

Article

The Image of Mary in Conversations with Her Son in the *Przemyśl Meditation*

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Abstract

This article examines the conversations between Mary and Jesus included in the *Przemyśl Meditation*—the most extensive Old Polish narrative work recounting the lives of Christ and His Mother. The analysis reveals a complex, dual image of Mary: on the one hand, she appears as a humble and helpless woman; on the other, as a powerful intercessor endowed with profound theological awareness. This duality is also reflected in her attitude toward her Son. In some passages, Mary identifies Jesus with the Father, emphasizing the unity of the Trinity, while in others, she clearly contrasts them, seeing in Jesus the suffering Son, obedient to a stern and relentless Father. The article explores the causes of these ambivalences, focusing on the narrative functions of the dialogues, their place within the structure of the work, and relevant extratextual contexts. The findings highlight the richness of medieval Marian thought and the theological tensions that shaped its expression in Polish religious literature.

Keywords: *Przemyśl Meditation*; Old Polish; image of Mary; dialogues; Polish Middle Ages

1. Introduction

This article argues that the dialogues between Mary and Jesus in the *Przemyśl Meditation* (*Rozmyślanie przemyskie* n.d., RP) function as a literary and theological tool, presenting Mary's complex duality—as a humble Handmaid and a mighty Mediatrix; Theotokos and humanly fearful mother on behalf of God. This study reveals how dialogue structures negotiate Marian doctrinal ambivalences between humility and authority prevalent in late medieval devotion.

The *Przemyśl Meditation* is the most extensive surviving Old Polish narrative text and, at the same time, an important witness to the development of Polish culture and religious language. This 15th-century apocryphal work has survived to our times in only one copy from the first half of the 16th century. The manuscript is stored in the National Library of Poland (sign. no. 8024 III). It bears traces of subsequent editing and copying and is genetically multi-layered. It is also an important text due to the specific nature of the Polish medieval legacy—not many narrative works from this period have survived, nor are there many editions with which the text could be compared.

The entire text of *Przemyśl Meditation* was published five times (Brückner 1907; Vrtel-Wierczyński 1952; Keller and Twardzik 1998, 2000, 2004; Korpus tekstów staropolskich 2016; Rojszczak-Robińska et al. 2021). In this article, I use the latest edition available at *Apocrypha*, a universal tool for the study of Polish apocryphal texts (apocrypha.amu.edu.pl).

The narrative begins with the scene of the Annunciation to Anne of the birth of Mary and ends with the description of Jesus' interrogation by Pilate. The author com-



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piled the text, and numerous studies to date confirm the creative nature of this process (Dorofeeva and Kelly [2024] 2025; Mahoney and Ó Riain 2022; Cré et al. 2020). The sources for the fragments with conversations between Jesus and Mary are the Gospels (the Finding of Jesus in the Temple—Luke 2:41–51 and the Wedding at Cana in Galilee—John 2:1–11), *Vita Beatae Virginis Mariae et Salvatoris rhythmica* (translated into prose), *Historia scholastica* by Peter Comestor, and *Passio Christi* by Jacques de Vitry. No sources have yet been identified for the chapters depicting the death of Joseph and the trial over the Holy Family's house after his death (RP144/24–147/21). Researchers have noted that the author of the *Przemyśl Meditation* made efforts to unify the text, which is evident, for example, in the way characters are named (Mika 2002) or in attempts to establish the course of events when sources differ (Rojaszczak-Robińska 2016). The relationship between the apocryphal text and the sources is not the subject of this study, although the sources undoubtedly shaped the image of Mary and defined her relationship with her Son. This study focuses on the Polish text, which reflects the state of Marian thought in Poland at a given moment in history. I assume that since the compilation process was creative in nature, the extant text reflects religious thought in Poland, adapted from Latin-language culture.

The *Przemyśl Meditation* is stylistically diverse, with erudite, didactic, and persuasive layers that do not exhaust the stylistic features of the text (Krażyńska 1995). The entire apocryphon contains charming and naive stories from Jesus' childhood, dolorous descriptions of the Passion, sermon outlines, and theological treatises. This diversity is also reflected in the material discussed in this article—the conversations between Jesus and Mary contained in the text of the *Przemyśl Meditation*. There are nine such conversations in the work, in scenes depicting:

- The resurrection of a Jewish boy (RP125/5–127/9);
- The killing and resurrection of a Jew (RP129/20–134/4);
- The finding in the Temple (RP143/15–144/23);
- The death of Joseph (RP144/24–146/20);
- The trial over the Holy Family's house after Joseph's death (RP146/20–147/21);
- The “catechetical” dialogue between Jesus and Mary (RP163/1–172/12);
- The wedding at Cana in Galilee (RP205/22–210/3);
- The conversation about the future Passion (RP498/24–505/17);
- Jesus' last conversation with his Mother before the Passion (RP523/4–526/6).

The material shows Mary's relationship with her Son at different stages of his life: in childhood, before the beginning of his public ministry, at its beginning, and at the very end, just before the Passion. The dialogues serve various functions within the text. They are presented as the direct cause of Jesus performing a miracle or taking action—a turning point in the stories about Jesus' works. The model for such a presentation is the Gospel passage about the Wedding at Cana. This model is used again in two stories about the resurrection of Jews and the scene of the trial over the house. Dialogues modelled on the Gospel passage about Finding Jesus in the Temple have a different narrative function. In these dialogues, Mary's conversation with her Son does not influence the events described (Jesus does not take any special action after it) but provides an explanation, often enigmatic and resulting from God's intentions. This type of dialogue includes the conversation before Joseph's death and both conversations before the Passion. As can be seen, this type is closely related to difficult events and suffering.

The “catechetical” dialogue between Jesus and Mary is a separate type. Its most important feature is its almost complete detachment from the rest of the narrative—the dialogue is not related to any events taking place, as evidenced by its lack of placement in time. The content of the conversation concerns issues that transcend time (relationships within the Trinity) and the entire history of salvation from the creation of the world to the

Assumption of Mary. The dialogue is a genre in itself, closely related to the catechetical and didactic purpose. It resembles catechisms in questions and answers¹.

The selected material varies in volume, sources, and content. I will comment on scenes of biblical origin as a kind of model and in terms of their departure from what is conveyed in the Gospels—in both cases, the author supplemented the biblical text with explanations. I have divided the entire material into three sections for the sake of clarity. First, I will discuss the short dialogues, then the catechetical dialogue, and finally the conversations before the Passion.

2. Short Dialogues

Short exchanges, woven into the narrative of Jesus' deeds, contain Mary's requests for miracles (resurrection, prevention of death, turning water into wine), advice (what to do in the face of false accusations or unjust lawsuits), or explanations (why Jesus remained in the Temple). Though brief, these dialogues reveal Mary's complex duality.

She is depicted both as a helpless woman ("Tell me, my dear little son, what I should do" RP126/3-5; "I as a woman, do not know how to take care. . ." RP145/12-16) and an effective mediator, utterly trusting Jesus' power: "do this for my sake, have mercy on him, forgive him his sin, resurrect him" RP133/11-16. The narrative seems to negotiate competing models of female passivity and maternal authority.

Mary's requests employ varied rhetoric. Indirect acts name problems ("they have no wine," rendered into direct speech: "As if she said: Give them wine." RP207/5-6) or seek advice ("what I should do. . ." RP126/3-5; "what should we do. . ." RP147/6-7), prompting Jesus to act. Direct requests also reveal Mary's dual image—both confident in her agency ("do this for my sake [. . .]" RP133/12-16) and compelled to rationally justify pleas ("you are still young, and I, as a woman, do not know how to take care, so I beg you [. . .]" RP145/12-16). Interestingly, rational arguments rarely have the desired effect (cf. Joseph's death scene), underscoring divine will over human logic.

Jesus' answers reveal his early understanding of the logic of salvation—incomprehensible to the human Mary. Divine necessity is opposed to human reasoning. Such justifications are also introduced as extensions of statements of biblical origin: "I am to be in these things, which are my father's, and I must already take care of his kingdom," (RP144/18-20), "My hour has not yet come, in which God the Father will reveal to this world miracles, signs, and my glory." (RP207/8-11). More striking is that Jesus' explanations sometimes contradict the narrator's commentary. When Mary begs for Joseph's life, Jesus insists that his guardian must "descend to the prophets and the old fathers [. . .] to tell them what he has seen from my birth until now, and also that their redemption is near" (RP145/18-146/1)—yet the narrator attributes this decision to hiding Christ's human nature from Satan (RP146/18-20). It also—perhaps unintentionally—emphasizes the distance between human understanding and God's designs.

The resurrection of a Jew scene (RP129/20-134/4) echoes the Gospel narrative through a miraculous catch despite followers' doubts ("And how are we to catch them when we have neither nets nor fishing rods?" RP130/6-8; cf. Mk 8:4), Sabbath-breaking accusations, Jesus as teacher and defender of God's law, and cries for his death. Such devices characterize apocryphal literature, reinforcing non-canonical authority. Similarly, Mary's opening words "My dear little son, where have you been?" (RP132/22) recalls the scene of finding in the Temple.

The Mother appears as reliable mediatrix and protector of man, while Jesus emerges as stern Old Testament God. The image of threatening Christ contrasts with the way His Mother addresses Him—"my dear little son." This discrepancy reveals the divine-human nature of the relationship between Mary and her Son.

Naming remains consistent throughout the *Przemyśl Meditation* (“o, my dear little son” and derivatives), homogenizing fragments that were diverse in terms of source and style. However, the use of the same forms produced different narrative effects. The diminutive form “little son” [synek], understandable in the apocryphon of childhood, where Mary addresses a small child, is also used in conversations before the Passion, but there it has a different purpose. In the story of childhood, it emphasizes Jesus’ age and his affectionate relationship with his mother. In the Passion scenes, through the contrast with the drama of the situation, it evokes an emotional response in the reader and stimulates devout sorrow.

3. Catechetical Dialogue

The conversation about the mysteries of salvation, as I have already mentioned, is not narratively connected with the rest of the work and can be treated as a separate text—even as a text representing a different genre. The dialogue takes place at an unspecified time before the beginning of Jesus’ public ministry—the narrator emphasizes that similar conversations took place many times:

Mary, the mother of God, often sat with her son Jesus Christ, the son of God, sweetly and lovingly conversing with him about various things, and the dear Jesus, answering all her questions very wisely, revealed everything to her. (RP163/5-11)

Already in this introduction, the writer emphasizes the divinity of Jesus and the motherhood of Mary through titles interpolated in relation to the source: Mother of God, Son of God.

The conversation has a specific form—quotations are repeatedly introduced without verbs of speech, and the dialogue takes the form of questions and answers, referring to the Christian tradition of dialogue. Texts of this type had a didactic purpose—they presented and explained the truths of faith. The dialogue tradition, with its ancient roots, later gave rise to catechisms in the form of questions and answers. In the dialogue from the *Przemyśl Meditation*, Mary takes on the role of the student, and Jesus that of the teacher. The conversation concerns the Incarnation, the Trinity and the dual nature of Christ, His saving mission, His Passion and subsequent events, through the Resurrection, Ascension, and Descent of the Holy Spirit, to the Assumption of Mary. The order of the dialogue is therefore well thought out and chronological in terms of the events taking place in history (the chronological order does not apply, e.g., to the relationship between the Persons of the Trinity).

In this scene, Mary is a humble woman, full of faith and ready to learn from her Son. Her humility is best illustrated by the question that opens the conversation: “My dearest son, is it right for me to ask you about certain things?” (RP163/12-14). The Mother’s statements are consistent with the convention of student-teacher exchange. Mary asks questions, giving her Son the opportunity to elaborate on important issues. At the same time, the content of the questions themselves and her ability to keep up with the subtleties of complex theological issues demonstrate the Mother of God’s great theological awareness and erudition—which corresponds to her image as one who studies the Holy Scriptures at the moment of the Annunciation (RP48/13-17).

The author departs from this framework of catechetical dialogue at the moment of the announcement of Christ’s Passion. Then, emotions appear in Mary’s responses, expressed through exclamations and the diminutive apostrophe “my little son.” Her image changes from that of an eager student to that of an emotional, concerned mother. Mary names her emotional states, and the descriptions are similar to those in the Passion scenes themselves:

Oh, my dear little son, my heart is broken with fear, and the words you spoke have greatly saddened me, for to hear of your death is a great pain to my heart and a great weeping to my soul. (RP166/13-18)

Truly, woe is me, my dearest little son! When you told me this, your mother's heart trembled again, for when I heard of your death, my heart withered, my spirit was saddened, and my soul was terrified. (RP168/9-15)

The way in which Mary's experiences related to her Son's Passion were described changed and became a theological problem in the Middle Ages (Falkenburg 1995). Early theologians, including St. Ambrose, based on the Gospel account, believed that Mary showed no signs of suffering during Christ's Passion. Later, however, in the 12th century, with the development of the ideas of *compassio Mariae* and *co-redemptrix* (influenced by the thoughts of Bernard of Clairvaux, among others) in religious literature, it became common to describe the Virgin Mary's weeping, fainting, and other manifestations of suffering. The problem also concerned morality—Mary, as a virtuous, modest woman, should not give in to despair or even overly expressive mourning. Both positions influenced devotional literature until the late Middle Ages. Traces of conservative thinking about the expression of Mary's suffering are present in the *Przemyśl Meditation* in chapter: "About this, as the ladies stood at the door, marveling at the immodesty of the Jews, they asked the Virgin Mary what had happened to her" (RP747/4-7): "seeing the Virgin Mary so swollen and transformed, they began to say to her: 'O Lady Mary, what is this news? For you have never been in the habit of running or leaving the house so early in the morning'." (RP747/11-17).

In the catechetical dialogue about the future Passion, there are references that also bear traces of the first tradition. Although Mary expresses her suffering in expressive words at the mention of Jesus' death, the mention of the resurrection eases her pain: "If you had not told me about the resurrection, I would have died with great sorrow upon hearing of your suffering, and yet my heart can never be joyful when I know that such suffering is to befall you." (RP169/23-170/6). However, it seems that such an approach to the subject is only possible due to the narrative detachment of the fragment from the rest of the text. The author of *Przemyśl Meditation* rarely anticipated the events he reported on. In the catechetical dialogue, however, the goal was different—it was to concisely present the most important truths of faith, and suffering, death, and resurrection are closely related—chronologically and logically.

The exchange of views on Christ's exemption from the law of original sin is important—it testifies to the author's conviction about physical source of this sin.

Jesus: 'I am not bound by the devil's law, for I was born without original sin of the human race.' Mary: 'Truly, my dear little son, I conceived you without male touch or union or human defilement or human lust, and I preserved my purity.'

Jesus: 'Therefore, the devil has no power over me' [...]. (RP167/13-21)

Jesus is free from original sin because Mary conceived him without sexual contact. This statement is problematic in the context of Catholic theology because it excludes the possibility of Mary's immaculate conception. This is worth noting because the most numerous traces of the Maculist position in Old Polish apocrypha are found precisely in the *Przemyśl Meditation*, despite its alleged Bernardine provenance.

4. Conversations Before the Passion

Before the Passion, faced with inevitable suffering, the image of Mary shifts from an authoritative intercessor to a desperate mother pleading against Jesus' death. This is again a narrative device aimed at arousing the reader's compassion. The mother's failed appeals target less painful death, her own death first and a detail—no spitting at Jesus' eyes.

In the last separate conversation before Jesus' departure for Jerusalem, Mary again asks Jesus not to make her watch his suffering. In response, Jesus expresses the apparent truth about the Immaculate Conception: "It would be strange if I gave you into suffering, as you were born holy and were holy in the world." (RP525/22-526/3). However, being born in a state of holiness and holiness throughout one's life were not the subject of the discussion on the Immaculate Conception. The Maculists believed that Mary was sanctified and cleansed of original sin in her mother's womb, and therefore before her birth².

During the conversation, Mary's emotional reactions are described—she faints several times, can barely speak out of grief, cries bitterly, and falls at her Son's feet. All these elements of the description of Mary's suffering are part of the *compassio Mariae* motif.

The rhetorical strategies observed in the short dialogues are repeated and expanded here. Mary addresses Jesus using diminutives and superlatives, such as "my dearest little son," "oh, my little son, my dear child," and "my dear little son." Diminutives are used even more frequently than in other dialogues, but, as I have already mentioned, they serve a different function here—they add emotional weight and arouse sympathy for the suffering mother.

Mary argues, referring to herself and her motherhood:

Look at the breasts which you have used, and at the womb in which you were carried. I beg you, your mother, do not let them spit on your holy eyes, do not give in to this shameful torment of Christ. Do this for me, your mother, my dearest little son. (RP499/9-16)

She evokes images from Jesus' childhood, contrasting them with images of the future Passion, once again eliciting an emotional response. In this case, the mother's authority and power are overcome by her feminine vulnerability and desperation in the face of inevitable suffering.

Another attempt at persuasion is to refer to the words of God himself:

You vowed that I would be filled with love, yet I am filled with sorrow. You promised to be with me, yet today you want to leave me alone in my great torment. For I know that your word cannot be taken back. Earth and heaven will rather pass away than your word. Therefore, my dearest son, I beg you to kill me first, before you kill yourself. For if I am to watch your torment, my heart will break within me. (RP502/13-503/1)

This is an interesting mosaic of biblical quotations (references to Isaiah 55:11, Matthew 24:35; Mark 13:31 and Lk 21:33) along with a reference to the scene of the angelic greeting (Lk 1:28). Mary's very mention of the words of the Annunciation in the context of the Passion is a motif well known in medieval Passion literature, but usually the accusation was directed at the Archangel Gabriel³. Here, Mary attributes the words of the angelic greeting to her Son, showing that she understood Gabriel's role as God's messenger, conveying the word of the Trinity. This is a double shift—the Archangel conveys the words of God, and God, because of the unity of the Trinity, is identified here with the Son.

Mary also refers to God's Law, reminding Jesus that she should be honoured as a mother. Here again, Jesus is shown as a lawgiver, emphasizing the divinity of Jesus and the unity of the Holy Trinity: "My dear child, remember what you commanded in the Old and New Testaments, that every man should honour his father and mother. And how do you honour me, dear child, when you cause me such sorrow?" (RP503/20-504/2). This is the most direct reference to her own authority—but it has no effect, like all the other requests in the conversations before the Passion.

Mary indirectly emphasizes her authority, instructing her Son with maternal condescension: "You ask me how this could happen. I will tell you, your mother, because I know

that you can redeem man without suffering such great pain or this cruel torment, because you can do whatever you want,” (RP499/16-23), “And you ask, my dear son, how this could happen. I will tell you, your mother: your divine blood is so precious that with the shedding of a single drop of your holy blood, God the Father will mercifully redeem man from his great misery.” (RP501/7-13). In the second of the passages quoted, unlike in the previous examples, there is a clear distinction between the Father and the Son.

Mary’s persuasive appeals before the Passion extend the rhetoric of the short dialogues. Her maternal authority and power as an intercessor are directly invoked in her own words but prove ineffective when confronted with divine designs. Instead, Mary is shown as fragile, human, and suffering, as well as humble in her cooperation with the plan of salvation.

5. The Complex Image of Mary

The image of Mary in the conversations from the *Przemyśl Meditation* is complex, showing duality on two levels—both as a woman and as the mother of Jesus. However, these images are not mutually exclusive but occur in parallel and sometimes even overlap.

5.1. Handmaid of the Lord—Mighty Mediatrix

The Mother of God as a woman is depicted in two ways: as humble and helpless, or as conscious of her agency and active. The first image can be summed up in the words: “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord.” Its prototype in the dialogues is the scene of finding Jesus in the Temple. Mary—the Handmaid (*ancilla Domini*) remains silent, humble, and helpless. She is characterized by fear and lack of understanding, yet she maintains a contemplative attitude. This convention was reinforced by the cultural image of women at the time as weaker beings, dependent on men and silent. This model therefore corresponded to the ideal of femininity—and since the image of Mary had to be always positive, this convention served the needs of worship well.

The second image depicts Mary as a powerful Mediatrix (*Mediatrix*)⁴—confident in the effectiveness of her intercession and aware of her agency. Its biblical prototype is the wedding scene at Cana: Mary asks Jesus to perform a miracle (“They have no wine”) and does not lose confidence despite his seemingly harsh response (“Do whatever he tells you”). This image was supported by the faithful people’s belief in Mary’s intercession and the special favour God bestowed upon her because of her role as the Mother of Christ. In the dialogues of the *Przemyśl Meditation*, this convention is realized in scenes in which Mary invokes her authority as a mother.

Both of these images, rooted in canonical texts, were further developed in apocryphal parts. They are not mutually exclusive but function in parallel, as confirmed by analyses. The choice of convention did not depend on the source. An example of this can be found in the first two scenes based on *Vita rythmica*, describing the resurrection of a Jewish child and an adult. In both cases, the innocence of Jesus is emphasized (which is particularly interesting in the second scene, because Jesus actually causes the death of the Jew) as well as the threat posed by the Jewish community. However, Mary’s reactions differ: in the first fragment, she is helpless (“Tell me, my dear little son, what I should do and how I should respond to such slander” RP126/3-5), in the second, she intercedes for the deceased (“O dear son, I beg you, do this for my sake, have mercy on him, forgive him his sin, resurrect him, so that no one may be scandalised by this innocence, and so that I may not be blamed” RP133/11-16). The only significant difference between these scenes is that the Jewish boy did not sin against Jesus before his death.

In the catechetical dialogue, Mary appears as a disciple, which fits her image as a humble woman. However, her admission to the knowledge of the mysteries of salvation,

as well as the theological knowledge and awareness she reveals in the dialogue, bring her closer to the image of the Mediatrix, and even more so to that of the *Co-redemptrix*—the one who participates in the plan of salvation and may know its details.

In the conversations preceding the Passion, Mary combines the characteristics of a helpless woman (fainting, weakness, humble acceptance of God's will) with those of a negotiator—reminding her Son of his duties towards her, invoking her authority and rights.

The choice of convention probably depended on the narrative purpose. The author was not bothered by the apparent inconsistency between these images. Such was the medieval view of Mary—at once the humble Handmaid of the Lord and the mighty Mediatrix, endowed by her Son with every honour.

5.2. *Bogurodzica*⁵—*Bogarodzica*

An analysis of the dialogues shows that the image of Mary as the Mother of Jesus is also dualistic. In some places, the Mother clearly distinguishes between God the Father and the Son, emphasizing the aspect of her motherhood: “My dear Son, I know that you are God and the Son of God, but how did it happen that you are my son, I do not know this.” (RP163/17-20). In catechetical dialogue, Mary consistently distinguishes between the Divine Persons and addresses Jesus in the second person singular, while He responds in the first-person plural: “Before this was created, where were you, or where did you reside, or where was the Father, in whom you were, or reside? Jesus: ‘We were in the glory of our Trinity, in which we are now in our divine power.’” (RP164/16-21).

However, in the conversation before the Passion, Mary often identifies Jesus with God the Father—it is He who appears as the giver of the Ten Commandments and the one who conveys His words through the Archangel Gabriel. In turn, Jesus clearly distinguishes even His own will from the will of the Father in His answers: “According to your word, dear mother [...] I am to obey my father, who sends me, his son, to save mankind from hell and also to take away this power. I know that it could turn out well, but I dare not anger my father.” (RP500/5-14).

Here, too, the discrepancies result from different narrative goals. The catechetical dialogue presents the truths of faith, including the unity of the Trinity. In contrast, the dolorous vision of the Passion, typical of late medieval religiosity, distinguishes between the obedient Son and the severe Father. This distinction is revealed in Jesus' words: “My Father wields his sharp sword over me today, and if I do not do this, he threatens to cut me down.” (RP505/9-12). Balance is restored by Mary's statements, which emphasize Christ's divine power—it is this that gives her argument strength and enables her to “negotiate” the conditions of salvation with her Son.

These two perspectives on Mary's motherhood—theological (*Theotokos*) on the one hand, and emotional (motherhood towards the Son of God) on the other—create a tension that was not contradictory for medieval audiences.

6. Summary

The complex image of Mary in the *Przemyśl Meditation* shows how medieval Marian devotion combined different orders—humility and glory, submissiveness and agency, and even physicality and divinity. In her dialogues with her Son, Mary is presented both as a model of a humble woman and as an active participant in God's plan of salvation. This dual portrayal of Mary, however, should not be regarded as characteristic exclusively of the *Przemyśl Meditation*; rather, it has its origins primarily in the canonical texts themselves, and secondarily in the sources for the compilation that is the RP. While Mary's humility and Mediatrix roles have been studied separately (Eitenmiller 2018; Reynolds 2019), I am

not aware of any analyses that examine their clash in forming the Marian image in late medieval para-biblical literature.

The characters' statements reflect not only the author's narrative and stylistic devices but also his theological reflection on the figure of the Mother of God. The discussed conventions of presenting Mary have a biblical source or are grounded in theological discourse, but they have been transferred to a specific work—an apocryphal narrative—and are aimed at achieving the goals of the text: increasing popular piety and providing an emotional description of the history of salvation.

An analysis of Mary's conversations with Jesus reveals that the dialogues serve narrative, didactic, and affective functions. At the narrative level, they constitute the climax of events or serve to interpret them. In the miracle scenes, the conversations between mother and son lead to the resolution of the situation. The catechetical dialogue and the conversations before the Passion constitute separate types of narrative: the former transcends time, becoming a miniature catechism, while the latter slows down the action, keeping the reader in emotional tension between the announcement of suffering and its inevitability. The dialogues also had a hermeneutic function—Mary's statements represent human understanding, while Jesus's represent the divine order requiring revelation. The author of the *Przemyśl Meditation* thus uses conversations not only as a plot element, but also as a means of building rhythm and emotion, as well as a didactic tool.

These dialogues also reveal the author's rhetorical and compositional awareness. In her statements, Mary uses various strategies of persuasion—from humble requests to emotional maternal pressure. In short scenes, the requests are concise, often indirect, signalled only by the description of the situation ("they have no wine"), while in the Passion scenes, they grow into elaborate apostrophes in which Mary refers to her motherhood, body, feelings, and relationship with her Son.

In terms of style, the dialogues in *Przemyśl Meditation* reveal interesting attempts to combine doctrinal discourse with the language of emotion, especially in the catechetical dialogue. In these passages, the catechetical language of reflection on the Trinity and original sin meets the language of maternal tenderness and care. Diminutives appear alongside theological concepts such as *essence* and doctrinal formulas. In this way, the author makes the truths of faith understandable and emotionally convincing to the reader. The use of diminutives and interjections also serves a devotional function—it is intended to evoke compassion and emotion in the reader, which places the work in the *compassio Mariae* tradition.

The dialogues between Jesus and Mary reveal the tensions of late medieval Marian devotion: the clash between emotion and doctrine, humility and authority, motherhood and divinity. The image of Mary that emerges from them varies depending on the context of the scene and the narrative function of the passage. The humble Handmaid, Mediatrix, fearful Mother, and the faithful Disciple—all these roles intertwine in *Przemyśl Meditation's* complex Marian portrait.

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Notes

- ¹ Works of this type only became popular in the 16th century, under the influence of Protestant catechisms, although the Catholic tradition of dialogue dates back to antiquity.
- ² It is worth comparing this passage with a similar passage from *The Life of Jesus Christ* (*Żywot Pana Jezusa Krysta* 1522): “And so, if you were to die before me, your most holy soul would have to go to the depths of hell in darkness, under the power of the evil spirit, and thus your most holy soul would not be honored according to justice. But it is right and just that your most holy soul, being guilty of no sin, should not be subjected to any torment, but should be taken straight to the kingdom of heaven” (ŻPK49v/6-13). The choice of the superlative “most holy” and the emphasis on the absence of guilt for any sin is a more expressive way of expressing the truth about the Immaculate Conception than is the case in the *Przemysł Meditation*.
- ³ Cf. *The Holy Cross Lament*, and among the Old Polish apocrypha RP494/1-495/7; ŻPK101v/25-32 (*Żywot Pana Jezusa Krysta* 1522); SCh109r/18-110r/2 (*Sprawa chędogo o męce Pana Chrystusowej* n.d.).
- ⁴ Today we are more cautious about Marian titles in the context of Mary’s cooperation in the work of salvation, cf. *Mater Populi Fidelis*. In the late Middle Ages, many titles expressing admiration for the Virgin Mary flourished, without the in-depth discussion of the dangers of possible excessive worship that characterized the earlier period.
- ⁵ This title, related to *Theotokos*, due to its morphological structure, literally means “giving birth for the sake of God.” The term is also the title of a hymn, the most significant surviving medieval Polish Marian song, which was most likely composed in the 13th century.

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