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THE ANGLO-SAXON TRANSFORMATIONS  
OF THE BIBLICAL THEMES IN THE OLD ENGLISH POEM  
*THE DREAM OF THE ROOD*

ABSTRACT

The main aim of this article is to present the Old English poem *The Dream of the Rood* as a literary work successfully mingling Christian and Germanic traditions. The poet very skillfully applies the pattern of traditional secular heroic poetry to Christian subject-matter creating a coherent unity. The Biblical themes and motifs are shaped by the Germanic frame of mind because the addressees of the poem were a warrior society with a developed ethos of honour and courage, quite likely to identify with a god who professed the same values. Although the Christian story of the Passion is narrated from the Anglo-Saxon point of view, the most fundamental values coming from the suffering of Jesus and his key role in God's plan to redeem mankind remain unchanged: the universal notions of Redemption, Salvation and Heavenly Kingdom do not lose their primary meaning.

KEY WORDS

Bible, rood, crucifixion, Anglo-Saxon, transformation

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*The Dream of the Rood* is a masterpiece of Old English religious poetry. Written in alliterative verse and maintained in the convention of dream allegory, this piece of early medieval literature is a mixture of Christian and Anglo-Saxon traditions. Although they seem to be contrasting, they are not antagonistic: these two worlds mingle together creating a coherent unity. The aim of this article is to explore how the Biblical inspirations in the *The Dream of the Rood* are transformed by the influence of the spirit of heroism pervading Anglo-Saxon literature and life.

Benjamin Thorpe (1782–1870), an English scholar of Anglo-Saxon literature, gave the title to the poem in 1836 in his editorial notes to the late tenth-century manuscript, the so-called Vercelli Book containing the literary work. Sometimes the title is alternately given as *The Vision of the Cross*<sup>1</sup>. The poem is believed to have originated much earlier than the manuscript – it is likely to be one of the oldest works of Old English literature<sup>2</sup>. Its authorship remains unclear. There are two early medieval poets who could have composed the poem. Charles W. Kennedy<sup>3</sup> and other scholars give the names of Caedmon (the seventh century) and Cynewulf (the eighth/ninth century) as possible authors. 15 of the 156 lines of *The Vision of the Cross* are carved in runic letters on the Ruthwell Cross in Dumfriesshire in the Lowlands of Scotland. It was a preaching cross, raised in a missionary area in Northumbria, around the year 700<sup>4</sup>. The Ruthwell Cross and the Vercelli manuscript are separated by a distance of 1000 miles and a period of 270 years. Michael Alexander claims that it is very likely that the poem had been composed before the cross was built<sup>5</sup>. He adds that there were many Celtic crosses erected at that time in Ireland and Scotland, but only in the area of Northumbria can such free-standing crosses be found nowadays<sup>6</sup>.

The poem is clearly a missionary one composed to spread the cult of the Cross among the Germanic tribes occupying England at the time. Its addressee was a warrior society with a developed ethos of honour and courage, quite likely to identify with a god who professed the same values. That is why the poet invests Christ with the enthusiasm and heroic zeal typical of great warriors of the early medieval period, dedicated to aggressive behavior and the cult of physical

<sup>1</sup> C. L. Wrenn, *A Study of Old English Literature*, London 1967, p. 134–135.

<sup>2</sup> M. Alexander, *Macmillan History of Literature. Old English Literature*, ed. A. N. Jeffares, London 1983, p. 177.

<sup>3</sup> Ch. W. Kennedy, *The Earliest English Poetry. A Critical Survey of the Poetry Written before the Norman Conquest with Illustrative Translations*, London 1971, p. 260–261.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 176–177.

<sup>5</sup> M. Alexander, *op. cit.*, p. 177.

<sup>6</sup> All those crosses have their origin in the East where the cult began. The cross had become a symbol of Christianity in the fourth century, and reached Britain three centuries later. This probably happened after 597 when Pope Gregory the Great sent a missionary, St. Augustine, to christianise the Anglo-Saxons (J. Blair, *The Anglo-Saxon Period*, [in:] *The Oxford History of Britain*, ed. K. O. Morgan, Oxford 1984, p. 76–78).

proWess. *The Dream of the Rood* shares some elements of the Germanic vision of heroism and interest in manly courage while it remains a religious text with a missionary purpose. The poem incorporates all the essential elements of the Biblical Passion: Jesus being mocked, tortured and nailed to the cross, his suffering, death, burial and resurrection. The vision of the Crucifixion is steeped in the language of traditional imagery developed in epic and heroic poetry of the Anglo-Saxons and is narrated by the personified Cross itself.

The Cross is presented richly ornamented with precious gems (Germanic society practiced the custom of gift-giving and understood the value of beautiful material objects)<sup>7</sup>.

Syllic wæs se sigebēam and ic synnum fāh,  
forwunded mid wommum. Geseah ic wuldres trēow  
wædum geweorðod wynnum scīnan,  
gegyred mid golde; gimmas hæfdon  
bewrigen weorðlice Wealdendes trēow<sup>8</sup>

(*DR* lines: 13–17)<sup>9</sup>

The description of the Rood evokes associations with the Five Holy Wounds of Jesus Christ, which were the result of his outspoken suffering: his hands and feet were nailed to the cross, whereas his left side was pierced with a lance by a soldier checking if the tormented God's Son was still alive. The five gems that decorate the vehicle for redemption are splendid and attract the poet's attention.

Eall þæt bēacen wæs  
begoten mid golde; gimmas stōdon  
fægere æt foldan scēatum, swylce þær fife wæron  
uppe on þām eaxlgespanne<sup>10</sup>

(*DR* lines: 6–9)<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> The Anglo-Saxon society was bound by ties of kinship. Gift-giving revealed the power of the lord and secured the loyalty of his thanes. That is why the basis of social relations was wealth. The Anglo-Saxon appreciation of riches was transferred to the Cross.

<sup>8</sup> *The Dream of the Rood*, [in:] *A Choice of Anglo-Saxon Verse*, ed. R. Hamer, London 1970, p. 160.

<sup>9</sup> "Wondrous was that tree of victory, and I stained with sins/ wounded sorely with defects, I saw the tree of glory,/honoured with garments, shining joyously,/adorned with gold. Gems had/splendidly covered the Lord's tree" (*The Dream of the Rood: an Electronic Edition* (2012), ed. M. Rambaran-Olm, [online], available at: [http://www.dreamofrood.co.uk/frame\\_start.htm](http://www.dreamofrood.co.uk/frame_start.htm) [December 12, 2012]).

<sup>10</sup> R. Hamer, op. cit., p. 160.

Howard R. Patch observes that

[i]t seems fairly safe, [...], to believe that in the dream the poet mentions the five jewels not only because they were prominent in the actual cross that he knew (i.e. the *Crux Gemmata*<sup>12</sup> traditionally symbolizing the triumph of Christ in Christian iconography), but because they represented the sacred wounds, and interpretation of some power<sup>13</sup>.

Christ's wounds are a vehicle of his victory over sin. Interestingly, there is an element of the Christian tradition in this picture of the glorious Cross, too. The poet sees that the Rood is guarded by bands of angels "engeldryhta feala" (l. 9) and holy spirits "hālige gāstas" (l.11).

While discussing the Passion, the narrator departs from some of the New Testament descriptions of the Biblical story about Salvation in which the physical weakness of Jesus is shown. The Cross does not mention the fact the it was carried by tormented and blood-covered Jesus (John 19,17)<sup>14</sup> and Simon of Cyrene, who helped Christ when he was not able to continue the Way of the Cross (Matthew 27,32)<sup>15</sup>. The Bible shows that Christ was extremely exhausted going to Golgotha; he fell three times under the heaviness of the wooden tool of torture. In the poem, neither Christ nor Simon of Cyrene carry the Rood. It waits for Jesus on the hill<sup>16</sup>:

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<sup>11</sup> "That beacon was all/covered with gold. Gems stood/beautiful at the surface of the earth, there were five also/up on the central joint of the cross" (*The Dream of the Rood: An Electronic Edition*).

<sup>12</sup> The idea of *Crux Gemmata* is Roman. The tradition of decorating crosses goes back to the Late Antiquity, when it was a common practice to decorate objects with gems in general. The jewelled cross appears for the first time in the early fourth century with the alledged discovery of the True Cross by St. Helene. The Germanic tribes, who appreciated riches, willingly adopted the new idea.

<sup>13</sup> H. R. Patch (1919), *Liturgical Influence in the "Dream of the Rood"*, p. 245, [online], Available at: JSTOR [December 6, 2012].

<sup>14</sup> "17 They took Jesus therefore: and he went out, bearing the cross for himself, unto the place called in Hebrew Golgotha: 18 where they crucified him, and with him two others, on either side one, and Jesus in the midst" (*The Holy Bible*, New York 1901, p. 117).

<sup>15</sup> "And as they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name: him they compelled to go with them, that he might bear his cross" (ibidem, p. 33). See also Mark 15, 21, p. 54 and Luke 23, 26, p. 90.

<sup>16</sup> According to the apocryphal tradition, after expelling Adam and Eve for disobedience from Paradise, God promises the couple to give them the *oil of mercy* healing from sin-wounds. After many years Adam asks his son Seth to bring him the heavenly mixture. Unfortunately for the old man, St. Michael states that the oil will be brought by Jesus when he comes to die in order to redeem mankind. When Seth is leaving Paradise, the archangel gives him three pippins of cedar, cypress and pine (they embody the Holy Trinity) coming from the forbidden Tree of Life. He orders Seth to put them under the tongue of his dead father. The three trees grow out of Adam's dead body. Many years pass when they join into one tree when brought to Jerusalem by King Solomon. Finally, the tree is used by the Jews to

Ongan þā word sprecan wudu sēlesta:  
‘Þæt wæs gēara iū, ic þæt gýta geman,  
þæt ic wæs āhēawen holtes on ende,  
āstyred of stefne mīnum. Genāman mē dær strange  
fēondas,  
geworhton him þær tō wāfersýne, hēton mē heora  
wergas hebban<sup>17</sup>

(DR lines 27–31)<sup>18</sup>

Not telling about Jesus’ anguish is done on purpose. The poet omits Christ’s fatigue and pain in order to portray the Saviour as an ultimate hero, characterized by might and heroism, making him inferior to his executioners. The image of the maltreated Son of omnipotent God does not correspond to the Germanic ethos of a triumphant warrior of incredible physical strength, whose image is fully presented in the Old-English poem *Beowulf*. Beowulf, being a praised and acclaimed Anglo-Saxon fighter ”þrītiges/manna mægen-cræft on his mundgripe/heaþo-rōf hæbbe”<sup>19</sup> (1.379–381)<sup>20</sup>. Other words describing Beowulf: “mægenes strengest/on þæm dæge þysses lifes,/æþele and ēacen”<sup>21</sup> (1.196–198)<sup>22</sup> emphasise the physical might of the warrior. It is not surprising that the Anglo-Saxon image of Jesus differs from the vision of the passive victim constructed by the Biblical narratives. The Gospels present Christ not only as a divine creature, but also a human being, who experiences fear and doubts while praying in the Garden of Gethsemane the night before his death. Frightened and covered with bloody sweat, Christ suffers emotional torments. This is revealed in his desperate words: “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass away from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt” (Matthew 26, 39)<sup>23</sup>. In the poem the emotional and physical suffering of Jesus is not mentioned on purpose, as it does not go well with the Germanic notion of physical power and courage. In the dream vision Jesus’ feelings are transferred to the Cross:

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make a cross to crucify Christ. The legend says that the Cross on which Jesus died was found by Constantine’s mother, Helena.

<sup>17</sup> R. Hamer, op. cit., p. 162.

<sup>18</sup> “It was years ago (that, I still remember),/that I was cut down from the edge of the forest,/removed from my foundation./Strong enemies seized me there, they made me into a spectacle for themselves, commanded me to lift up their criminals” (*The Dream of the Rood: An Electronic Edition*).

<sup>19</sup> *Beowulf*, ed. A. J. Wyatt, Cambridge 1894, p. 17.

<sup>20</sup> “that he thirty/men's strength in the grip of his hand/renowned in war, has;” (*Beowulf* (2012), trans. B. Slade, [online], available at: [www.heorot.dk/beowulf-rede-text.html](http://www.heorot.dk/beowulf-rede-text.html) [July 7, 2013]).

<sup>21</sup> *Beowulf*, ed. A. J. Wyatt, op. cit., p. 9.

<sup>22</sup> “of the greatest strength,/on that day in this life,/noble and mighty” (*Beowulf*, trans. B. Slade, op. cit.).

<sup>23</sup> *The Holy Bible*, op. cit., p. 31. See also Mark 14, 34–39, p. 53, and Luke 22, 42–44, p. 89.

Þurhdrifan hī mē mid deorcan næglum, on mē syndon  
þā dolg gesīene,  
opene inwidhlemmas<sup>24</sup>

(*DR* lines: 46–47)<sup>25</sup>

*The Dream of the Rood* presents Christ in the Germanic convention as a fearless hero and an aggressive young warrior who boldly faces his destiny. The Cross uses adjectives like ‘mōdig’ (l.41), ‘strang’ and ‘stīðmōd’ (l.40) (brave, strong and resolute) with reference to the Saviour. Jesus’ image differs from the Christian tradition alluding to him as a sacrificial lamb — meek and passive<sup>26</sup>. Jesus prepares himself for the final battle against sin like a warrior:

Geseah ic þā  
Frēan mancynnes  
efstan elne micle þæt Hē mē wolde on gestīgan<sup>27</sup>

(*DR* lines: 33–34)<sup>28</sup>

In the poem Jesus strips himself and mounts the Cross on his own,

Ongyrede Hine þā geong hæleð þæt wæs God ælmihtig,  
strang and stīðmōd; gestāh Hē on gealgan hēanne  
mōdig on manigra gesyhðe, þā Hē wolde mancyn lȳsan<sup>29</sup>

(*DR* lines: 39–41)<sup>30</sup>

whereas in the Bible he is humiliated and brutally stripped by Roman soldiers:

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<sup>24</sup> R. Hamer, op. cit., p. 162.

<sup>25</sup> “They pierced me with dark nails. On me, the scars are visible,/open malicious wounds” (*The Dream of the Rood: An Electronic Edition*).

<sup>26</sup> See the Trial before the Sanhedrin: Matthew 26, 59–64, p. 310, Mark, 14, 60–61, p. 53, and Luke 22, 70, p. 89.

<sup>27</sup> R. Hamer, op. cit., p. 162.

<sup>28</sup> “Then I saw mankind’s Lord/hasten with great zeal, that he wished to climb upon me” (*The Dream of the Rood: An Electronic Edition*).

<sup>29</sup> R. Hamer, op. cit., p. 162.

<sup>30</sup> “The young hero stripped himself then (that was God Almighty),/strong and resolute. He ascended onto the high gallows,/brave in the sight of many, there, [since] he wished to release mankind” (*The Dream of the Rood: An Electronic Edition*).

27 Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the Praetorium, and gathered unto him the whole band. 28 And they stripped him, and put on him a scarlet robe. 29 And they platted a crown of thorns and put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand; and they kneeled down before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews! 30 And they spat upon him, and took the reed, and smote him on the head. 31 And after that they had mocked him, they took off from him the robe, and put on him his own garments, and led him away to crucify him (Matthew 27, 28–31)<sup>31</sup>.

In the poem, the moment of Jesus' death is also presented differently than in the Bible. Perhaps this is because in the Germanic culture death and dying were common phenomena, and warriors sooner or later met their destiny. Death was perceived on three levels, and the poem refers to the first one, that is the moment of physical separation of soul from body<sup>32</sup>. The Cross reports that Jesus "hæfde His/gāst onsended" (l.49), which indicates his active participation in his death. In the Bible, the dying Jesus is more passive and exhausted, and, consequently, unable to send his spirit forward. Saint Mark the Apostle writes that he "uttered a loud voice, and gave up the ghost"(16, 37)<sup>33</sup>. Saint Matthew (27, 45–46) reports that:

45 Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour. 46 And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli lama sabachthani? that is, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? [...] And behold, the veil of the temple was rent in two from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake; and the rocks were rent; 52 and the tombs were opened; and many bodies of the saints that had fallen asleep were raised; 53 and coming forth out of the tombs after his resurrection they entered into the holy city and appeared unto many<sup>34</sup>.

The descriptions of the reaction of Nature towards the death of Jesus both in the Bible and in the poem share some similarities: darkness and earthquake. The darkness veiling the world at Jesus' death corresponds to the Gospel. The Cross reports it like Saint Matthew does:

Feala ic on þām beorge gebiden hæbbe  
wrāðra wyrda. Geseah ic weruda God  
pearle þenian; þýstro hæfdon  
bewrigen mid wolcnum Wealdendes hræw,  
scīrne scīman sceadu forðeode,

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<sup>31</sup> *The Holy Bible*, op. cit., p. 33. See also Mark 15, 26–20, p. 54.

<sup>32</sup> A. J. Frantzen, *Anglo-Saxon Keywords*, Chichester 2012, p. 67–70.

<sup>33</sup> *The Holy Bible*, op. cit., p. 33. See also Luke 23, 46, p. 91.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 33. See also Luke 23, 44–46, p. 91 and John 19, 30, p. 117.

wann under wolcnum. Wēop eal gesceaft,  
cwīðdon Cyninges fyll. Crīst wæs on rōde<sup>35</sup>

(*DR* lines: 50–56)<sup>36</sup>

According to Charles Kennedy, "[t]he darkness which falls upon the earth [...] [the poet] inherits from Biblical source"<sup>37</sup>. Yet, what follows Christ's death is presented differently by the two literary masterpieces. While narrating the burial of Jesus, the Bible mentions Joseph of Arimathea<sup>38</sup>, who owns a stone tomb where the dead body is laid. In the poem Joseph is not mentioned even once. Also the description of Jesus' burial reflects the ideals of the Germanic culture. The Bible presents the ceremony as quiet and simple. Saint Matthew the Apostle reports that "Joseph took the body, and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had hewn out in the rock: and he rolled a great stone to the door of the tomb and departed. And Mary Magdalene was there, and the other Mary, sitting on the sepulcher" (27, 59-60)<sup>39</sup>. In *The Dream of the Rood* Christ's burial is monumental and solemn, worthy of a brave warrior:

Ongunnon Him þā  
moldern wyrcan  
beornas on banan gesyhðe; curfon hīe ðæt of beorhtan  
stāne,  
gesetton hīe ðæron sigora Wealdend. Ongunnon Him þā  
sorhlēoð galan  
earme on þā æfentīde. þā hīe woldon eft sīðian  
mēðe fram þām mæran þeodne, reste Hē ðær mæte  
weorode<sup>40</sup>

(*DR* lines: 65–69)<sup>41</sup>

<sup>35</sup> R. Hamer, op. cit., p. 163–164.

<sup>36</sup> "I endured many cruel events/on that hill. I saw the Lord of Hosts/severely stretched out. Darkness/had covered the bright radiance/of the Lord's corpse with clouds, a shadow went forth,/dark under the sky. All of creation wept,/they lamented the King's death. Christ was on the cross" (*The Dream of the Rood: an Electronic Edition*).

<sup>37</sup> Ch. Kennedy, op. cit., p. 264.

<sup>38</sup> See Matthew 27, 57–60, p. 33, Mark 15, 42–46, p. 55, Luke 23, 50–53, p. 91, and John 19, 38–40, p. 117–118.

<sup>39</sup> *The Holy Bible*, op. cit., p. 33. See also Mark 15,42–47, p. 55, Luke 23, 52–53, p. 91, and John 19, 38–41, p. 118–119.

<sup>40</sup> R. Hamer, op. cit., p. 164.

<sup>41</sup> "The men began to make a sepulcher for him/in the sight of his slayer; they carved it out of bright stone;/they put him, the Lord of Victories, therein. The wretched began to sing him a song of sorrow/in the evening-time, then they wanted to go again,/wearily from the glorious prince. He rested there with little company" (*The Dream of the Rood: an Electronic Edition*).



Jesus is buried like a true Germanic hero. His burial has a lot in common with the one of Beowulf:

Him ðā gegiredan Gēata lēode  
ād on eorðan unwāclícne  
helmum behongen hildēbordum  
beorhtum byrnum swā hē bēna wæs  
ālegdon ðā tōmiddes mǣrne þeoden

[...] swōgende lēg  
wōpe bewunden<sup>42</sup>

(*Beowulf*, lines: 3137–3141, 3145–3146)<sup>43</sup>

The message conveyed by the poem and the Bible and is the same: mankind's salvation and redemption is impossible without Jesus' suffering. In this respect, there is no discrepancy between the two sources, since the Germanic tradition is, in fact, Christian.

Nū ic þē hāte, hǣleð mīn se lēofa,  
þæt ðū þās gesyhðe secge mannum,  
onwrēoh wordum þæt hit is wuldres bēam,  
se ðe ælmihtig God on þrōwode  
for mancynnes manegum synnum  
and Ādōmes ealdgewyrhtum<sup>44</sup>

(*DR* lines: 95–100)<sup>45</sup>

The Bible tells its believers that Redemption can be achieved only through Christ's death. In his Epistle to the Romans, Paul the Apostle writes that "God commendeth his own love toward us, in that, while we were sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, shall we be saved from the wrath of God through him" (5, 8–9)<sup>46</sup>. Saint John the Apostle adds that

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<sup>42</sup> *Beowulf*, ed. A. J. Wyatt, op. cit., p. 134.

<sup>43</sup> "Then for him prepared the people of the Geats/a pyre on the earth, not trifling./hung with helmets, with battle-shields,/with bright byrnies, as he had requested;/they laid then in the midst the famed chieftain", "swarthy over the heat, the roaring flame woven with weeping – the tumult of winds lay still" (*Beowulf*, trans. B. Slade, op. cit.).

<sup>44</sup> R. Hamer, op. cit., p. 167–168.

<sup>45</sup> "Now I command you, my beloved warrior,/that you tell this vision to men./reveal in words that it is the tree of glory,/on which Almighty God suffered/for mankind's many sins" (*The Dream of the Rood: an Electronic Edition*).

<sup>46</sup> *The Holy Bible*, op. cit., p. 161.

“[f]or God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life” (3,16–17)<sup>47</sup>. This Biblical notion of Salvation is also present in *The Dream of the Rood*:

Ac hīe þonne forhtiað ond fēa þencap,  
hwæt hīe tō Crīste cweðan onginnen.  
Ne þearf ðær þonne ænig anforht wasan  
þe him ær in brēostum bereð bēacna sēlest,  
ac ðurh ðā rōde sceal rīce gesēcan  
of eorðwege æghwylc sāwl,  
sēo þe mid Wealdende wunian þenceð<sup>48</sup>

(DR lines: 115–121)<sup>49</sup>

The image of Christ in *The Dream of the Rood* brings hope. God’s Son fights the final battle against sin, which ends the long-standing conflict between Good and Evil. The triumph is revealed in Jesus’ resurrection. The reward is eternal life in the Heavenly Kingdom achieved with the help of the Cross<sup>50</sup>. This promised realm presented by the narrator resembles the Germanic Valhalla, though.

wuniaþ on wuldre; and ic wēne mē  
daga gehwylce hwnæne mē Dryhtnes rōd,  
þe ic hēr on eorðan ær scēawode,  
on þysson lænan life gefetige  
and mē þonne gebringe þær is blis mycel,  
drēam on heofonum, þær is Dryhtnes folc  
geseted tō symle, þær is singāl blis,  
and mē þonne āsette þær ic syþþan mōt  
wunian on wuldre, well mid þām hālgum  
drēames brūcan. Sī mē Dryhten frēond [...]<sup>51</sup>

(DR lines:135–144)<sup>52</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Ibidem, p. 33

<sup>48</sup> “But then they fear, and few think of/what to begin to say to Christ./None needs to be afraid [of]/of [he] who already bears on his breast the best of signs./but through the cross, each soul must seek/the kingdom from the earthly way./those who intend to dwell with the Lord” (*The Dream of the Rood: an Electronic Edition*).

<sup>49</sup> R. Hamer, op. cit., p. 168.

<sup>50</sup> S. B. Greenfield, *The Interpretation of Old English Poems*, London and Boston 1972, p. 23.

<sup>51</sup> R. Hamer, op. cit., p. 170.

<sup>52</sup> “they dwell in glory, and each day/I look forward to the time when the cross of the Lord/that I previously saw here on the earth./in this temporary life, will fetch me, and will then bring me to where great bliss is./joy in the heavens, where the Lord’s people are/seated at the feast, where perpetual joy is;/then it may set me, where afterwards I might dwell in glory, with the saints” (*The Dream of the Rood: an Electronic Edition*).

From the Biblical report, it is known that having risen from the dead, Jesus did not hide his wounds from his disciples, as they were not only the proof of his Resurrection and his divine power, but also the confirmation of God's love of people. In the poem, the Cross shows the wounds to the poet. The Biblical themes and motifs are shaped by the Germanic frame of mind. Even the image of blood and water coming from the pierced side of Jesus, which appears in the Bible, is influenced by the Anglo-Saxon spirit. The Cross, which embodies Jesus (with his side pierced), is wet with water and drenched with blood, but at the same time, decorated with treasure:

Geseah ic þæt fīse  
bēacen  
wendan wǣdum and blēom; hwīlum hit wæs mid wǣtan  
bestēmed,  
beswyled mid swātes gange, hwīlum mid since gegyrwed<sup>53</sup>

(DR: lines: 21–23)<sup>54</sup>

To conclude, the poem *The Dream of the Rood* is an Old English literary work presenting the Christian story of the Passion told from the Anglo-Saxon perspective. The poet adopts the Germanic point of view in retelling the story of Man's Salvation to appeal to his audience. Although the Christian and Germanic perspectives differ and offer divergent images of the Cross, Jesus Christ and his death, there is no clash between them in presenting the most essential values coming from the Passion. In the poem the universal notions of Redemption, Salvation and Heavenly Kingdom do not lose their primary meaning, although they are transformed by the Anglo-Saxon spirit of heroism, and values like courage, physical strength and wealth, the Germanic tribes valued in their life. The poem shows that of Christian and Germanic values can be successfully mingled together creating a coherent unity when their common denominator is saving man from sin.

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<sup>53</sup> R. Hamer, op. cit., p. 170.

<sup>54</sup> "I was afraid in the presence of that beautiful sight. I saw that noble beacon/change its coverings and colour; sometimes it was drenched with moisture,/soaked with the flow of blood, sometimes adorned with treasure" (*The Dream of the Rood: an Electronic Edition*).

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