The Best Kind of Bloody Mess

In an excerpt from the seventh chapter of Julian’s *Book of Showings*, the author depicts Christ’s extreme suffering as he hangs on the cross, waiting to die a gruesome death. Particular attention is paid to the beads of blood that flow from Jesus’ forehead; their number is compared to droplets in a rainstorm, they spread evenly in a scale-like pattern across his brow, and each droplet possesses the perfect roundness of a pellet. While the metaphorical connections are vague, these comparisons are meant to evoke the perfect breadth, depth, and wholeness of Christ’s love for mankind. In the time period that this play was written audiences were entranced by a religious phenomenon known as ‘affective piety’, which encouraged them to meditate upon Christ’s suffering in order to truly understand the magnitude of his sacrifice for humanity. They devoured the delicately detailed suffering in these performances, as it allowed them to exist one step closer to their savior. Julian was well aware of this fact, and focused in on Christ’s suffering to capture the attention of an audience that was dedicated to furthering their connection with their spiritual savior.

Jesus’ blood is first compared to the plethora of raindrops that fall from a houses’ eaves on a stormy night. It falls, “so thick that no man may number them with no bodily wit”, suggesting that mankind is simply incapable of understanding the volume described. This references the unknowable enormity of Christ’s love and understanding that incessantly pours down on each and every soul, regardless of his or her worthiness. As the blood drips down his forehead it moves, “like the scale of herring”, evenly spreading out across his brow. This image reinforces notions of Jesus’ omniscience and omnipresence, the godly ability to see and understand anything and everything, never leaving an individual alone in his or her struggle against sin. Finally, Julian notes the roundness of each individual glob of blood; even as a most precious life force is being drawn from his body, it takes on a geometric perfection that aligns with Christ’s utter flawlessness. In spite of his extreme suffering, Jesus retains a respectable and admirable grace, remaining beautiful and godly even in his most agonizing moment. This subtly reminds the reader that, though Jesus *is* suffering for the sins of mankind, he still embodies the divine love of God; his perfection cannot be masked nor quelled by mortal pain, and will not fail the audience.

Julian depicts Jesus’ suffering with a gruesome level of detail in order to assault the reader with “affective piety”, with particular attention paid to the painful emotions that accompanied Christ’s crucifixion. This except of several paragraphs is devoted entirely to the bloody mess of Jesus’ head; the audience witnesses bleeding, “until many things were seen and understood”, describing the contemplation that such an event would inspire. The author says that despite the hideousness of the scene, “all of the sight that I saw was most comfort to me...and most fulfilled me with liking and sickerness (security) in seule.”, confirming that spiritual growth has come from the experience. Julian’s metaphors act on multiple levels, simultaneously denoting how unbearably excruciating Jesus’ torture was, and the proportional vastness of his love that this action represented.

The droplets, “fell so thick that no man may number them with no bodily wit” - the all-encompassing nature of a rainstorm is representative of Christ’s downpouring of love onto mankind.

“This showing was quick and lively and hideous and dreadful and sweet and lovely; and all of the sight that I saw this was most comfort to me, that our good Lord, that is so reverend and dreadful, is so homely and so courteous, and this most fulfilled me with liking and sickerness in seule”