

# Leeds Studies in English

## Article:

O. S. Pickering, 'Devotional Elements in Two Early Middle English Lives of Christ', *Leeds Studies in English*, n.s. 14, (1983), 152-66

## Permanent URL:

[https://ludos.leeds.ac.uk:443/R/-?func=dbin-jump-full&object\\_id=121513&silos\\_library=GEN01](https://ludos.leeds.ac.uk:443/R/-?func=dbin-jump-full&object_id=121513&silos_library=GEN01)



*Leeds Studies in English*  
School of English  
University of Leeds  
<http://www.leeds.ac.uk/lse>

# DEVOTIONAL ELEMENTS IN TWO EARLY MIDDLE ENGLISH LIVES OF CHRIST

By O.S. PICKERING

## I

Elizabeth Salter's London M.A. thesis of 1949, eventually published in 1974, contains (almost as a bonus to her famous study of Nicholas Love) one of the most helpful listings of Middle English Lives of Christ.<sup>1</sup> The two Lives that form the subject of the present essay are the *Southern Passion*, which has been edited by B.D. Brown,<sup>2</sup> and the greater part (now known as the *Ministry and Passion*) of "the long poem in St John's College Cambridge MS B. 6" (Salter, p.89).<sup>3</sup> Both are associated with the late thirteenth-century *South English Legendary* collection. Elizabeth Salter classifies the English Lives into five types "according to material and mode of presentation" (p.55), and she places the two poems in question in different groups: the *Ministry and Passion* (MP) in group (c), "Lives consisting of loose paraphrase of the Biblical account, with homiletic and legendary additions", and the *Southern Passion* (SP) in group (d), "Lives consisting of Biblical paraphrase, homily and emotional reflection" (pp.55-6). It is the new element of "emotional reflection" that distinguishes the second group, and which indeed separates groups (a)-(c) from (d)-(e). The whole of group (d), writes Elizabeth Salter (p.98), "illustrates a changed devotional attitude to the Life of Christ. In choice and treatment of material these Lives differ strongly from all those hitherto discussed. They contain, in varying degree, a vernacular expression of the vein of affective meditation on the Humanity of Christ which runs in Latin literature from the time of Anselm onwards".

Thus MP is grouped with (for example) *Cursor Mundi* and the *Northern Passion*, and SP with Love's *Myrroure* and other versions of the pseudo-Bonaventuran *Meditationes Vitae Christi*. But MP and SP are not to be so sharply contrasted. Elizabeth Salter notes (p.100) that they are both connected with the *South English Legendary*, but not that they are textually related, even though this had been clearly stated by B.D. Brown (p.viii). The absence of an edition of MP left scholars in doubt about the nature of the relationship until very recently,<sup>4</sup> but detailed analysis of the two poems has now established that SP is a careful reworking of MP.<sup>5</sup> This does not in itself mean that they could not be as contrasting as Elizabeth Salter's classification implies, but the difference between them lies elsewhere than in the element of emotional reflection.

MP is a poem of 3048 lines, ranging in its narrative from the



Allas, man, qwere is þin herte? How mayst þou here þis  
 But þou tremele & quake for drede, so reufull þing it is?  
 Trees & stonys suffred not þ[at] his herte brak in to,  
 Alle þat ny3 þe place were, but þat þei bruste also.  
 Cloþis þat in þe temple were al toclef in þe mydde;  
 Dede mennys beryelys brokyn eke, as [3if] mercy to bidde.  
 Ihesus, hard was þi deþ qwan harde trees & stonys  
 Tobrustyn þo þin herte brak & beryelis with mannys bonys.  
 Man, how mayst þou heryn þis [but] þin herte br[e]ke anon?  
 Allas, man, and is þin herte hardere þan ony ston?  
 þi lord + deyde in so strong peyne & in so strong a deþe  
 For þe, & þou art his hyne and sory art vnneþe.  
 Sunne & erþe, stonys and trees, here vertu gunne quenche,  
 & þou for qwom he suffred his deth vnneþe wil on hym þenche.  
 (MP 2539-58)

These extracts correspond closely to *SP* 1524-38 and 1583-1602.  
 There is also a third emotional passage common to both poems at *MP*  
 2579-612/*SP* 1645-78, on how the Jews shed every drop of blood in  
 Christ's body.

In addition to these shared emotional passages *SP* contains  
 two others not in *MP*, namely 1109-16 and 1603-24. The first occurs  
 in the middle of what in *MP* is a continuous narrative of the Agony  
 in the Garden (*SP* 1105-08, 1117-20 are parallel to *MP* 2163-70), and  
 reads as follows:

O Ihesu swete þing . whar is oure heorte now?  
 ffor to þolye so strong deþ . lutel gult haddestou,  
 þat ar þou come þer-to . þe blody dropes rede  
 þou swattest, Ihesu, swete þing . strong was þi drede.  
 Bou3testou vs al wiþ nou3t . nay, lemman ywis,  
 Strong was þi deþ atten ende . Ihesu kyng of blis,  
 Whanne þou ar þou come þer-to . swattest red blod.  
 How mi3tou, man, þis yhure . bote þou change þi mod?  
 (SP 1109-16)

It seems to have been inspired by the detail of the drops of blood  
 in *MP* 2165-6 (1107-08), and it replaces the short devotional  
 apostrophe with which *MP* ends its account of the Agony:

Lord Ihesu, mekil was þi loue þat þou schewedyst þere,  
 þat þou wendyst to þi deth & haddist þerto so gret fere!  
 (MP 2173-4)

The reviser was evidently capable of writing an emotional lament of  
 his own in a style very similar to that of the shared passages.

*SP* 1603-24 is a more complicated matter. It follows immedi-  
 ately on the shared *MP* 2539-58/*SP* 1583-1602, quoted above, and  
 describes Christ's physical pain when hanging on the Cross:

A prophete spak of oure lord . longe byffore þis dede,  
 And þorw oure lordes mouþ . þeose wordes he sede:  
 'A ffox him may ffynde a stey . and a turtle a nest al-so, 1605

Whar-ynne hi sitte mowe & walwy . & hare ese do,  
 Ak Ihesus nys on eorþe nou3t . so muche goed byleued  
 Wher-vp he mowe enes . reste his wery heued'.  
 O Ihesu swete þing . were þou so pouere þo  
 Nere þou kyng of alle kynges . whoder was þi goed y-do? 1610  
 þe nas so muche goed ygraunted . wher-vpe þou mi3ttest deye  
 Ne a wrecche torf of þe eorþe . bote henge in þe eyr heye;  
 Ne þi sely lymes . nere ygraunted to þe na-mo  
 þat eny mi3te oþer helpe . how mi3te þer beo more wo?  
 þine armes were wyde ystreyt . þine hondes y-nayled ffaste, 1615  
 þat þou ne mi3ttest in al þi wo . to þin heued ones caste.  
 Ne þou ne mi3ttest bere vp þin heued . so strong was þi deþ,  
 Ne whar-vp hit lenye . wel harde þou lete þi breþ.  
 þei hit mi3te to þi shuldres come . þi croune of þornes þo  
 þer-on wolde deope wade . and þat hadde 3ut ybeo more wo. 1620  
 How mi3te so pouere deþ . eny man here y-seo?  
 Byter and strong and eke pouere . Ihesu yhered þou beo.  
 No wonder hit nas þei þe sonne . in derkhede were ydo,  
 Whanne treos and harde stones . and clopes to-borste al-so.  
 (SP 1603-24)

The final couplet reverts to the subject-matter of the preceding passage, which may suggest that *SP* has made an insertion, but although there is no trace of 1603-24 in the extant *MP* there is a corresponding passage in another related poem, the *Abridged Life of Christ (ALC)*. The principal source of this composition is unmistakably *MP*, which it drastically compresses,<sup>8</sup> and it normally agrees with *SP* only when the latter is following *MP*. In this case, however, *ALC* 447-72 seem to be related to *SP* 1603-24. There is an obvious difference in that the first part (447-54, 457-8) and the last couplet are cast in the form of an address by Christ from the Cross, and there are no apostrophes to Christ; but the sequence of ideas is the same, and there are very similar phrases:

Oure lord sede womman lo here by sone . ybrou3t in grete pyne  
 For mannes gultes nouþ here . & nobyng for myne  
 Al þat goþ by þe way . dwelleþ a luytel wyle  
 & lokeþ he sede war any pine . oþer sorwe be as myne 450  
 þerfor he sede þe wolf haþ sty . ware he may lygge & reste  
 & þe foul to legge . his breddes haþ neste  
 Ic þat am godes sone . me nys no3t byleued  
 So muche place ware ic may . legge on myn heued  
 þe gywes maden mowen on hym . & sayde if þou haddest my3t 455  
 & if þou ert godes sone . wy nelt þou adon ly3t  
 My body sede oure lord . is blodly & wan  
 Alas sede oure swete lord . þat ic euer made man  
 Alas man wy nelt þou þis . vnderstonde in þy þo3t  
 Hou lytel ioie oure lord hadde . in þe rode ynayled so tou3t 460  
 His armes wer ystra3t . fram hym so wyde  
 & faste ynalled to þe hard tre . boþ in ayþer syde  
 þat he ne my3t for no þing . to his heued hem fette  
 Ne in non half his heued . þerwith vndersette  
 þus he lyned his heued . vppon his scholdere adoune 465  
 He hadde also on his heued . of þornes ymade a croune

þe þornes were þeron . swyþ scharp & longe  
 þat wende on his heued . & made hym woundes stronge  
 For soþ he was þe deþ so ney . for þe grete turment  
 He ne mygt noȝt bere his heued & hey . for þe hard iuggement 470  
 þo sede oure lord me nys noȝt . so muche byleued  
 War vpon ic may lyny . & legge myn heued (ALC 447-72)<sup>9</sup>

Because of the correspondence with *SP* there is a strong possibility that *MP* originally contained a similar passage. In wording this would probably have been closer to *SP* than to *ALC*. *MP* and *SP* are careful not to attribute to Christ any non-canonical speeches ("Oure lord seyde to hem no more þat we owher don rede", *MP* 2493/*SP* 1519), but *ALC*, not subject to similar restraint, makes Christ speak the prophete's words in his own person,<sup>10</sup> as part of an appeal from the Cross in the style of contemporary lyrics.<sup>11</sup> It is therefore likely that *SP* 1605-08 are closer than *ALC* 451-4 to what *MP* may once have had, and (given that *ALC*'s author is engaged in rewriting) *SP* 1615-20 closer than *ALC* 461-70. *SP* 1603-04, 1609-14, and 1621-4 are not paralleled in *ALC* but could well have existed in *MP*, if this poem ever contained the passage. 1609-14 are the lines most likely to have been added by the *SP* reviser.

The uncertainty about the origin of *SP* 1603-24 underlines the now evident conclusion that there is no essential difference in poetic mode between any of the emotional passages in *MP* and *SP*, whether or not they are common to the two poems. *SP*'s author appears to write with a greater fervour, as may be seen from the epithets applied to Christ (although it is possible that these may be scribal in origin). In the passages not in *MP* we find *lemman* (1113) and *swete þing* (1109, 1112, 1609), and in the shared passages *Swete Ihesu* (1645, 1667) where *MP* has *Ihesu* and *Blissid Ihesu* (2579, 2601). But this is not a difference in kind, only in degree. The authors of the two poems apostrophize Christ and Man in the same way, exclaiming at the former's sufferings and love, and admonishing the latter for his hardness of heart.

## II

Beatrice Brown, the editor of *SP*, devotes a section of her invaluable discussion of the poem's sources to "The *Meditationes Vitae Christi* and the *Lignum Vitae*". The former, one of the best-known devotional works of the Middle Ages, is a spurious work of St Bonaventura (1221-74), the latter an authentic one. Mrs Brown claims that *SP* "is cast in the same general mould as the *Meditationes*, that of commentated narrative interrupted with emotional apostrophe" (p.lxxix), and that "On the whole it would seem that the poet had been impressed by the general purpose and method of the *Meditationes Vitae Christi*, and had evolved a highly simplified work on the same lines" (pp.lxxx-lxxxii). In support of these claims of broad resemblance she adduces a number of detailed parallels, and notes, too, certain passages in *SP* which are especially close to the *Lignum Vitae*.

Mrs Brown's conclusion that *SP* was influenced by the *Meditationes*

(*MVC*) has been generally accepted by Middle English scholars.<sup>12</sup> Less notice has been paid by students of *MVC* itself, but C. Fischer, writing in 1932,<sup>13</sup> may have been influenced by the implications of her arguments for the dating of the Latin work and for the question of its authorship (first noted by Brown herself, pp.xci-xcii). *MVC* is usually dated c.1300, but *SP* can confidently be dated c.1275-85 (Brown, p.xii); and while a date of c.1300 means that *MVC* could not possibly be by Bonaventura, a date several decades earlier pushes it back into his lifetime. When for *SP* is substituted the older *MP* (for what Mrs Brown says about *MVC* and *SP* holds in almost every case for *MP*), the date of the Latin work in theory becomes earlier still. Fischer in fact argued on other grounds that the Passion section of *MVC* was authentic Bonaventura and thus pre-1274. His conclusions have largely been rejected by later *MVC* scholars,<sup>14</sup> and Mrs Brown's must also be disputed. Both *SP*'s supposed broad and particular correspondences with *MVC* can be called into question.

Mrs Brown divides the supposed detailed resemblances to *MVC* (and the *Lignum Vitae*) into five groups, which she calls "Explanatory comment", "Graphic detail", "Quality of feeling", "Themes and phrasing of emotional passages", and "Hortatory tone". But she assembles in support no more than thirteen passages from *SP* (eleven of which occur in *MP*), and only six of these are more than two lines long.

The seven short passages do not seem especially significant, and need little comment:

*SP* 1349 (*MP* 2333), an interjection on the shame that the Jews inflicted on Christ. The wording is close to the sentence that Brown (p.lxxxv) quotes from *MVC* cap. 77,<sup>15</sup> but there it is placed during the Journey to Calvary, not, as in the poems, during the Trial before Pilate.

*SP* 1423 (*MP* 2399), "Sharpe and kene were þe þornes . hi wente to þe scolle". Brown (p.lxxxiii) claims that "not only the concrete detail but the narrative manner corresponds", but the Latin (cap. 76) reads "Perforabant namque caput ejus sacratissimum acerbissimae illae spinæ", and continues (not quoted by Brown) "ac totum madere faciebant sanguine" (Peltier, p.604) - a "graphic detail" not in the poems.

*SP* 1438 (*MP* 2414), on the shame of carrying the Cross. The motif appears at the same point in *MVC* (cap. 77), but despite what Brown says (p.lxxxii) it was a common theme.<sup>16</sup>

*SP* 1581-2 (*MP* 2537-8), the moment of Christ's death: ". . . and þo closede his eye, / And his heued heng adoun . and myd þat word gan to deye". Brown (p.lxxxiii) claims that here, too, both the concrete detail and the narrative manner correspond, but the passage in *MVC* (cap. 79) reads: "Et ex tunc languere coepit more morientum, modo claudendo oculos, modo aperiendo, et caput inclinare" (Peltier, p.607), after which Christ speaks again before dying. The poems' simpler description is closer to the Gospels (cf. Jo. xix. 30).

*SP* 1583 (*MP* 2539), the first line of one of the shared emotional passages, quoted earlier ("O Ihesu who may þis yhure . wipoute wop of heorte?"). Brown (p.lxxxix) relates it to a rhetorical appeal

not in *MVC* but, in the *Lignum Vitae*. The similarity undoubtedly exists, but the Latin sentence has the very different context of Christ's examination by the high priests (the paragraph "Jesus vultu velatus", Peltier, p.75). Again, the sentiment was common.

*SP* 1671 (*MP* 2605), "Namore schame þan hi dude . ne miȝte þe gywes þe do", from the third emotional passage common to the poems. Brown (p.lxxxv) refers to *MVC* cap. 79, but the relevant phrase reads "et quantum poterant, nocuerunt" (Peltier, p.607), i.e. "did harm", not "did shame". As in other cases, the context is different.

Finally, *SP* 837-8, not in *MP*, are more significant than the other lines so far discussed, for they make the striking comment that if Peter, at the Last Supper, had known that Judas was the traitor, he would have torn him apart with his teeth. *MVC* cap. 73 makes the same point in the same context, but, as Brown allows (p.lxxxii), the writer explicitly cites Augustine as his authority. The comment was therefore not original.

The supposed resemblances so far discussed do not carry even sufficient cumulative weight to make it likely that *MP/SP* used *MVC* as a source, and of the six more substantial parallels cited by Mrs Brown and now to be examined, only two relate primarily to *MVC* itself.

Two of the six she admits are closer to Jacobus de Voragine's *Legenda Aurea*.<sup>17</sup> The first of them (*SP* 1524-40, *MP* 2498-514) is also the first of the shared emotional passages, and was quoted earlier. The subject is the idea that tasting the vinegar and gall was the climax of Christ's physical suffering. This is briefly found in the paragraph "Jesus felle et aceto potatus" of the *Lignum Vitae* (Brown's reference to *MVC* cap. 79 is less close), but *MP/SP*'s development resembles a passage, attributed to St Bernard, in *Legenda* cap. 53, as Brown shows (pp.lxxxvi-lxxxvii). The second parallel with the *Legenda* (*SP* 1645-70, *MP* 2579-604) comprises the greater part of the third of the shared emotional passages, describing how the Jews shed every drop of each of the three kinds of blood in Christ's body. As before, Brown finds the essence of the idea in the *Lignum Vitae* ("Jesus cruore madidus") and a more detailed exposition, closer to the poems, in *Legenda* cap. 53 (Brown, pp.lxxxvii-lxxxviii).

Another two of the longer parallels Mrs Brown refers wholly to the *Lignum Vitae*. They involve *SP* 1547-50 (*MP* 2521-4) and *SP* 1587-98 (*MP* 2543-54), which she considers together on pp.lxxxix-xc: the second falls within the second shared emotional passage, quoted above. The theme is the behaviour of natural phenomena when Christ dies. In the first case the sun hides its light, refusing to shine when its creator is suffering, and in the second the earth, stones, trees, and graves break open, showing more compassion than man, whose heart remains unmoved. There is undoubtedly similarity to passages in the paragraph "Jesus Sol morte pallidus" of the *Lignum Vitae*, but it must be said again that the ideas were also in general circulation.<sup>18</sup>

The two remaining parallels, with *MVC* itself, deserve more



serious consideration. One of them is *SP* 2159-68, a passage which gives three reasons why Christ allowed his wounds to remain visible after the Resurrection. Exactly these explanations occur at the same point in *MVC* cap. 93, and Mrs Brown (p.lxxxiii n.55) was unable to trace the same three elsewhere. The passage does not, however, occur in *MP*. It was evidently added by the reviser, and therefore has no bearing on whether the original form of the poem was influenced by *MVC*.<sup>19</sup>

The other and final parallel is with *MVC*'s well-known description of the process of Crucifixion in cap. 78, where Christ is said to be nailed to the Cross after it has already been set upright in the ground. Mrs Brown (p.lxxxiv) quotes the following passage:

Hic modum crucis diligenter attende. Ponuntur duae scalae,  
una retrorsum ad brachium dextrum, alia ad sinistrum brachium,  
super quas malefici ascendunt cum clavis, et martellis.  
Ponitur etiam alia scala ex parte anteriori, attingens usque  
ad locum ubi debebant pedes affigi. Conspice nunc . . .  
compellitur Dominus Iesus ascendere per hanc scalam parvam . . .  
(Peltier, pp.605-06),

and compares it with *SP* 1459-61 (*MP* 2435-7):

Laddren hi hadde on eyper half . oure lord vp hi bere,  
And henge him heyour þan eny þeof . ich wene þat þo were.  
þorw eyper hond hi smyte a nayl . & þorw þe ffet þe þridde.

She claims that these descriptions are "virtually identical", and that the correspondence is particularly noteworthy because the *MVC* is "unique among Latin treatises on the Passion in thus describing the mode of crucifixion" (as opposed to the more familiar "prostrate" method)<sup>20</sup> and is the ultimate authority for it.

But in fact the "upright" Crucifixion is attested long before the late thirteenth century. Earlier medieval art contains instances of Christ ascending the Cross by means of a ladder,<sup>21</sup> and literary accounts, too, often leave it in no doubt that Christ was fastened to an already erect Cross: the Old English *Dream of the Rood* is an obvious case. For an example from the first half of the thirteenth century one need go no further than the Middle English *Woioing of Our Lord*:

A, nu have thai broht him thider. A, nu raise thai up the  
rode; setis up the warh-treo. A, nu nacnes mon mi lef. A,  
nu driven ha him up with swepes and with schurges. A, hu  
live I for reowthe that seo nu mi lefmon up o rode and swa  
to drahen hise limes that I mai in his bodi euch ban tellen.  
A, hu that ha nu driven irnene neiles thurh thine feire  
hondes into hard rode, thurh thine freoliche fet.<sup>22</sup>

The mention of ladders is admittedly unusual in thirteenth-century literary treatments of the Crucifixion, but *MP/SP*'s few lines are far too generalised to be referable to *MVC*'s circumstantial description, which is much longer than the extract quoted by Mrs Brown and

which ends with a brief account of the alternative prostrate Crucifixion. In particular, *MVC* differs from *MP/SP* in having three ladders and in depicting Christ as climbing up by himself.

Even if some of the suggested resemblances between *MVC* and *MP/SP* were admitted to be significant, it must be asked whether *MP's* author would have picked from *MVC* only the few ideas and details in question, and left so very much more untouched. Only a memorial knowledge of the work could easily explain this procedure, and it then follows that he could be remembering from a range of sources, not just one. Mrs Brown (p.lxxx) allows that "a large proportion of the actual subject-matter of the *Meditations* does not appear in the *Southern Passion*", and she herself suggests that "certain striking passages . . . had impressed themselves on the poet's memory, while the bulk of information was naturally forgotten". *SP*, she admits, contains "none of the speculative discussion" and nothing of "the mass of apocryphal incident relating to the Blessed Virgin".

If this is the case, she is exaggerating when at the same time she claims that *MVC* "supplied the general norm" for *SP* and that there is a "general correspondence in structure" (p.lxxx). *MP* is predominantly biblical and *SP* even more so. They are continuous gospel harmonies with an arrangement of material found (so far as is known) nowhere else, and take as little from *MVC* in the way of design or structure as they do distinctive content. What can be said is simply that *MP/SP* and *MVC* independently represent a shift towards a consistent narrative account of the Life and Passion of Christ and away from the more fragmented approach commonly found in earlier works cast in other literary forms.<sup>23</sup>

Similarly, the "general mould" of the poems cannot be said, as in *MVC*, to be "commentated narrative interrupted with emotional apostrophe" (Brown, p.lxxix). In *MP* and *SP* the latter element is concentrated in the central sections of the Passion and forms only a tiny proportion of the whole. In particular, none of *MP* and *SP's* three shared passages of emotional apostrophe is derived from *MVC*. As we have seen, Mrs Brown refers two to the *Legenda Aurea* and the third to the *Lignum Vitae*. She makes no mention of *SP's* additional emotional passages, and these also do not depend on *MVC*.

Mrs Brown also makes much of what she claims are close similarities in *SP* and *MVC's* authorial attitude and purpose. She is right in saying that both are didactic and that they share (at least during *MP/SP's* emotional passages) "a note of reproachful exhortation" (p.lxxxix). But is it really true that "The relation of writer to audience is the same", and that the English poems reflect the same "urgent desire to move men to sympathetic meditation" (p.lxxxix)? One of *MVC's* most noticeable and appealing characteristics is the intimacy and tenderness with which each reader feels himself led personally through the book, as if by an individual guide. It exemplifies to perfection the "deictic" mode, in which the reader is made an eye-witness to the action and gently but consistently urged to "Imagine this" or "Look now".<sup>24</sup> There is nothing of this in *MP* and *SP*, which generally inhabit an altogether less inspired world of plain narrative and impersonal exposition, and

this sharp contrast in authorial method makes irrelevant the occasionally similar "intensity of feeling" (Brown, p.lxxxv).

## III

*MP* and *SP* are to some extent hybrid compositions. They fall between Elizabeth Salter's (c) and (d) groups of English Lives of Christ, in that they consist predominantly of "loose paraphrase of the Biblical account, with homiletic and legendary additions", but have also several passages of "emotional reflection" which fit somewhat strangely with the lower temperature of their surroundings. The source of these passages is almost certainly not to be sought in one particular work, such as *MVC*, but generally in the affective tradition of devotion to the humanity of Christ, which was well-established in England long before *MVC* was written.<sup>25</sup> *MP* and *SP*'s emotional passages show the influence of the exclamatory style popularised by St Bernard and St Anselm, and developed in the treatises and meditations that circulated under their names. For example:

O lacrymae, ubi vos subtraxistis, ubi estis, fontes lacrymarum?  
Humectate maxillas meas, irrigate genas meas, fluite super  
faciem. Heu me miserum! omnis creatura compatitur Christo,  
et turbatur de morte sua, sed miserum cor meum non compatitur  
Creatori suo morienti pro ipso. Flete me, coelum et terra;  
lugete me, omnes creaturae. Melius esset me non esse creatum,  
quam sic induratum cor meum remanere de tanta morte. O  
Domine! quantum humiliasti te!<sup>26</sup>

In terms of the English vernacular, *MP* and *SP* look back (though at a lower level of intensity) to the passionate utterances of the *Wooring of Our Lord* (quoted from earlier) and forward to Rolle's Passion meditations:

Lord, þi swete passyown reysyd þe dede of here gravys and þei  
walkyd abowte; hyt openyd helle zatys, þe erthe tremblyd  
þerewith, þe sonne lost hys lyzt, and my sory herte, þat is  
of þe develys kynde, hardere þan þe stonys þat clovyn at þi  
deth, it may not of þi passyoun a lytel poynt fele, ne I  
ryse not with þe dede in reuthe þereoffe, ne I cleve not as  
þe temple, ne os þe erthe tremble, ne opene þe closyng þat  
is so harde speryd.<sup>27</sup>

But although these comparisons can be made, *MP* and *SP* are not "personal" in the same way as these classic devotional works. Although their authors write as if expressing their own response to Christ's sufferings (and certainly they are less self-effacing than *MVC*'s author), they do not involve themselves as sinners in need of Christ's loving sacrifice, nor their audience as individuals to be appealed to personally. Anselm, Bernard, Rolle concentrate entirely on their own particular relationship to the Passion: "the appeal to the reader", as Mrs Brown remarks (p.lxxix) "is not made through precept or direct admonition; it is inherent in the fervent

expression of the writer's own feeling". St Edmund's *Speculum Ecclesiae, MVC*; Pseudo-Bede's *De Meditatione Passionis Christi*<sup>28</sup> represent a separate tradition in which the reader is conducted personally through the meditative process. *MP* and *SP* are different from both. Their emotional apostrophes to Christ exclude all reference to their author's own personalities, and the "man" who is exhorted to have a change of heart is generalised mankind, not the individual reader or hearer:

Ihesu, hard was þi deþ qwan harde trees & stonys  
 To Brustyn þo þin herte brak & beryelis with mannys bonys.  
 Man, how mayst þou heryn þis [but] þin herte br[e]ke anon?  
 Allas, man, and is þin herte hardere þan ony ston?  
 þi lord + deyde in so strong peyne & in so strong a deþe  
 For þe, & þou art his hyne and sory art vnneþe.

(*MP* 2551-56)

Examples of this kind of apostrophe are scarce in contemporary Middle English writings,<sup>29</sup> it being more usual (if the treatment of the Passion is not merely descriptive) either for the author to pray to the crucified Christ or for Christ to address mankind from the Cross. There is, it seems, nothing so heightened as *MP* and *SP*'s emotional passages in late thirteenth-century English religious lyric. The Harley lyrics "Iesu, for þi muchele miht" and "I syke when y singe" contain, respectively, a short reproachful address to man and exclamations of grief addressed to Christ, but their tone is gentle and restrained compared to the passages in *MP* and *SP*.<sup>30</sup> Closer in style is one of the renderings of "Respice in faciem Christi":

Loke to þi louerd, man, þar hanget he a rode,  
 and wep hyf þo mist terres al of blode.  
 Vor loke hu his heued biis mid þornes bi-wnde,  
 and to his neb so bispet and to þe spere-wnde.  
 Faluet his feyre luer, and desewet his sicte,  
 drowepet his hendi bodi þat on rode biis itiht . . .<sup>31</sup>

This poem has a deictic element, but otherwise it is impersonal in the same way as *MP* and *SP* in that it lacks a "meditating 'I'" and universalises the audience.<sup>32</sup> Rosemary Woolf quotes it as an example of a Passion lyric cast in the form of "sermon address",<sup>33</sup> and the same phrase can help us to categorise *MP* and *SP*'s emotional passages. Their devotional response to the Passion is also more akin to that of the sermon than to that of the meditative lyric, and seen in this light they do not fit so strangely with the didactic colouring of the surrounding verse.

Forthright but impersonal expression of feeling is also a characteristic of other *South English Legendary* poems. Authorial apostrophe to Christ is a rhetorical feature found, for example, in *St Lawrence*:

Louerd muche was þe pine . þat he þolede for þe here (189),<sup>34</sup>

in *St Mary of Egypt*:

Ou Iesus muche is þi miȝte . muche þoledestou þere (51)

and in the *Nativity of Mary and Christ*:

Welle, lord, muchel þoledestou on erþe vs to lere (307).<sup>35</sup>

Such interjections seem to be a natural part of the *Legendary's* uninhibited conversational style, a style which also allows Judas and Herod to be directly addressed, disapprovingly:

Wrecchid Iudas, qwy askid þou not of mercy to affonge?  
Qwy þouȝttyst þou not on his grace or þou þiself þe honge?  
(MP 2377-8);

Away, Heroudes, þou wrecche kyng, þou hunttest aboute nouht!  
Sore þou drast þoru him to be of þi kyndom out ybrouht . . .  
... Whi slowe þou for haterede of him þe children þat gutles were?  
Wel he wuste, wrecche, þi þouht; ne founde þou him nout [þere]!  
(*Nativity of Mary and Christ*, 669-70, 673-4)

There are also frequent appeals and asides to (so it would seem) a listening audience, for example at *All Souls* 191:

For ich wot non of ȝou nescholde . hem hadde so sore agaste.

The *Legendary* is not a collection of sermons and may not even have been written for recitation, but its poetic manner is nevertheless that of popular instruction and communication. *MP* and *SP's* emotional passages are remarkable expressions of feeling, but they are publicly rather than privately devotional.

NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> *Nicholas Love's "Myrroure of the Blessed Lyf of Jesu Christ"*, *Analecta Cartusiana* 10 (Salzburg, 1974), Chapter IV, especially pp.73-118; referred to here as "Salter". The bibliographical references are up-dated from the 1949 thesis, which was submitted under the author's maiden name of Jones, and bore the title "Nicholas Love's Fifteenth-Century Translation of the *Meditationes Vitae Christi*: a Study, with Special Reference to the Passion Section".
- <sup>2</sup> EETS OS 169 (1927), referred to here as "Brown". All quotations from the *Southern Passion* are from this edition.
- <sup>3</sup> I am preparing a critical edition of the *Ministry and Passion* for publication in 1984 in the Middle English Texts series of Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, Heidelberg. The "long poem" to which Elizabeth Salter refers has also been known as the "Long Life of Christ", but the first part has now been recognised as a separate composition to which the *Ministry and Passion* forms a sequel: see *The South English Nativity of Mary and Christ*, ed. O.S. Pickering, Middle English Texts 1 (Heidelberg, 1975) pp.20-3.
- <sup>4</sup> See, for example, the uncertainty admitted in Manfred Görlach, *The Textual Tradition of the South English Legendary*, Leeds Texts and Monographs, n.s. 6 (Leeds, 1974) p.19.
- <sup>5</sup> The evidence is presented in my article, "The *Southern Passion* and the *Ministry and Passion*: the Work of a Middle English Reviser", forthcoming in *Leeds Studies in English* for 1984. The statement that *MP* is derived from *SP*, made in O.S. Pickering, "The *Temporale* Narratives of the *South English Legendary*", *Anglia* 91 (1973) pp.445-6, now needs correction.
- <sup>6</sup> *SP* 1524, 1583, and 1349, in Derek Pearsall, *Old English and Middle English Poetry* (London, 1977) p.106.
- <sup>7</sup> Quotations from *MP* are from the text to be published in my critical edition (see fn.3 above), based on St John's College, Cambridge, MS B.6, ff.35r-69v. [ ] indicates an editorial addition or substitution, + an editorial omission.
- <sup>8</sup> See Pickering, "The *Temporale* Narratives", pp.446-8, and the introduction to the forthcoming edition of *MP*.
- <sup>9</sup> The poem is unprinted. I quote from Trinity College, Cambridge, MS R.3.25, ff.185v-6r.
- <sup>10</sup> MS Harley 2247's text of *SP* 1604, reading *As*, i.e. "as if", instead of *And* (Brown, p.59), makes it clearer that Christ spoke through the prophet, not the prophet through Christ. The verse "*Vulpes foveas habent, et volucres coeli nidus; filius autem hominis non habet ubi caput reclinet*" was in fact spoken by Christ himself during his Ministry (Mt. viii, 20; also Lu. ix, 58), but *SP* is apparently referring to Ps. lxxxiv, 3, "*Etenim passer invenit sibi domum; et turtur nidum sibi . . .*"
- <sup>11</sup> Egerton 1993, the other principal manuscript of the *Abridged Life*, moves even further away from the presumed original form of the passage, and recasts 447-54, 459-64 into short couplets, e.g. "*Alle þat goþ bi þe weie . ibideþ a while ich ou preiþe / And lokeþ he seide whar eni pine . or eni serwe be aþen mine*" (f.26v).

- <sup>12</sup> Salter, p.101; Pearsall, *Old English and Middle English Poetry*, p.106.
- <sup>13</sup> "Die 'Meditationes vitae Christi': ihre handschriftliche Ueberlieferung und die Verfasserfrage", *Archivum franciscanum historicum*, 25 (1932) pp.3-35, 175-209, 305-48, 449-83. He refers briefly to Brown's edition of *SP* on pp.345 and 476.
- <sup>14</sup> Convenient summaries of recent opinion about *MVC*'s date and authorship are provided in *Meditaciones de passione Christi olim Sancto Bonaventurae attributae*, ed. Sister M. Jordan Stallings, Catholic University of America, Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Language and Literature, 25 (Washington, 1965), and in Walter Baier, *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 Cartusiana 44, 3 vols. (Salzburg, 1977), II, pp.326-8. E. Colledge, in "'Dominus cuidam devotae suae': a Source for Pseudo-Bonaventura", *Franciscan Studies* 36 (1976) pp.105-7, has recently advanced fresh evidence for a date of composition not earlier than 1300. A.G. Little, *English Franciscan History* (Manchester, 1917) p.146, stated that the Latin preaching handbook *Fasciculus Morum* refers to "Bonaventura (Life of Christ)", a point taken up for dating purposes by Brown, p.lv, and Salter, p.41. *Fasciculus Morum* is usually dated c.1320, but Siegfried Wenzel, *Verses in Sermons: "Fasciculus Morum" and its Middle English Poems* (Cambridge, Mass., 1978) pp.26-34, has now re-dated it to the beginning of the fourteenth century. Professor Wenzel tells me, however, that he knows of no reference to *MVC* in the *Fasciculus*, and he suggests that Little may have been misled by the reference to the apocryphal Infancy Gospel in Book III.
- <sup>15</sup> I have used the edition by A.C. Peltier, *Opera omnia S. Bonaventurae* (Paris, 1868), XII, pp.509-630, and the translation by Isa Ragusa and Rosalie B. Green, *Meditations on the Life of Christ: an Illustrated Manuscript of the Fourteenth Century* (Princeton, 1961).
- <sup>16</sup> Cf. ultimately Ezechiel xxxii, 24, "et portaverunt ignominiam suam cum his, qui descendunt in lacum". Mrs Brown does not record that the "less close analogue" she quotes from Pseudo-Bernard, *Sermo de Vita et Passione Domini*, PL 184, col. 960, occurs with almost identical wording in the paragraph "Jesus cruci elevatus" of the *Lignum Vitae* (Peltier, *ed.cit.*, XII, p.76).
- <sup>17</sup> Ed. T. Graesse (Dresden, 1846; 3rd edition, 1890).
- <sup>18</sup> See, for example, *Meditations on the Life and Passion of Christ*, ed. C. D'Evelyn, EETS OS 158 (1921) ll.1143-52. This work is a fourteenth-century translation of John of Hoveden's *Philomena* of the later thirteenth century.
- <sup>19</sup> It is notable that *SP* 837-8, the most striking of the short "parallels" with *MVC* (see above), also does not occur in *MP*. But the fact that *SP* contains two new passages (totalling twelve lines) that can be closely paralleled in *MVC* does not amount to proof that the work itself was known to the reviser any more than to *MP*'s author. The chronology, too, remains difficult.
- <sup>20</sup> For a discussion of the two methods of Crucifixion, see F.P. Pickering, *Literature and Art in the Middle Ages* (Coral Gables, Florida, 1970) pp.236-45; see also E. Roy, *Le mystère de la Passion en France du XI<sup>e</sup> au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris, 1904) pp.91-3.

- 21 See the illustrations in G. Millet, *Recherches sur l'iconographie de l'Evangile* (Paris, 1916), chap. VI. I owe this reference (and some others) to Mr Peter Rees-Jones, who is making a study of the subject.
- 22 Quoted from *Middle English Religious Prose*, ed. N.F. Blake, York Medieval Texts (London, 1972) p.70.
- 23 For example, Peter Comestor's *Historia Scholastica*, Vincent of Beauvais' *Speculum Historiale*, and the *Legenda Aurea*; the meditations and sermons of Bernard and his followers; and of course the liturgy.
- 24 See Pamela Gradon, *Form and Style in Early English Literature* (London, 1971) p.308; Douglas Gray, *Themes and Images in the Medieval English Religious Lyric* (London, 1972) pp.126-7.
- 25 See Salter, pp.119-49.
- 26 Pseudo-Bernard, *Lamentatio in Passionem Christi*, PL 184, col. 772, here quoted from Gradon, *Form and Style*, p.301.
- 27 Quoted from *English Writings of Richard Rolle, Hermit of Hampole*, ed. Hope Emily Allen (Oxford, 1931) p.26.
- 28 PL 94, cols. 561-8.
- 29 Among Latin works, it is noticeable that the *Lignum Vitae* also addresses mankind in a general way. To the passages quoted by Brown (pp.lxxxix and xc) and already referred to may, for example, be added: "Et tu, perditte homo, totius confusionis et contritionis hujus causa existens, quomodo non in fletum erumpis foras?" (Peltier, p.75, from the paragraph "Jesus morte damnatus").
- 30 See *The Harley Lyrics*, ed. G.L. Brook, 3rd edition (Manchester, 1964) pp.57-60.
- 31 *Religious Lyrics of the XIVth Century*, ed. Carleton Brown, 2nd edition (Oxford, 1952) p.2.
- 32 For the concept of a "meditating 'I'" in religious lyrics, see Wenzel, *Verses in Sermons*, pp.129-30.
- 33 *The English Religious Lyric in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1968) p.31.
- 34 This, and the subsequent lines from *St Mary of Egypt* and *All Souls*, are quoted from *The South English Legendary*, ed. C. D'Evelyn and Anna J. Mill, EETS 235-6 (1956), II, p.364, I, p.138, and II, p.470.
- 35 *The South English Nativity of Mary and Christ*, ed. Pickering, p.74, from where the subsequent quotation is also taken (pp.93-4).