**“Lothly thinges thai weren alle”: Imagining Horror in the Late Middle Ages[[1]](#endnote-1),**

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The popular medieval penitential treatise known as *The Prick of Conscience* (c. 1330-50) makes an arresting attempt to correlate the contents of the universe: demons of unspeakable ugliness, visions of death and the afterlife, the sinful clothed in blankets of vermin, apocalyptic fires scouring the earth to create a gleaming, perfect world. The cosmology of its readers is worlds away from that of the American writer, H. P. Lovecraft (1890-1937), a staunch atheist, who, having rejected the treacly didacticism of the Victorian age, detested any kind of art whose purpose was to edify or instruct. He had a particular disdain for the literature of the Middle Ages. In an immense letter written in February 1931 to fellow weird writer, Frank Belknap Long, he opines that “some former art attitudes—like sentimental romance, loud heroics, ethical didacticism, &c.—are so patently hollow as to be visibly absurd & non-usable from the start.”[[2]](#endnote-2)

Yet the descriptions which appear in *The Prick of Conscience* will seem familiar to even the most casual reader of Lovecraft’s weird tales. I offer one example below, in which hellish fiends descend upon the recently dead to strip away their souls, to illustrate the point:

For when the lyf endeth of mon

Fendes shul gedre aboute hym thon

To reve fro hym his soule away

To pyne of helle that lasteth ay. …

They are so blaake seyth the boke  
And so lodly upon to looke  
That alle the men of myddelerde  
Of that syght shul ben aferde.  
For alle that lyven in this lyve  
Couthe not so lothely thing descrive …  
So sly peyntoure never non was  
Though he alle othur in sleyght couth passe  
That couthe ymagyne hore uglynesse  
Or peynt a poynte of hore lykenesse, …  
For yif they had suche powere  
In that fourme to shewe hem here  
Oute of witte they wolde men fray  
So orrible and so foule aren thay.

[For when the life of a man comes to its end, then fiends shall gather around him to make off with his soul to the eternal pains of Hell. … They are so black, the book tells us, and so loathly to look upon that all the men of Middle Earth [ie. the world of mankind] are frightened of the sight of them. No living man could describe such a loathly thing. … Never has there been such a painter, however ingenious he might be, who could imagine their ugliness or paint their likeness, … for if [he] had such skills to show them in that form, they would drive men out of their wits, so horrible and foul are they.][[3]](#endnote-3)

Here, the *Conscience* poet relies upon on a series of nebulous adjectives, recognizing the failure of any artistic endeavour to represent the truly monstrous. “[L]othely” or “lodly” the poet repeats twice, a term which means, according to the Middle English Dictionary, fearsome, detestable, and obscene to behold.[[4]](#endnote-4) The repetition of this word, a commonplace in Lovecraft’s lexicon, cannot help but call to mind the “vast, loathsome shapes that seeped down from the dark stars” to inhabit the sunken city of R’lyeh, terrible enough that their mere psychic residue was enough to drive men mad in “The Call of Cthulhu” (1928).[[5]](#endnote-5) The narrator fears that were the sciences to progress further in correlating the nature of the universe suggested by his vision, humanity would might only find “peace and safety” in flight toward “a new dark age.” [[6]](#endnote-6)

There is no indication that Lovecraft ever encountered *The Prick of Conscience*, and, indeed, it would come as a great surprise to me if he had. Although his essay *Supernatural Horror in Literature* (1927) claims that medieval literature gave “an enormous impulse” toward the expression of the weird tale, he depended heavily for many of his references to medieval literature on Edith Birkhead’s monograph *The Tale of Terror* (1921).[[7]](#endnote-7) His own contributions blur fact and fantasy, a tendency exemplified in the following passage where he argues that Western horror-lore depended on

the hidden but often suspected presence of a hideous cult of nocturnal worshippers whose strange customs—descended from pre-Aryan and pre-agricultural times when a squat race of Mongoloids roved over Europe with their flocks and herds—were rooted in the most revolting fertility-rites of immemorial antiquity.[[8]](#endnote-8)

As much fodder as there is for critique here, it must be acknowledged that Lovecraft is hardly the first writer to conflate the medieval with a representation of an ahistoric, mythic or superstitious past. Horror’s capacity to disturb and distress, so Ken Gelder argues, depends upon a configuration, which forces the archaic (the primal, primitive, and “frenzied subject of excess”) to occupy the same territory as the modern (the rational, technological and moral subject).[[9]](#endnote-9) But while the Middle Ages might serve as a useful symbol within fiction, it becomes more problematic when the symbol is extrapolated too broadly. Here I find myself thinking of the French critic Georges Bataille who theorized that when horror is transfigured through an authentic artwork, it becomes “a pleasure, an intense pleasure”—the pleasure of fixation, of ravishment without death—except in the case of the religious imagery of hell in the Middle Ages, which, attempting to reform its viewer, was “hardly separable from education.”[[10]](#endnote-10) Medievalists, predictably enough, have protested any sort of monolithic or homogenous description of the Middle Ages, but they have nevertheless failed to produce many accounts of their own to address the uses of horror in medieval literature. Instead, they have largely recapitulated Bataille’s point that there was “an exemplary purpose” at work in these texts, and they were not intended “to chill the blood or entertain by frisson.”[[11]](#endnote-11)

But I find myself resistant to the impulse to categorically dismiss *The Prick of Conscience*, a poem that produces horrific images of torture and apocalyptic destruction. Why do we so fervently resist the notion that such a text might possess the power to evoke “the more complete loss we undergo in death,” as Bataille argues the true work of art does?[[12]](#endnote-12) Certainly, there are few texts that go to greater lengths to evoke that loss. “The deth … louseth alle thing,” [Death … unknots all things,] writes the *Conscience* poet, it is “sotel and ryght pryvé” [subtle and very secret].[[13]](#endnote-13) He casts Death in the guise of a monstrous figure, inexorable, unstoppable, and ultimately unknowable:

Thus shal he viseten uch mon  
And yit noon discreven hym con  
There is noon undur heven ryche  
That con telle what deth is lychee

[Thus he will visit every person, and yet no one can describe him. There is no one under Heaven that who tell what Death is like.] [[14]](#endnote-14)

Passages such as this seem to produce exactly the sort of “atmosphere of breathless and unexplainable dread” that Lovecraft identifies as the hallmark of the weird tale.[[15]](#endnote-15) Although Lovecraft may have had misgivings about the relevance of didactic literature to his project, his essay *Supernatural Horror in Literature* offers surprising insights into the functioning of medieval affective poetry. My aim in this chapter then is, firstly, to broaden the history of supernatural horror to take better account of the literature of the late Middle Ages in England, and secondly, using Lovecraft’s essay, to illuminate the literary effects—the “high spot[s]” of emotional intensity, to use his turn of phrase—of one such text, *The Prick of Conscience*.[[16]](#endnote-16)

# *The Prick of Conscience:* An Early Horror Text?

“Strange things happen when the discussion turns to violence,” claims Jody Enders in the preface to her monograph, *The Medieval Theater of Cruelty: Rhetoric, Memory, Violence.*[[17]](#endnote-17) She describes the range of reactions she faced when she presented her work at conferences: anything from tittering to outright laughter, mortification, anger, aversion and moral judgement. Horror has long been a contested cultural mode, its pleasures viewed as aberrant or compromising, a puzzle or paradox in need of solving. Even scholars used to studying an age as “violent, tormented, bewildered, suffering, and disintegrating” as the fourteenth century are not immune to an initial feeling of distrust.[[18]](#endnote-18) The suspicion tending to greet texts that treat horror has, I think, in many respects distorted the reception of *The Prick of Conscience*. Despite the fact that it survives in more copies than any other single Middle English poem of the period, doubling the numbers of its contemporary, *The Canterbury Tales* by Geoffrey Chaucer, it has received little attention until the present decade.[[19]](#endnote-19) Jean Jost remarks that its emphasis on “excruciatingly detailed physical pain” is “excessive,” and most others have similarly written off the high numbers as either a strange quirk of fate, or, as Derek Pearsall puts it, “the frustrations of a scrupulously historical enquiry.”[[20]](#endnote-20) But these remarks point toward a more general problem in medieval studies at present. Even in medieval genres of literature where horror is clearly recognized as a vital component such as the affective meditations which I will discuss in more detail below, scholars seem to lack the appropriate tools to talk about the function of suffering and emotion without reducing these texts to sites of either “affective excess” or “rhetorical crudity.”[[21]](#endnote-21) Lovecraft’s *Supernatural Horror in Literature* provides a useful framework to do so.

The idea that *The Prick of Conscience* had any pleasures to offer has not to my knowledge been explored.[[22]](#endnote-22) And while its grisly material might disconcert some modern readers, there is no question that *The Prick of Conscience* appealed to a wide audience of parish priests, vicars and chantry chaplains, canons, and even gentry readers.[[23]](#endnote-23) This is less surprising when we consider that the early fourteenth century had witnessed a series of social and economic catastrophes: the Great Famine of 1315-1322, the recovery from which only occurred in the 1350s or 1360s; the beginning of the Hundred Years’ War with France from 1337; and, most importantly, the outbreaks of the Black Death from 1348 onward. These crises resulted in a substantial reduction of the literate population who had previously consumed literature predominantly in Latin or French. The radical depopulation of the country allowed for shifts in the organization of vernacular book production as well as the tastes of the reading population to occur rapidly. *The Prick of Conscience* emerged in the fourteenth century as part of a broader industry of *pastoralia* written in English, loosely aligned with the programs of reform and pastoral care initiated in England following the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 and Archbishop Pecham’s 1281 Council of Lambeth.[[24]](#endnote-24) Theologians and church leaders wrote and translated a wide range of literary aids to educate and edify local priests and the souls under their charge: sermons, saints’s lives, expositions on doctrinal matters, manuals of confession, and the like. In genre, *The Prick of Conscience* sits somewhere between *Chicken Soup for the Soul* and the mondo film series, *Faces of Death* (dir. Conan LeCilaire): a seven-part guide designed to teach the reader to approach salvation through the contemplation of the horrors of this world and the next.

The assessments of the critics I have been citing are not entirely without basis. *The Prick of Conscience* is a text whose chief literary concern is horror, and through it, the ravishment that comes when the reader tiptoes up to the very limits of a textual experience of death. And yet the didactic parameters of the *Conscience* poet’s project are very different than modern horror or even Lovecraft’s literature of cosmic fear. The *Conscience* poet states in his prologue, that some readers understand what they are told, but cannot feel dread because they only appreciate what they themselves can see.[[25]](#endnote-25) But whoever reads *The Prick of Conscience* from start to finish, the poet maintains, will “waxen lowe” [grow angry or depressed] and “drede have therby / to knowe good and fle fooly” [experience dread as a consequence of it so he will acknowledge what is good and flee from folly].[[26]](#endnote-26) The *Conscience* poet accomplishes this task by using horrific imagery to allow the reader to vividly visualize and imagine the corruption of the body and the pains of Hell in order to push him toward what was called in medieval Latin theology *compunctio cordis* or the repentance of the heart, the initial recognition of sinfulness necessary to engage properly in the sacrament of penance. These images were designed to excite within readers who may have only an intellectual understanding of the Bible an ecstatic psychological state in order that from that dread the true love of God might begin.[[27]](#endnote-27)

To accomplish this unsavory task, the *Conscience* poet obsesses over images of bodily decay and torture, showing the same aesthetic interests as the French Grand Guignol theatre plays of the nineteenth century or the slasher films of the 1980s. A single example ought to suffice to illuminate the *Conscience* poet’s general method. The third book of *The Prick of* *Conscience* is devoted to detailing the nature of death and the pain accompanying it. The text provides a schematic breakdown of the subject matter, firstly explicating three kinds of death (ghostly, endless, and bodily) and then identifying the four kinds of dread that accompany death (the pain of death, the grisly sight of fiends, the judgement of our lives, and our lack of knowledge about whether we shall go to Hell or Heaven). The poet illustrates each point with a single, particularly vivid image that would adhere in the mind of the reader. When describing the pain of death, the first of these necessary fears, he proffers a visceral extended metaphor that he says he has drawn from an unidentified philosopher:

He lyckeneth monnes lyf to a tree

That grewed yif hit myght so bee

Out of a monnes herte to spryng

And wrapped were with herte stryng,

The crop oute at his mouthe he bere

And to uche fote a rote faste were

And every veyn of his body

Had a roote fastened ther by;

Uche toe and fyngur on hand

Had a roote ther inne growand

And every lyme on uche a syde

With dyverse rotes were occupyde,

And yif that tree then were pulled oute

At ones with alle the rotes aboute

The rotus shuld then rise therwith

Evere veyn, senewe, and lyth

A more peyne couthe no mon cast

Then hit were while that hit laste …

[He (ie. the philosopher) likens man’s life to a tree that grows out of his heart, with his heart-string wrapped around it, the crop growing out of his mouth and a root fastened to each foot and fastened to each vein also, with roots growing into each toe and finger of his hand and roots of various kinds clinging to his limbs on either side. And if that tree were suddenly pulled out, so that the roots, veins, sinews and joints all tore free, then no greater pain could a man feel than this while it lasted ...][[28]](#endnote-28)

Upon reading this passage, I can easily imagine the reader cringing, shuddering or shrinking away, and the critic Howell Chickering observes that it would have been enough to have “made a believer’s skin crawl.”[[29]](#endnote-29) He proceeds to argue that passages such as these operate only at the most basic level by shocking their audience into the empty fear (*timor vanis*)or the fear of punishment for proper penitence. But this perspective is too distanced, I think, and too focused upon the poem’s didactic purpose. It neglects the genuine fascination, the terrifying attraction, the potential seductiveness a text like *The Prick of Conscience* might have offered to those desperate to come to terms with the nature of their bodies and their place within a complex and incomprehensible universe. An understanding of the text’s operations on purely theological grounds does not fully account for the effects of the poem, which are, I will argue, more subtle and potentially pleasurable than typically imagined. As the *Conscience* poet makes clear in his conclusion, dread alone “es noght medeful to prufe” [is not advantageous to experience] if it “accordes noght halely with that lufe” [does not accord entirely with that love], and consequently it must be “lufes brother” [love’s brother].[[30]](#endnote-30) These lines suggest that dread and love do not share an obverse relationship, but rather they are interconnected, and the experience of one may in fact lead to the experience of other. This provocative combination of pain and ravishment, the latter of which has been ignored in accounts of *The Prick of Conscience*, is instantiated within a great deal of literature from the period. In the section that follows I will examine the medieval theories of affective horror that undergird meditational and devotional texts like *The Prick of Conscience* to demonstrate that their pleasures have much in common with those of the weird tales championed by Lovecraft.

# Violence, Pain, and Other Paradoxical Pleasures

“Because we remember pain and the menace of death more vividly than pleasure,” Lovecraft writes, “and because our feelings toward the beneficent aspects of the unknown have from the first been captured and formalized by conventional religious rituals, it has fallen to the lot of the darker and more maleficent side of cosmic mystery to figure chiefly in our popular supernatural folklore.”[[31]](#endnote-31) In this passage, Lovecraft comes startlingly close to describing an important aspect of medieval literary and religious culture: affective piety. Medieval literary culture had a well-developed system for addressing the relationship between the textual experience of pain and pleasure. This strain of piety emerged in the eleventh and early twelfth centuries and continued to develop in richness and variety throughout the subsequent three centuries. Much of it had to do with certain mnemonic techniques, initially used by monks who wished to meditate upon and fill the storehouses of their memory with narratives, allegories, and images from the Bible. The act of *meditatio* was a profound process of self-reflection in which a monk slowly and repetitively read aloud portions of the Bible in order to commit them to memory and to ruminate upon their deeper meaning. And Lovecraft was remarkably astute in noting that images associated with death and pain were far more likely to lodge themselves in the minds of those engaging in this meditative process.

One of the most popular and influential modes of affective meditation invited readers to reflect upon exceptionally gory accounts of Christ’s suffering upon the cross. Texts of this kind were the “major psychological narratives” of the later Middle Ages, and by the early fifteenth century devotional treatises of this kind were owned and read more than any other kind of English book.[[32]](#endnote-32) They aimed to teach their readers, through iterative performances, how to relate to the suffering of others and, consequently, how to develop a proper Christian *ethos*. A brief example will demonstrate the nature of the genre. In the first half of the fourteenth century, the English hermit Richard Rolle composed a number of affective treatises for a limited circle of aristocrats, lay religious, and anchoresses. His particular blend of affective piety emphasized a three-fold path to perfection in which the reader was encouraged to adhere to the basic tenets of the Christian faith, renounce worldly attachments in imitation of Christ, and lastly, become enkindled with the fire of Christ’s love.[[33]](#endnote-33) In *Meditation B*, Rolle provides a highly charged account of the Passion:

I see your body on the cross all bloody and strained so that the joint pull apart; now your wounds open, your skin is completely ripped and gapes so wide, your head is crowned with thorns, your body is all wounds, nails [are] in your hands and feet so tender, and in your sinews there is a most painful feeling. There is no support for your head; your body is strained like a parchment skin on a rack; your face is swollen that once was so fair; your joints are undone; you stand and hang on nails; streams of blood run down from the cross; the sight of your mother increases your pain.[[34]](#endnote-34)

Rolle believed that his readers would discover great sweetness when ruminating upon passages such as these. In *The Melody of Love*, he describes the pleasures of a contemplative life of such meditation, advocating it as the very best and most secure way of living because it allowed one “to feel in advance the eternal sweetness, to sing the delights of eternal love and to be snatched in the praise of the Creator by the infusion of song in jubilation.”[[35]](#endnote-35) For Rolle and his circle, the delights of eternal love—fire (*fervor*), sweetness (*dulcor*), and song (*canor*)—were very real. Rolle conveys the excitement these feelings created in him in a dramatic passage in the Latin text, *The Fire of Love*:

I was more greatly amazed than I can tell when for the first time I truly felt my heart growing hot, and blazing in a real not an imaginary way, as if with a palpable flame ... And when I knew that it boiled up only from within, and that this kindling of love was not caused by the flesh nor by concupiscence—from which I learned that it was a gift of the Maker—I melted joyfully into an emotion of greater love; and chiefly because of the influx of the sweetest of delights and of inner sweetnesses, which with that same spiritual ignition bedewed my soul to the very marrow.[[36]](#endnote-36)

And lest one think such behavior was hyperbolic, it was exactly this sort of loud wailing and extreme behavior that would cause trouble for the religious eccentric Margery Kempe (ca. 1373-1438) who dictated her story to a fellow Englishman in the 1420s and then later, in 1436, persuaded a local priest to rewrite it.[[37]](#endnote-37) Her weeping seems to have sprung from an ecstatic penitence for her own sins, for the sins of the world, and compassion for the suffering of Christ.[[38]](#endnote-38)

But this style of meditation was not limited to a narrow range of religious readers. A variety of late medieval treatises encouraged laymen and laywomen to pursue these experiences. *The Contemplations of the Dread and Love of God* was one such popular text addressed to a general audience.[[39]](#endnote-39) It proposed a spiritual path adapted from the work of Richard Rolle, with close enough parallels that the English printer Wynkyn de Work attributed it to Rolle in his 1506 and 1519 editions.[[40]](#endnote-40) The title of this text immediately recalls *The Prick of Conscience*’s aim to “pryck her soule withinne / So of that drede may love bygynne” [prick their souls so that love may begin out of dread].[[41]](#endnote-41) *The Prick of Conscience* bears strong connections with this tradition. Although now generally regarded as anonymous by scholars, much like *The Contemplations of the Dread and Love of God*, it was absorbed into the canon of Rolle’s English works. Five fourteenth-century manuscripts assign authorship to him.[[42]](#endnote-42)

Although the *Conscience* poet does not offer an image of the Passion for meditative purposes, nevertheless, his text borrows heavily from the general *praxis* associated with affective piety. Like Rolle, he deploys a series of vivid images designed to encourage the reader to experience, within a fictive framework, the pains of death and the torments of Hell. In the sixth book of *The Prick of Conscience*, the poet outlines the fifteen torments of Hell which include, among others, fire, coldness, stink and filth, hunger, unbearable thirst, and eternal darkness. The eighth pain, which addresses the presence of vermin, is particularly unsettling:

The eyghte peyne the boke seyth us  
Is orrible vermyn and venymus  
Whiche shul on the synful rouke  
Ever on hem to gnawe and souke,  
As grisly dragouns and neddres kene  
And toodes so foule we nevere noon sene…

For they dyd here ageyn Godes law  
Wod vermyn shul hem there gnaw…

They shul with vermyn covered be  
So that no lyme shal hem be fre  
And on hem shul thay be gnowand  
Whethur so they sitte or stande  
The vermyn shal be here clothyng  
And vermyn shal be here beddyng …

[The eighth pain, so the book tells us, is horrible vermin and venomous creatures which shall crouch on the sinful and gnaw and suck upon them for eternity, as grisly dragons and adders can, and toads that are so foul we have never seen the like of them. … For they acted against God’s law, and so mad vermin shall gnaw upon them. … They shall be covered with vermin so that no limb is untouched, and [the vermin] shall gnaw upon them whether they sit or stand. The vermin shall be their clothing, and vermin shall be their bedding …][[43]](#endnote-43)

Terrifying images such as this one, which anticipates the hellish bone-filled cavern beneath Exham Priory in Lovecraft’s story “The Rats in the Walls” (1924), were a useful part of a particular meditative technique in which readers engaged in mnemonic exercises using images drawn from violent, biblical themes.

Building up one’s memory was considered a craft as much as it was considered an art, and there were tools that had been designed in order to assist monks with the process. Lovecraft’s notion of the memorable fragments of earlier works takes on an additional resonance when considered in this context. The basic principles of *ars memorativa* treatises were thus: firstly, these texts recommended that the material to be memorized should be divided up into short segments, so that very long works could be readily retained and securely recovered out of chains of these short segments. Secondly, these short segments were often attached to schematic images, often referred to as “pictures” [*picturae*], which were said to be painted in one’s mind.[[44]](#endnote-44) The treatises often stress the need to create personal connections with the materials or to color them with emotions. Fear, violence and sensuality were frequently linked in this tradition, as authors created images drawn from violent, biblical themes to push the reader toward the *compunctio cordis* required for medieval meditation.[[45]](#endnote-45) An anonymous Carthusian monk of the fifteenth century, for example, counseled readers to use frightful images of people who had been hanged or decapitated, as these would be the most arresting. Worried that the monks may take pleasure from executing only their enemies in these reveries, he immediately cautioned that these poor, tortured souls ought to be friends and relatives as well as enemies.[[46]](#endnote-46)

Consider also the twelfth-century Carthusian monk, Adam of Dryburgh, who developed a threefold system for contemplation, which consisted of meditation on the form of God, his terrible punishments of the damned, and at last the joys of Heaven. The second part, most relevant for us, involved a literary and spiritual exercise in which readers contemplated the moment when the soul separates from the body, the decayed and worm-ridden state of the body after death, the Resurrection and judgement of the dead, and the penalties awaiting the damned. They then were instructed to imagine themselves within those images so they could sublimate and accommodate the experience before moving on to the final section, which focused on the contemplation of Heaven.[[47]](#endnote-47) His language stresses the visual nature of these horrific images:

I see these things, Lord my God. I see these things, I say, and I am afraid. I consider these things and I quake with fear. I behold these things and in your hands I tremble, O righteous and hidden God: hidden and righteous.[[48]](#endnote-48)

The moment of judgment draws special attention. He urges the reader to

paint the moving powers of heavens, the burning heavens and lands, and that frightful and dreadful vengeance which he will exercise on the reprobate. …Let [your meditations] see that land the external penalties of the reprobate, the infernal Gehenna, where the fire will be inextinguishable, the worm immortal ...[[49]](#endnote-49)

The fifth book of *The Prick of Conscience*, the longest book of the entire treatise,is entirely devoted to detailing Judgement Day and the signs that will announce its coming. The passage, which describes the fire that will consume the world, is particularly evocative:

At the ende of the worlde byfore the dom  
An hidouse fyre byfore shal com  
That sodeynly the worlde shal bryn  
And no thing spare that is therin, …  
This fyur that of the worlde shal ryse  
Shal then come fro dyverse partyse:  
The fyur above withouten were  
And undur erthe and above here  
Shul mete togedur at ones thon  
And holy brenne beest and mon,  
And alle that groweth in erthe and eyre  
Til alle be clensed and made feyre.

[At the end of the world before judgment, a hideous fire shall come so that suddenly the world shall burn and nothing shall be spared. This fire that comes from the earth shall rise up and appear from different parts: the fire above and outside and under the earth shall meet together at once and completely burn all beasts and men, and everything that grows in the earth and the air until all are cleansed and made beautiful.][[50]](#endnote-50)

The images from this particular book of *The Prick of Conscience* were so evocative that a fifteenth-century stained glass window was created to depict them—specifically the fifteen signs of Doomsday—in All Saints North Street, York, each accompanied by a variant of the words of the poem.[[51]](#endnote-51) There, churchgoers could easily visualize the horrors to come and think upon their own sinfulness.

I have in my discussion thus far sketched out the relationship between *The Prick of Conscience* and affective meditations and mnemonic techniques. I have shown that many of these techniques involved readers imagining brutal and horrific moments of violence and then identifying with or inserting themselves into those narratives in order to intensify their feelings. In this sense, a text like *The Prick of Conscience* acts as an “emotion machine” to use Ed Tan’s term: it generates powerful negative emotional responses, and it does so through strategies analyzed in modern cognitive theories of affect.[[52]](#endnote-52) What interests me is how in many cases the ecstatic sublimation of fear invoked by violent mental images comes as a result a final liberating turn to the joys of Heaven. *The Prick of Conscience* makes this move as well—but should we say that the only pleasure that the text offers is in the final section? Or might we imagine that the emotional “high points” of the text (and I have shown several examples) were in and of themselves pleasurable?

# Art-Horror and Medieval Emotion Machines

Both medieval and modern scholars such as Lovecraft himself have been slow to recognize a potential continuity in the treatment of horror in literature over the centuries and have subsequently neglected early texts when addressing how certain effects are produced.[[53]](#endnote-53) The exclusion persists as a result of two premises: firstly, if the horror literature is taken as arising from a set of recognizable tropes, then these tropes largely originate within Gothic literature; secondly, and perhaps more intriguingly, the fear of the supernatural exploited in horror literature is particularly calibrated to a post-1750 world in which the scientifically-minded thinkers of the Enlightenment relegated the supernatural to “a figment of the imagination.”[[54]](#endnote-54) During the medieval period, these arguments imply, the supernatural would have been taken as an extension of reality, and, consequently, any form of affect generated by narratives dependent upon it would be of a markedly different kind. Andrew Joynes, in his introduction to an edition collecting medieval ghost stories, remarks,

Today, the effect of a story of the supernatural is frequently enhanced by the fact that it runs counter to the supposedly rational tenor of modern culture. In the Middle Ages, a time of unquestioning religious faith, a ghost story often had an exemplary purpose and was intended to evoke a wondering response from its listeners.[[55]](#endnote-55)

The supposition that medieval people had an “unquestioning religious faith” allows critics to collapse or confuse distinctions between the natural or true horror such as plagues and warfare with otherworldly horrors such as demons. For medieval audiences, they argue, these horrors were all potentially plausible. Indeed, Lovecraft makes a similar point when he suggests medieval readers had “a most unquestioning faith in every form of the supernatural; from the gentlest of Christian doctrines to the most monstrous morbidities of witchcraft and black magic.”[[56]](#endnote-56) Consequently, these texts tend to be dismissed by modern critics who believe that narratives with some grounding in actual horror cannot lead to pleasurable emotions.[[57]](#endnote-57) The philosopher Robert C. Solomon, for example, argues that although we might ask what pleasure a movie-goer would experience in a horror film, it “makes no sense at all” to ask such a question of a real horrific event such as September 11, which does not involve a liberating “epistemic uncertainty.”[[58]](#endnote-58) For Solomon, audiences only experience enjoyment when a text is “‘mixed’ and compromised” or presented as “make-believe.”[[59]](#endnote-59)

Critics who follow this line of thinking might argue that a text such as *The Prick of Conscience* could not evoke pleasure because it lacked a necessary fictive distance which would relax moral judgments and free its readers from the need to take action or responsibility for their aberrant emotional responses to suffering. This position tends to be strengthened when textual representations of violence within *The Prick of Conscience* are conflated with the ongoing “real” horror of the outbreaks of the Black Death. Jonathan Hughes argues that the author of *The Prick of Conscience* was more effective than anyone else in instilling a fear of dying in those with un-confessed sins in times of sickness and danger.[[60]](#endnote-60) But while it is tempting to link the composition of *The Prick of Conscience* to the emergence of the Black Death, it must also be remembered that current theories of authorship date the composition of the poem to the 1330s, some decades before the first major outbreak in 1348-49.[[61]](#endnote-61) As a result, the original context of writing likely does not reflect an awareness of the outbreak of plague, even if this environment intensified the popularity of the text post-1350. A historical reading of the text in the light of the catastrophes of the fourteenth century may yield many rewards, but one of the side effects of this approach is that it also obfuscates our understanding of the potentially pleasurable function of the text in and of itself. To look for literary strategies designed to produce pleasure out of genuinely horrific events seems to risk trivializing the horrendous nature of those catastrophes.

In the discussion that follows, I want to push back against some of these assumptions to sketch out some possible avenues for understanding the specifically textual pleasures that *The Prick of* Conscience may have offered its readers. In doing so, I argue that *The Prick of Conscience* uses strategies quite similar to modern horror texts to ravish its readers with the intensity of the emotions it generates. Lovecraft’s account of “weird” fiction makes a valuable connection between religious texts and tales of cosmic horror. He argues that “the thrill of the chimney-corner whisper or the lonely wood” is grounded in a psychological pattern or tradition “coeval with the religious feeling and closely related to many aspects of it.”[[62]](#endnote-62) While I hesitate to suggest that the purpose or ultimate use of the sensations within the text is the same, like Lovecraft, I believe that the emotionally heightened state produced by devotional or penitential texts is analogous in some ways to the kinds of pleasure generated by modern horror texts.

Noël Carroll’s theory of art-horror, which he develops in his monograph *The Philosophy of Horror*,offers a useful starting point for understanding how textual representations of horror create specific kinds of pleasure in their audiences. He differentiates between what he calls “natural horror” (ecological disaster, genocide, and the like) and the horror that appears in fine art, radio programs, films, and novels, more specifically, the products of a specific genre. That genre can be identified by the inclusion of a particular object—a monster—that elicits fear and repulsion because it is *impure* and violates categorical distinctions (ie. living/dead). It is not the combination of fear and repulsion of these categorical violations that are inherently pleasurable—these, he admits “[exact] a little discomfort in exchange for greater pleasure”[[63]](#endnote-63)—but rather the narrative itself which revolves around the drama of the discovery or disclosure of an object that is, in principle, unknowable.

Some aspects of *The Prick of Conscience* are elucidated by using an account such as this. Although the text itself is not narrative in focus, a potential problem, it does broadly stage a drama of discovery in which otherwise unknowable beings—fiends, for example—are revealed and explained to the reader. However, Carroll argues that one can only experience art-horror with respect to a fictive monster, an entity “not now believed to exist according to reigning scientific notions.”[[64]](#endnote-64) His account specifically excludes the Middle Ages because the cosmology of the period included witches, demons, werewolves and spectral forces as a part of reality, and, consequently, could not provoke the necessary sense of natural violation.[[65]](#endnote-65) Carroll’s definition of monsters that fascinate has been challenged in recent critical theory, and here I add my own objections that this position represents an overly simplified understanding of medieval thought.[[66]](#endnote-66) Even if spectral forces were more easily regarded as part of reality, this belief was not universal. Robert Bartlett argues that conceptions of homogenized medieval belief systems prejudge the issue. There are many cases when anomalies and inconsistencies in paradigms of belief are revealed: conceptions of the “natural” and the “supernatural” caused intellectual discomfort in the Middle Ages.[[67]](#endnote-67) At the very least, it must be acknowledged that the programs of reform and pastoral care which prompted the writing of *The Prick of Conscience* cameabout in large part because the tenets of faith were not as widely understood as was desired. In the Prologue, the *Conscience* poet states explicitly that a lack of knowledge prevents readers from experiencing the appropriate feelings toward the perils they should dread and flee.[[68]](#endnote-68)

If we modify Carroll’s theory to consider creatures which may be generally believed to exist, yet still remained unknown or impossible to apprehend except through the mediation of texts, then it might be the case that the reader took some pleasure in coming to a greater understanding of these monstrous entities who were the object of their fascination and curiosity. Nevertheless, Carroll’s account does not provide an adequate understanding of the presence of passages designed to intensify the apprehension of pain. For Carroll, disgust and fear do not coexist with pleasure, but rather those emotions, unpleasant in and of themselves, are simply necessary for the generation of the latter. But in the case of *The Prick of Conscience,* surely the experiences of disgust and fear would have exceeded their necessary function; consequently, we are left in a position of agreeing with those scholars who saw its methods as crude and excessive. The pleasures taken when the reader explores the natures of monsters seem rather weak if one then accepts the reality of those monsters. It might be countered that a more pleasurable process of discovery is the revelation that, although these pains exist, they might be mitigated by an appropriate penitential process.

An account which integrates the experience of fear and pleasure would be preferable. In this respect, Matt Hills’ cognitive-based approach is better. He maintains that horror ought to be regarded as an aesthetic, fictional exercise.[[69]](#endnote-69) Hills rejects Carroll’s dependency upon both an object-oriented approach, in which a single feature of the text—the monster, for example—provokes a response. He also rejects the definition of an emotion as “occurrent” (that is, taking place only in direct response rather than a lingering effect like a disposition of mood). He suggests that horror involves not just an outward-focused emotional reaction to textual content, but also introspection over emotional and affective states. In his modified theory, horror texts shift between object-oriented emotions and objectless affects such as edginess or anxiety. These texts function as “emotion machines” for constructing both affects and emotions and transforming one into another.[[70]](#endnote-70) The pleasure of a horror text comes, in this theory, from the transformation of experienced affect into emotion and vice versa, as objects attach themselves to pre-existing affects and as emotions become detached from objects (as, for example, when a monster disappears from the screen or page) and are converted into the “affective saturation” of an unsettling mood or edgy ambience.[[71]](#endnote-71) Hills’ modified theory might explain, then, how the crises of the fourteenth century conditioned a heightened reaction to *The Prick of Conscience.* Anticipatory reading and its mood is a crucial part of an affective theory of reading. Yvonne Leffler, for instance, argues for the significance of vague “pre-figurings” within a text, whereby a threat presented within the diegesis of the text is later made actual.[[72]](#endnote-72) Hills would caution against this approach, arguing that these anticipatory states are “textually derived” and “forward-looking” rather than “recapping anxious moods felt outside the aesthetic text-audience encounter.”[[73]](#endnote-73) However, it seems to me that in cases where the anxieties of the text mirror anxieties that be experienced outside the text, Hills’ objection has less force.

If we follow Hills theory, one of the pleasures offered by a text such as *The Prick of Conscience* might be the transformation of objectless affect to object-oriented emotion as the text worked to crystallize anxieties surrounding the suddenness and unpredictability of death into specific, evocative images. The first book of *The Prick of Conscience*, for example, describes the wretchedness of mankind. It outlines all the phases of life (birth, middle age, and old age) followed by the nature of his death. In this final section, the *Conscience* poet provides an extraordinarily detailed description of the tokens by which death might be recognized in a sick person:

His fronnt bygynneth doun to falle  
And his browes goon doune with alle;  
His lyfte yghe semeth welle lesse  
And narower then the ryght yghe esse.  
His nese cop is sharpe with alle,  
Then bygynneth his chin to falle,  
His pouns ben stille with out styryng,  
His feet gyn coolde his body gyn clyng,  
And yif ny deth is a yong monne  
He waketh and may nought slepe thon.

[His forehead begins to fall down, and his brows begin to fall; his left eye shrinks and becomes narrower than the right eye. His nose tip grows very sharp, and then his chin begins to fall as well. His pulse grows still and will not stir. His feet grown cold, and his body begins to shrivel up. And if death is near a young man then he wakens and cannot sleep.][[74]](#endnote-74)

The anxiety the text has provoked in its reader, combined with any external, intensifying anxiety, could here be focalized around the single provocative image of a dying man. This model aligns neatly with Jonathan Hughes’s account of the purpose of *The Prick of Conscience* as a penitential tool:

By evoking the terrors of sudden and painful death, writers on confession opposed to this arbitrary force the hard certainties of a penitential system that exerted an iron grip on penitents in this world and the next. The physical terrors of death were shown to be manifestations of a troubled conscience, and their alleviation was only possible through the sacrament of penance.[[75]](#endnote-75)

Here, the objectless affect—“the terrors of sudden and painful death”—transforms into “the hard certainties” of the text’s penitential system, and, consequently, becomes easier to process and manage. This approach does not reduce the horrific imagery within the text to an account of “real” horror or didactic purpose, which might be dismissed as lacking in artistry; instead, it reveals how the *Conscience* poet used specific literary techniques still in order to enhance the complex emotional effects of his text.

In this section I have laid out in brief several modern cognitive-based models that expose some of the paradoxical pleasures of *The Prick of Conscience*. On the one hand, an adjusted version of Carroll’s model would locate the pleasure of the text in its ability to reveal the nature of the monstrous beings who torment the sinful in the afterlife as essentially pleasurable; on the other hand, Hills’ model would posit the text as an “emotion machine” for converting the objectless anxiety provoked by the crises of the fourteenth century into the concretized and targeted dread necessary for the text’s psychosomatic penitential program. And yet it must be admitted that if these represent the only pleasures the text has to offer then they still seem rather troubling. For one, while *The Prick of Conscience* has an aesthetic component, it does not operate with the same degree of fictionality as the horror texts studied by both Carroll and Hills. Modern horror texts may leave the reader with a lingering sense of unease or indeterminacy if they have been particularly effective, yet they still depend upon the eventual dissipation of these affects as the reader’s cognitive faculties reject the reality of the narrative. Here we reach a crux: the *Conscience* poet’s project requires that the material presented in the text be taken as authoritative and genuine rather than fictional, and so the final release from the realm of horror ought not to take place. Indeed, the *Conscience* poet may well have intended the reader to sustain feelings of dread and horror long after the text had been read. In this sense, then, *The Prick of Conscience* tends to resemble postmodern horror texts such as *The Blair Witch Project* (1999, dir. Daniel Myrick and Eduardo Sánchez), which makes use of apparently “found footage” to claim the authenticity for the text, rejecting conventions that allow for closure. The horror of such tales bleeds over into reality, leaving the audience in doubt as to whether what they saw was genuine or fictional. As Isabel Cristina Pinedo argues, these texts confront us with epistemic uncertainty: “we only know that we do not know.”[[76]](#endnote-76)

*The Prick of Conscience* is a disruptive poem, one of the first horror texts of widespread appeal in England. It is a text designed to unsettle its readers, to challenge their sense of the universe and their own place within it, and by doing so, to mingle dread and fervour in a series of intense moments of textual ravishment. This same disruptive practice is a feature of Lovecraft’s writing, which is obsessed with undermining traditional forms of knowledge and dramatizing in stark and frightening detail the intrinsic unknowability of the world his characters inhabit. The horrific effects of weird tales such as “The Call of Cthulhu”, which I cited at the very beginning of this chapter, rely upon the audience’s epistemic uncertainty. They suggest that our ability to correlate the contents of the universe is flawed. Should we glimpse the “terrifying vistas of reality” that exist beyond the realm of scientific comprehension, only madness—or perhaps fanaticism—awaits us. But the disruptive effects of weird tales such as this only occur when they resist rationalisation and explanation.[[77]](#endnote-77) *The Prick of Conscience* contains a similar indigestible kernel at its core, an element that cannot easily be resolved through the study of historical causes or by recourse to the kind of “smirking optimism” Lovecraft himself despised in didactic literature. *The Prick of Conscience* grimaces where other texts might grin, it terrifies, but it also seems to take a strange satisfaction in unfolding the manifold miseries of its vision of the afterlife, it exudes delight in its sheer excessiveness. The account I have offered of the text’s complicated emotional machinery is necessarily partial, and has touched only in passing on popular belief, definitions of “natural” and “supernatural” in medieval thought, and the role of religious texts in mediating evolving notions of cosmology. But even this partial account demonstrates that the study of horror literature might be usefully broadened to include texts written before the eighteenth century. When modern critics dismiss medieval literature as purely didactic, they dispose too readily of a huge body of work capable of both illuminating and complicating the paradoxical pleasures of horror. For although Lovecraft himself may have been deeply skeptical of medieval texts such as *The Prick of Conscience*, the unprecedented resurgence in the popularity of his critical and creative writing offers an exciting opportunity to re-examine texts of a similar vein, separated by hundreds of years, but linked in their shared apprehensions about the nature of the cosmos and humanity’s place within it.

1. An early version of this chapter was presented at the 36th International Conference on the Fantastic in the Arts held in Orlando, March 18-22, 2015. Both the research for this article and travel to the conferences were made possible by a Postdoctoral Fellowship from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council for which I am extremely grateful. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. H. P. Lovecraft to Frank Belknap Long, 22 February 1931 in *Selected Letters III (1929-1931)*, edited by August Derleth and James Turner (Sauk City, WI: Arkham House Publishers, Inc., 1971), 293; quoted in S. T. Joshi, *A Dreamer and a Visionary: H.P. Lovecraft in His Time* Joshi (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2001), 298. Bryant Brantley studies both Lovecraft’s aversion to the Middle Ages and his links with it in “H. P. Lovecraft’s ‘Unnameable" Middle Ages” in *Medieval Afterlives in Popular Culture*, edited by Gail Ashton, and Daniel T. Kline (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 113-127. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. James H. Morey, ed., *Prik of Conscience* (Kalamazoo, Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 2012), 3:499-591. All modern translations of the original Middle English are my own. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. “Lothli (adj.).” *Middle English Dictionary*. Accessed April 14, 2015. http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=id&id=MED26162. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. H. P. Lovecraft, “The Call of Cthulhu” in *The Call of Cthulhu and Other Weird Stories*, edited by S. T. Joshi (New York: Penguin Classics, 2002), 165. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Ibid., 139. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. H. P. Lovecraft, *The Annotated Supernatural Horror in Literature*, edited by S. T. Joshi (New York: Hippocampus Press, 2000), 29. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Lovecraft, *Supernatural Horror*, 29-30. This rather outmoded idea, which S. T. Joshi offhandedly remarks “is no longer accepted by anthropologists” (103, n. 5) likely came from Margaret A. Murray’s *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1921). [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Ken Gelder, “Introduction” in *The Horror Reader* (London: Routledge, 2002), 3. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Georges Bataille, “The Cruel Practice of Art” (1949). “L'Art, exercise de la cruauté” was originally published in *Médicine de France* 4 (1949): 21-7 and reprinted in Georges Bataille, *Oeuvres Complètes,* vol. XI (Paris: Gallimard, 1988). This translation first appeared on the CD-ROM *BLAM!* 1 (1993) and was revised for supervert.com. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Andrew Joynes, ed., *Medieval Ghost Stories* (Woodbridge, England: Boydell Press, 2001), xii [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Bataille. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Morey, 3:125-27. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. Ibid., 3:125-31. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Lovecraft, *Supernatural Horror*, 24. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Jody Enders, *The Medieval Theater of Cruelty: Rhetoric, Memory, Violence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), xi. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. Barbara W Tuchman, *A Distant Mirror* (New York: Knopf, 1978), xiii. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. Lewis and McIntosh identified 120 manuscripts and fragments in *A Descriptive Guide to the Manuscripts of the* Prick of Conscience (Oxford: Society for the Study of Mediaeval Languages and Literature, 1982). Ralph Hanna III has recently suggested the number may be as high as 170 in “Two New Manuscript Fragments of *Speculum Vitae*,” *Journal of the Early Book Society* 16 (2013): 193-98. These numbers can be compared to the eighty-one manuscripts of *The Canterbury Tales* identified by Michael Sargent in “What Do the Numbers Mean? A Textual Critic’s Observations on Some Patterns of Middle English Manuscript Transmission” which appears in *Design and Distribution of Late Medieval Manuscripts in England*, edited by Margaret Connolly and Linne Mooney (York: York Medieval Press, 2008), 206. *The Prick of Conscience* has begun to undergo a re-evaluation, in part because of the publication of two new editions, the first by James H. Morey which I have cited from throughout, and the second by Hanna and Sarah Woods: *Richard Morris’s Prick of Conscience: A Corrected and Amplified Reading Text* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). Contributing to this, Moira Fitzgibbons has produced two articles which address *The Prick of Conscience* as a literary text, rather than focusing on the linguistic data it might provide: Enabled and Disabled ‘Myndes’ in *The Prick of Conscience*” in *Medieval Poetics and Social Practice: Responding to the Work of Penn R. Szittya*, edited by Seeta Chaganti (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), 72-94 and “Critical Pleasure, Visceral Literacy, and the *Prik of Conscience*,” *Pedagogy* 13 (2013): 245-266. Daniel Sawyer has also identified fragments of another *Conscience* manuscript in “Rediscovered Manuscript Fragments of *The Prick of Conscience* in the Library of Queens' College, Cambridge,” *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society* (forthcoming). [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. Jean Jost remarks that its emphasis on “excruciatingly detailed physical pain … plays an excessive role” in “Afterlife in the Southern Recension,” typescript 10; quoted in Howell Chickering, “Rhetorical Stimulus in the *Prick Of Conscience*” in *Medieval Paradigms*, edited by Jeremy duQuesnay Adams and Stephanie A Hayes-Healy (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 209. Derek Pearsall’s quotation appears in Derek Pearsall, *Old English and Middle English Poetry* (London; Boston: Routledge & K. Paul, 1977), 139. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. Anne Clark Bartlett and Thomas Howard Bestul, “Introduction” in *Cultures of Piety: Medieval English Devotional Literature in Translation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 3-4. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne et al, eds., *The Idea of the Vernacular: An Anthology of Middle English Literary Theory, 1280-1520* (University Park, PA.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 241. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. See Alexandra Barratt’s description of the ownership of *Conscience* manuscripts in “Spiritual Writings and Religious Instruction,” in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain*, *Vol. II:* *1100-1400*, edited by Nigel Morgan and Rodney M. Thomson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 358-359. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. Mary Elizabeth O’Carroll, *A Thirteenth-Century Preacher's Handbook: Studies in MS Laud Misc. 511* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute for Mediaeval Studies, 1997), 1. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. Morey, Entre: 282-286. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. Ibid., Entre: 320-21 [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. Ibid., Entre: 331. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. Ibid., 3:226-243 [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. Chickering, 212. [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. Morey, 7: 1807-1815. [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. Lovecraft, *Supernatural Horror*, 27. [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. Jennifer Bryan, *Looking Inward: Devotional Reading and the Private Self in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 110. [↑](#endnote-ref-32)
33. William F. Hodapp, “Richard Rolle's Passion Meditations in the Context of His English Epistles: *Imitatio Christi* and the *Three Degrees of Love*,” *Mystics Quarterly* 20 (1994), pp. 96-104 (100). [↑](#endnote-ref-33)
34. Richard Rolle, "Meditation B" in Richard Rolle: Prose and Verse, edited by S. J. Ogilvie-Thomson, EETS 293 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 377-38. [↑](#endnote-ref-34)
35. The Latin reads: “Sed melius est, securius est, suavius contemplatorem esse, eternam suivitatem presentire, delicias canere eterni amoris et in laudem rapi Conditoris per infusionem conoris iubilei” from *Melos Amoris*: 152.6-154.19. Qtd in Nicholas Watson, *Richard Rolle and the Invention of Authority*, 183. [↑](#endnote-ref-35)
36. Richard Rolle, *Incendium Amoris*, 145.1-147.32 (need proper citation); qtd in Nicholas Watson, *Richard Rolle*, 114. [↑](#endnote-ref-36)
37. Cf. *The Book of Margery Kempe*, edited by Lynn Staley (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1996). [↑](#endnote-ref-37)
38. Santha Bhattacharji examines the Western medieval tradition of religious weeping, and its controversial nature, in "Tears and Screaming: Weeping in the Spirituality of Margery Kempe" in *Holy Tears: Weeping in the Religious Imagination* edited by Kimberley Christine Patton and John Stratton Hawley (Princeton, NJ : Princeton University Press, 2005): 229-240. [↑](#endnote-ref-38)
39. Margaret Connolly, ed., *Contemplations of the Dread and Love of God* (Oxford: Oxford University Press for the Early English Text Society, 1993), 7. [↑](#endnote-ref-39)
40. Margaret Connolly, “Mapping Manuscripts and Readers of *Contemplations of Dread and Love of God*” in *Design and Distribution of Late Medieval Manuscripts in England*, edited by Margaret Connolly and Linne Mooney (York: York Medieval Press, 2008), 262. [↑](#endnote-ref-40)
41. Morey, Entre:330-332. [↑](#endnote-ref-41)
42. The *Conscience* manuscripts which attribute authorship to Richard Rolle are BodL, MS Ashmole 60, BL, MS Egerton 3245, London, Lambeth Palace, MS 260, Camb., Gonville and Caius College, MS 386, and Oxford, Merton College, MS 68. These are discussed in Robert Lewis and Angus McIntosh, *A Descriptive Guide to the Manuscripts of the* Prick of Conscience (Oxford: Society for the Study of Mediaeval Languages and Literature, 1982). [↑](#endnote-ref-42)
43. Morey, 6: 436-482. [↑](#endnote-ref-43)
44. Mary Carruthers and Jan M. Ziolkowski, *The Medieval Craft of Memory: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures* (Philadelphia, Pa: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 6. [↑](#endnote-ref-44)
45. Kimberly Rivers, “The Fear of Divine Vengeance: Mnemonic Images as a Guide to Conscience in the Late Middle Ages” in *Fear and its Representations in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, edited by Anne Scott and Cynthia Kosso (Turnhout: Brepols, 2002). [↑](#endnote-ref-45)
46. Rivers, 77-9. See also Roger A. Pack, “*Artes memorativae* in a Venetian manuscript,” *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen âge* 50 (1983): 257-300. [↑](#endnote-ref-46)
47. J. F. Worthen, “Adam of Dryburgh and the Augustinian Tradition,” *Revue des Études Augustiniennes* 43 (1997), 343-344. [↑](#endnote-ref-47)
48. The Latin reads: “Video haec, Domine Deus meus. Video haec, inquam, et timeo. Considero haec et pavea. Cerno haec et in manibus tuis trepido, O Deus juste et occulte: occulte et juste!” qtd in Worthen, 344. [↑](#endnote-ref-48)
49. Jacques Paul Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 153 (Paris: s.l., 1864).834-35; translated and qtd in Rivers, 82 [↑](#endnote-ref-49)
50. Morey, 5: 845-860. [↑](#endnote-ref-50)
51. See Sue Powell, “The Fifteen Signs of Doom in Image and Text: the Pricke of Conscience Window at All Saints, North Street, York” in *Harlaxton Medieval Studies* XII (New Series) *Proceedings of the 2000 Symposium: Prophecy, Apocalypse and the Day of Doom*, edited by Nigel J. Morgan (Donington, Lincs: Shaun Tyas/Paul Watkins Publications, 2004), 292–316. [↑](#endnote-ref-51)
52. Ed S. Tan introduces the term in *Emotion and the Structure of Narrative Film: Film as an Emotion Machine* (New York: Routledge, 2011). [↑](#endnote-ref-52)
53. Scholars such as Noël Carroll and John Clute among others have traditionally placed the beginningof the horror genre in the eighteenth century, finding its roots in Gothic novels such as Horace Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) or “monster stories” including Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (1818). For examples of this approach, see Carroll, *The Philosophy Of Horror, Or, Paradoxes Of The Heart* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 14 and Clute, “The Darkening Garden” in *Stay* (Essex: Beccon Publications, 2014), 269-343. [↑](#endnote-ref-53)
54. Carroll, 56. [↑](#endnote-ref-54)
55. Joynes, xii. [↑](#endnote-ref-55)
56. Lovecraft, *Supernatural Horror*, 24. [↑](#endnote-ref-56)
57. Matt Hills, *The Pleasures of Horror* (London: Continuum, 2005), 3. [↑](#endnote-ref-57)
58. Robert C. Solomon, “Real Horror” in *Dark Thoughts: Philosophic Reflections on Cinematic Horror*, edited by Steven Jay Schneider and Daniel Shaw (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2003), 230-31. [↑](#endnote-ref-58)
59. Ibid., 251. [↑](#endnote-ref-59)
60. Jonathan Hughes, “The Administration of Confession in the Diocese of York in the Fourteenth Century” in *Studies in Clergy and Ministry in Medieval England*, edited by David M. Smith, Purvis Seminar Studies, Borthwick Studies in History I (York: University of York Press, 1991), 112. [↑](#endnote-ref-60)
61. Lewis and McIntosh’s early estimate was about 1350 on the basis that many of the manuscripts appear just after this date, but Hanna and Wood more recently have placed the date some twenty years earlier in Ralph Hanna III and Sarah Wood, eds., *Richard Morris's Prick of Conscience: A Corrected and Amplified Reading Text* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), vlii. [↑](#endnote-ref-61)
62. Lovecraft, *Supernatural Horror*, 26. [↑](#endnote-ref-62)
63. Carroll, 171. [↑](#endnote-ref-63)
64. Ibid., 35. [↑](#endnote-ref-64)
65. Ibid., 57. [↑](#endnote-ref-65)
66. For criticisms and revisions, see Berys Gaut, “The Paradox of Horror,” *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 33 (1993): 333-45; Mark Verobej, “Monsters and the Paradox of Horror,” *Dialogue: Canadian Philosophical Review* XXXVI (1997): 219-46; Robert C. Solomon, “The Philosophy of Horror, or, Why Did Godzilla Cross the Road?” in *Entertaining Ideas – Popular Philosophical Essays: 1970-1990* (New York, Prometheus Books), 119-30); and Matt Hills, “An Event-Based Definition of Art-Horror” in *Dark Thoughts: Philosophic Reflections on Cinematic Horror*, 138-157. [↑](#endnote-ref-66)
67. Robert Bartlett, *The Natural And The Supernatural In The Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 2. [↑](#endnote-ref-67)
68. Morey, Entre: 175-180 [↑](#endnote-ref-68)
69. Hills, *The Pleasures of Horror*,5. [↑](#endnote-ref-69)
70. Ibid., 28. [↑](#endnote-ref-70)
71. Ibid. [↑](#endnote-ref-71)
72. Yvonne Leffler, *Horror as Pleasure: The Aesthetics of Horror Fiction* (Stockholm, Almqvist & Wiksell International, 2000), 183-4. [↑](#endnote-ref-72)
73. Hills, *The Pleasures of Horror*, 31. [↑](#endnote-ref-73)
74. Morey, 6:432-443. [↑](#endnote-ref-74)
75. Hughes, “The Administration of Confession,” 112. [↑](#endnote-ref-75)
76. Pinedo, “Postmodern Elements of the Contemporary Horror Film” in *The Horror Film*, edited by Stephen Prince (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 99. [↑](#endnote-ref-76)
77. Lovecraft, *Supernatural Horror*, 26. [↑](#endnote-ref-77)