende stont so gedoochsamljck onder

den cruce met haer kinde ghecruyst in pinen inden wille ende inder begheiten

- ¹¹ Cf E. Verwijs & J. Verdam *Middelnederlandsch Woordenboek* vol IV (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1899) coll. 1121–1122 (under *manelijc(heit)*).
- ¹² *Dat sijn die Seven Ween van onser liever vrouwen int lange* (Antwerp: Willem Vorsteiman [n.d.] – Royal Library, The Hague, 231 G 31).
- ¹³ *Ibid.* cited from the chapter: Die vijffte wee als sy haer sone aenden cruce deerlic sach sterven. croop onder die peerden door. stouste si neder te aerden al vast aenden cruce. *Sint Jan* die alijt bi haer was dit siende. en conste hy haer nyet ghehelpen. want hy mede alsoo flau was van pijn. nochtans dede hy zyn best. hy heftese vaste. hy trockse vaste. hy ontuech haer cleder. hy mochte haer wat cruyts inden mont steken. o lachen hy en wist wat doen. hy en mochte haer nyet troosten. Och hadde si mogen roepen nae dat haer was te moede die werelt souder af hebben gecbeeft. op dat sy dan onder den last niet blijven en soude so gaf haer god stercheyt dat zyt mocht lijden.
- ¹⁴ Cf *Dit es dleven ons liefs heren* 1512 (note 6) fol. (CC)CLXXX–v (in the story of the election of the Cross). Oh what a terrible sorrow and crying was there but nevertheless the blessed and sorrowful mother did not clamour in any way. (O wat swaeder diuck ende screynghe is daer geweest. maer die gebenedide ende bedruucte moeder hielt haer nochtan sonder eenighe misbaer van buten). This passage also implies that a clamour is not a seemly expression of grief for Mary but that it is quite acceptable for Mary Magdalene and the other onlookers.
- ¹⁵ *Dat sijn die Seven Ween van onser liever vrouwen int lange* (note 42) quotation from the chapter: Die vijffte wee als sy haer sone aenden cruce deerlic sach sterven. hicsullen wy weten dat maria in haer lijden also lydsaem was ende manelijck dat sy noyt een onlydsaem woort en sprac. noyt en maecte si misbaer van buyten als van roepen of van cruyten of haer handen te wringen. mer stont oft lach so manelijck dat si haer lyde besloten hielt in haer heit. men sach niet dat sy doevich was. dan aen dye overvloedige uanen ende haer bedruuct aensicht.
- ¹⁶ Cf Denny 1969 pp. 215 ff.
- ¹⁷ Compare De Vries 1964 pp. 204 ff. for the relationship between Mary's lament and the death lament which is accompanied by clamour, loud weeping, breast beating etc.
- ¹⁸ *Dit es dleven ons liefs heren ihesu cristi* 1512 (note 6) fol. (C)C(L)XXII–v. O devote hearten staet nu inwendeliken op ende haest u met penitencien ende rouwe van binnen ende helpt ihesum uwen heere ende verlosse

sijn cruce draghen. Ende draghet u liden heymelic met maria die moeder ons heren ihesu.

- ¹⁹ See note 7.
- N. Elias *Über den Prozess der Zivilisation* 2 vols. (Basle: Haus zum Falken, 1939).
- ²⁰ See J. Bremmer & H. Roodenbug (eds.) *A Cultural History of Gesture* (with an introduction by Sir Keith Thomas) (Ithaca & New York: Cornell University Press, 1992).
- Cf Lightenbeig 1927: 220. In among all those ascetic observations and incitements like the morsels of stories depicting the historical or legendary facts like little islands in a sea (my transl.)
- The *Fasciculus myri* (note 1) which contains the motif of the blood being licked is much smaller in format. The layout is less tidy and it is less carefully printed than several of the other Lives of Jesus mentioned above which frequently contain entire series of woodcuts. Does this indicate that it was produced for a less socially prestigious and civilized readership than these other books?
- ²¹ M. J. Friedländer *Early Netherlandish Painting* 16 vols. (Leiden & Brussels: A. W. Sijthoff & Editions de la Connaissance, 1967–1976).
- It is outside the scope of this book to explore in detail the origin and iconographical traditions of the different types of portrayal of the Crucifixion and their variants on which the Dutch examples from the 15th and 16th centuries which I cite below are based. I confine myself to the observation that as far as I can establish in general terms (although a much more broadly based and more detailed study will be needed to confirm this) the different poses and gestures of sorrow of Mary at the Cross stem to a large extent from (much) older examples in the art of the Middle Ages – see e.g. D. C. Shorr *The Mourning Virgin and Saint John* *The Art Bulletin* 22 (1940) pp. 62–69. K. Kunze *Ikongraphie der christlichen Kunst* vol. I (Freiburg im Breisgau: Heider & Co., 1928) pp. 446–468. G. Schiller *Ikongraphie der christlichen Kunst* vol. II (Gutersloh: Gutersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1968) pp. 110 ff. E. Kirschbaum (ed.) *Lexikon der christlichen Ikongraphie* vol. II (Rom: Freiburg, Basle, Vienna: Heider, 1970) under Crucifixion pp. 606–642. Baumer & Scheffczyk (eds.) *Marinlexikon* 1992 vol. IV pp. 685–688 – all with further references.
- Friedländer *INP* vol. I Pl. 38A and 38B.
- E. Panofsky *Early Netherlandish Painting: Its Origins and Character* 2 vols. (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1971) I p. 235.
- ²² Friedländer *INP* vol. II cat. no. 47 (Pls. 66–67) 89 (Pl. 108) 93 (Pl. 109) vol. III cat. nos. 5, 5a (Pls. 10 and 11).

- cat. nos 51, 52 (Pl. 65), compare cat. no. Add. 132 (Pl. 127); vol V, cat. no. 84 (Pl. 65); vol VIb, cat. no. 185 (Pl. 196), 189 (Pl. 199); vol. VII, cat. no. 12 (Pl. 18), 13 (Pl. 19), compare cat. nos. 56–58 (Pls. 55–57), 115 (Pl. 87), vol. IXa, cat. nos 11, 11a, 11b, 12 (Pls. 23, 24, 26 and 27), 29, 30 (Pl. 51); vol XI, cat. no. 130 (Pl. 108), 156 and 157 (Pl. 126), 160 and 161 (Pl. 127), and 249 (Pl. 167).
- ⁶⁹ Friedländer, *ENP*, vol. II, cat. nr. 93 (Pl. 109). Compare vol VII, cat. no. 12 (Pl. 18), see also cat. no. Add. 193 B (Pl. 11) Mary's hand gesture (holding her hand against her head) is found as a gesture of sorrow in Christian art from as early as the 9th century – cf. Shorr, 1940. However, it is not impossible – bearing in mind that Mary is turned away from the Cross – that Massys in fact intended this gesture as an expression of meditation. For Mary's averted gaze as a sign of meditation, cf. F. O. Buttner, *Imitatio Pietatis Motive der christlichen Ikonographie als Modelle zur Verahnlichung* (Berlin: Gebi. Mann Verlag, 1983), pp. 96–97.
- ⁷⁰ Friedländer, *ENP*, vol. VII, cat. no. 13 (Pl. 19).
- ⁷¹ Cf. W. Moll, *Johannes Brugman en het godsdiensstug leven onzer vaderen in de vijftiende eeuw*, vol. II (Amsterdam: Poruelje, 1854), p. 373: 'en had hoe die cracht Gods niet begaef of ghesteelt in medeliden, dat moederlike heite en hads gheensins moeghen verdraghen'.
- ⁷² Cited from De Vries, 1964, p. 264, note 11 (from: MS. Cologne Historical Archive, G.B. 8 71, fol. 86-v): 'Nochtan hoe groet die zake hoers rouwen was zoe onthielt zie hoe nochtan wijselic in hoer selven overmits die cracht godes ende gheestelike stancheit ende waert alte mael van binnen ghequelt'.
- ⁷³ Friedländer, *ENP*, vol. II, cat. no. Supp. 131 (Pl. 134).
- ⁷⁴ Barasch, 1976.
- ⁷⁵ Rogier's portrayal of Mary embracing the Cross in her grief – cf. his Crucifixion Triptych in Vienna. Friedländer, *ENP*, vol. II, cat. no. 11 (Pl. 19) – has indeed had some imitators. However, I shall not consider this type further here.
- ⁷⁶ Friedländer, *ENP*, vol. II, cat. no. 15 (Pl. 32).
- ⁷⁷ Ibid., cat. no. 3 (Pl. 6).
- ⁷⁸ Cf. O. G. von Simson, 'Compassio and Co-redemptio in Roger van der Weyden's *Descent from the Cross*', in: *The Art Bulletin*, 35 (1953), pp. 9–16; and Buttner, 1983.
- ⁷⁹ Friedländer, *ENP*, vol. XI, cat. no. 112 (Pl. 93); vol. XII, cat. no. 322 (Pl. 175); vol. XIII, cat. no. 128 (Pl. 67). Cf. Joos van Cleve's *Deposition*, vol IXa, cat. no. 31 (Pl. 52), which is a free copy of Rogier's *Deposition*.
- ⁸⁰ Friedländer, *ENP*, vol. III, cat. no. 2a (Pl. 3), Supp. 108 (Pl. 122); vol. IXa, cat. no. 20 (Pl. 45); vol. X, cat. no. 13 (Pl. 12); vol. XI, cat. no. 88 (Pl. 81), 164 (Pl. 128); vol. XII, cat. no. 143 (Pl. 74).
- ⁸¹ Friedländer, *ENP*, vol. II, cat. no. 16 (Pl. 34), 91 (Pl. 108); vol. VIb, cat. no. 186 (Pl. 197); vol. XI, cat. nos. 164 (Pl. 128), 94 and 94a (Pl. 85), 95 (Pl. 86).
- ⁸² Friedländer, *ENP*, vol. III, cat. no. 53 (Pl. 66).
- ⁸³ Friedländer, *ENP*, vol. VIII, cat. no. 15 (Pl. 23) – cf. 16 (Pl. 23).
- ⁸⁴ Friedländer, *ENP*, vol. VII, cat. no. 128 (Pl. 99).
- ⁸⁵ Friedländer, *ENP*, vol. VIa, cat. no. 3 (Pl. 10); vol. XI, cat. no. 13 (Pl. 13).
- ⁸⁶ Friedländer, *ENP*, vol. VII, cat. no. 103 (Pl. 82); vol. IXb, cat. no. 148 (Pl. 167); vol. X, cat. no. 66 VI (Pl. 53), 73 (Pl. 63).
- ⁸⁷ Friedländer, *ENP*, vol. I (Pl. 92); vol. IV, cat. no. 80 (Pl. 73); vol. XI, cat. no. 164 (Pl. 128).
- ⁸⁸ A relatively early example comes from a follower of Rogier van der Weyden – Friedländer, *ENP*, vol. II, cat. no. 93 (Pl. 109).
- ⁸⁹ Friedländer, *ENP*, vol. III, cat. no. 77 (Pl. 87).
- ⁹⁰ Friedländer, *ENP*, vol. IV, cat. no. 51 (cf. 51a) (Pl. 55); also cf. a *Crucifixion* by Cornelisz. Engelbrechtszoon, vol. X, cat. no. 70 (Pl. 58).
- ⁹¹ Friedländer, *ENP*, vol. II, cat. no. 59a (Pl. 86) – cf. a *Crucifixion*, listed as 'South Netherlandish' at the RKD in The Hague – in Valencia, Real Colegio de Corpus Christi (Photo: Mas, Barcelona, no. C. 16717). Also cf. a *Crucifixion* by a follower of Rogier van der Weyden – Friedländer, *ENP*, vol. II, cat. no. 92 (Pl. 108).