

Re-visioning the Cross in “The Dream of the Rood”
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In the first line of the Old English poem “The Dream of the Rood” the reader is called to listen to “the choicest of visions” (Glenn l.1). It is not unusual for “vision” and “dream” to be used interchangeably, but in 2015 the word “rood” has fallen into disuse—and must not be mistaken for its homonym “rude.” In the *Oxford English Dictionary*, most of the definitions for “rood” suggest we should understand it as it is used in “The Dream of the Rood” as a representation of “the cross upon which Jesus suffered” (*OED* 3.a). As a result, from the poem’s title and the first line as it is interpreted in Jonathan Glenn’s 1982 version of the poem, I expect to “hear” of a dream of the cross, the cross on which Christ was crucified. In this paper I will discuss my response to this dream-poem from my perspective as a non-Christian living twenty centuries after the Christ story is set, and ten centuries after this poem was written. What most surprises me about the poem is the fact that it generates a sympathetic reaction in me, despite my disbelief in the importance of Jesus and my skepticism about the details of his crucifixion.

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In conclusion, in each reading of “The Dream of the Rood” I find myself feeling sympathetic toward the speaker of the poem. The first time I read “The Dream of the Rood” I had thought the emotion aroused was toward the figure of Christ, but upon deeper analysis of my response I discover that the sympathy I feel is toward the fictitious person relating the dream because it shows how dire are his or her own circumstances and how deeply s/he needs to believe s/he can be and will be saved. So the fact that I am not a Christian is not really relevant to my sympathy being aroused. It turns out that common humanity is what I see in this re-visioning of the cross.

Works Cited

Glenn, Jonathan. Translator. “The Dream of the Rood.” 2006. Web. Sept. 25, 2015.

Oxford English Dictionary. n.d. Web. Sept. 25, 2015.