PRIVATE PASSIONS: THE CONTEMPLATION OF SUFFERING

IN MEDIEVAL AFFECTIVE DEVOTIONS

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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This dissertation examines the representation of suffering in medieval affective

devotional texts. Images of physical and emotional suffering from Christ's life and

Passion abound in these materials meant for private meditation. Critical assessments of

this suffering often cast it as indicative of child-like literalism and sentimentality. By

contrast, I argue that these texts require the reader to engage with this suffering in far

more complex psychological ways. Chapter one explores the connection between

imagined suffering and the ethical function of affective meditations. Drawing on Mary

Caruthers's work on the cultural meanings and uses of memory, I demonstrate how the

classical art of memory evolved during the Middle Ages from a secular tool for orators

into a Christian tool for self-fashioning. Chapter two examines the process of self-

transformation encouraged by the *Meditations on the Life of Christ* and questions the

perception that the *Meditations* merely offers a script for a meditator to passively

follow in order to feel compassion for Christ. I use performance theory to argue that

the *Meditations* instead relies on a productive tension between pleasure and pain that

causes the meditator to experience the act of inflicting emotional pain upon herself as a pleasurable act of self-creation. Chapter three employs Emmanuel Levinas's ideas about the nature of an ethical relationship with the Other to illuminate the nature of Margery Kempe's relationship to Christ in *The Book of Margery Kempe*. Kempe's *Book* demonstrates the necessity to the affective project of *failing* to make God and his suffering "familiar" to the reader. Chapter four uses Caroline Bynum's work on gender in medieval spirituality to argue that the *Quis dabit*, one of the most popular and influential texts in the *planctus Mariae* genre, embodies assumptions about gendered spiritual roles that affect how male and female readers relate to Christ and Mary. In the *Quis dabit*'s conversation between Bernard of Clairvaux and Mary, Bernard's attempt to identify with Mary's suffering turns into his appropriation of Mary's own narrative in order to make her better fit the "feminine" role that he needs her to play for his own spiritual ends.

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Introduction

This project takes as its subject the function of suffering in medieval affective devotional texts. More specifically, it explores the role of suffering, both witnessed and imaginatively experienced by the meditator, in the process of self-examination and character formation encouraged by affective meditations. The Middle Ages are a time of ardent affective devotional practice, and at the heart of that practice lie lovingly detailed, emotionally charged images of violence and suffering. Those who mediated upon narratives of Christ's life had many opportunities to feel pity and compassion for the suffering of others. Sometimes the suffering is brought on by poverty, as in Christ's nativity; sometimes the suffering is explicitly bloody and violent, as in Christ's Passion. But always the texts' injunction to the reader is to imagine herself personally participating in the events in her mind, such as by joining in the humble daily activities of the holy family, as well as sharing in their tribulations, such as by weeping along with Mary at the foot of the cross. Such participation is meant to be spiritually transformative, but the specific mechanisms by which suffering effects this transformation are often explained as simply the cultivation of compassion on the part of the participant. One might think that given the broad proliferation of such texts from the twelfth century through the end of the Middle Ages, and given the pervasiveness of physical and emotional suffering in these texts, that the function of suffering would already have been thoroughly explored by scholars of medieval devotions. Representations of the wounded body of Christ have, indeed, received extensive attention from critics. Christ's body has been read as a contested symbol of the body politic, of marginalized subject positions in urban economies, and of the limits of clerical power. It has been implicated in debates

over ideologies, questions of justice, and contests over legitimate authority. Such scholarship tells us much about the body of Christ as a socio-political symbol, but does not explore the ways in which people in the privacy of their own devout imaginations made meaning out of Christ's suffering. This project's goal is to apply the same level of scrutiny given to Christ's body as socio-political symbol to suffering as a necessary part of a meditative exercise in self-examination and self-fashioning. I draw on Mary Carruthers's insights into the connections between memory and ethics in the Middle Ages to argue that affective meditations are essentially a mnemonic art whose goal is the creation of a proper Christian subjectivity, and that this subjectivity is formed in part by learning how to relate to the suffering of the other. My purpose is to enrich our conversation about the function of suffering in affective devotions, to complicate the picture of how readers and witnesses to suffering react to it, and to trace the connections between memory, ethics, and medieval affective devotions.

"Devotional literature" is a broad category. We need to begin our discussion with an overview of what we mean by devotional literature, the different forms this literature takes, and how they relate to each other. The devotional literature of the high and late Middle Ages is but one component of the expanding, vibrant, and multi-faceted devotional activity that permeates European Christianity during this time. This activity, whether expressed though art, literature, objects such as relics, or activities such as pilgrimages, was devotional in that it inspired and enhanced feelings of piety, love, and reverence toward God, Mary, the saints, the Passion, and the eucharist. Thus to call an object or a practice "devotional" is to make a claim not about its specific form but about its larger intent, for an extensive variety of objects, texts, and activities served to promote

these feelings in both monastic and lay individuals. Manuscript illuminations supplied

dramatic, emotionally moving images from Christ's life, especially the nativity and

crucifixion,[1] for monastic readers while carved crucifixes in churches regularly placed the

image of the suffering Christ before the eyes of the lay congregation. Devotional texts,

including lyrics, sermons, and meditations on the Passion, reached an audience of both

the literate and the illiterate through public preaching and dramatic performances.

Franciscan preachers retrofitted popular songs with lyrics about Scriptural narratives in

order to connect with as wide a lay audience as possible, and their sermons, peppered

with colorful, affective stories about Christ's life, furnished their audience's memories

with a rich mental library of devotional narratives that they could rehearse later during

their private prayers or while visiting the holy sites in Jerusalem.[2] Margery Kempe,

whose literacy is a matter of some debate among scholars, exemplifies just how familiar

an individual could be with devotional texts by hearing about them from her spiritual

advisors rather than reading them herself, and the extent to which such devotional

narratives could shape both a person's private meditation and her public religious

expression.

   The diffuse nature of "the devotional"—its incorporation of so many modes and

genres to reach such a varied and ever-growing audience—makes it difficult to

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[1] See, for example, the copiously illustrated fourteenth century Italian translation of the *Meditations on the Life of Christ* in Bibliothèque Nationale MS Ital. 115, edited by Isa Ragusa and Rosalie B. Green; and the fifteenth century British Library MS Additional 37049, a Carthusian miscellany of prose and verse devotional works discussed by Jessica Brantley in *Reading in the Wilderness: Private Devotion and Public Performance in Late Medieval England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

[2] On the Franciscans' use of popular song, see David L. Jeffrey, *The Early English Lyric and Franciscan Spirituality* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1975), 26-27. On the "literary" significance of Franciscan preaching, see John V. Fleming, *An Introduction to Franciscan Literature of the Middle Ages* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1977), 122-123.

pigeonhole it into any precise category of religious expression or experience. Richard

Kieckhefer suggests that we place the devotional on a continuum between the liturgical

and the contemplative—that is, between the official, public, relatively stable forms of

religious experience such as the Mass, and the unofficial, private, relatively unstructured

religious experience of the religious recluse.[3] Devotional activities share qualities with

both of these extremes: they can be either communal and public, such as a Corpus

Christi procession, or they can be individual and private, such as a person reciting a

prayer or religious lyric to himself. They may be generally recognizable across cultural

boundaries (for example, in their broad outlines, Passion meditations all employ the same

narrative conventions regardless of their provenance), yet they invite regional or personal

variations in style or performance. (See, for instance, how the author of the *Meditations*

on the Life of Christ encourages his reader to go beyond the biblical narratives about

Christ's life and to meditate upon whatever apocryphal narratives best help her to achieve

compassion and love for Christ). Although Kieckhefer's method of relating the

devotional to the liturgical and the contemplative is very helpful for discerning the

indebtedness of the devotional to both of these other forms of piety and for highlighting

the roles of both the public/official and the private/unofficial in devotional practice, it

suggests too clear a distinction between the devotional and the contemplative end of the

spectrum. In my approach to this material, I see the contemplative as part of the larger

category of the devotional rather than as a contrasting category in its own right. The

purpose of all devotional literature—the instilling of feelings of love, awe, and piety—is

to prepare the individual for a more intimate engagement with the divine than he would

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[3] Richard Kieckhefer, "Major Currents in Late Medieval Devotion," in *Christian Spirituality: High Middle Ages and Reformation*, ed. Jill Raitt (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 76.

otherwise be ready to have. This engagement can occur through meditation,

contemplation, or mystical encounter with God. Meditation, given its unabashed

indulgence in the most emotionally baroque aspects of affective piety, is clearly a type of

devotional literature meant to instill love and compassion for Christ. Yet it is also a

prerequisite practice for those who aspire to move on to the more rarified heights of

apophatic contemplation and, perhaps, to the direct apprehension of the presence of God

enjoyed by the mystics. Kieckhefer's continuum from liturgical through devotional to

contemplative discourages us from seeing this alternative spectrum that joins meditation,

contemplation, and mysticism as three distinct yet related genres of devotional literature.

Despite the fact that these three forms of engagement with the divine all in some sense

develop from and contribute to devotional literature, it is important to keep our

terminology straight and not conflate these different methods of approaching and

apprehending God. Medieval authors of devotional texts took pains to distinguish

meditation from contemplation, and some modern critics also point out that too often we

modern readers apply the word "mystical" to contexts that medieval readers would not

have recognized by that term.[4] Before reviewing the critical response to devotional

literature of the Middle Ages then, we ought to take a moment to outline the purposes and

methods of, as well as the distinctions and connections between, meditation,

contemplation, and mysticism.

     Both meditation and contemplation have their origins in monastic rather than lay

spiritual practice, specifically in monastic exegesis of the Bible and other religious texts.

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[4] See Nicholas Watson, "The Middle English Mystics," in *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature*, ed. David Wallace (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 544; Denise N. Baker, "Mystical and Devotional Literature," in *A Companion to Medieval English Literature and Culture c.1350-c.1500*, ed. Peter Brown (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), 423.

Meditatio was an essential component of *lectio divina*, the slow, prayerful reading of a

sacred text, quietly recited under one's breath. A monk engaged in *lectio divina* hoped

by his practice to delve into the hidden (*mystikos*) meaning of the text, what Bernard

McGinn calls the "concealed level, or deep structure, of the mystery of salvation."[5]

Lectio more generally was the activity whereby a monk supplied the storehouse of his

memory with narratives, characters, symbols, allegories, facts, and images from

everything that he read. *Meditatio*, a term that originally referred to the repeating of a

text in order to memorize it, was the physical and mental activity by which a monk

"digested" this stockpile of material. One of the most common medieval metaphors for

meditatio is of a cow chewing the cud, an image inspired by the constant movement of

the mouth while reading and which also points to the meditating monk's goal of

internalizing what he has read in order to "feed" his mind with the truths of scripture and

the wisdom of the Church Fathers. To meditate is to dwell piously and intently upon

what one has gathered up into memory, to ruminate upon it so as to make it into a part of

oneself. *Meditatio*, as Mary Carruthers points out in *The Book of Memory*, is an

essentially ethical endeavor because one uses the texts one has consumed to build the

mental structures which will shape the nature and connections of one's thoughts about

sacred and moral topics.[6] Just as the body is built out of the food one eats, so one's

character is built out of the texts upon which one meditates. Meditating upon sacred texts

both supplied the monk's memory with the materials necessary for cultivating a pious

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[5] Bernard McGinn, *The Growth of Mysticism: Vol. 2 of The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad, 1994), xi.

[6] Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 165.

Christian subjectivity and incorporated those materials into his ways of seeing and being

in the world.

Ruminative reading of this sort was never meant as an end in itself, but as a stage

in the monk's spiritual journey toward a more subtle apprehension of God. Words and

images, products of a fallen and limited human comprehension, are suitable aids for

beginners in meditative practice because such people are, in the words of Bernard of

Clairvaux in his twentieth sermon on the *Song of Songs*, "carnal men" who are not yet

skilled enough in spiritual learning and discipline to perceive a God who transcends all

human denotation. Christ assumed human form, Bernard explains, so that he could

"recapture the affections of carnal men who were unable to love in any other way, by first

drawing them to the salutary love of his own humanity and then gradually to raise them

to a spiritual love"[7] The author of the *Meditations on the Life of Christ* elaborates on this

movement from meditative prayer that relies on images (for which the *Meditations* is

most widely known) to contemplative prayer that strives to rise above them:

> But, if I may say so, let my soul die the death of angels, so that, transcending the
> memory of things present, it may cast off not only the desires but also the images
> of lower and corporeal things. Then may my soul have a pure way of life with
> those angels who bear the real image of purity.
>   Such ecstasy, as I see it, either alone, or principally, is called
> contemplation. Not to be gripped by material desires during life is the nature of
> human virtue; but to gaze without the use of bodily images is the nature of angelic
> purity.
>
> Sed anima mea moriartur morte etiam, si dici potest, angelorum, ut praesentium
> memoria excedens, rerum se inferiorum corporearumque non modo cupiditatibus,
> sed et similitudinibus exuat, sitque ei pura cum illis conuersatio, cum quibus est

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[7] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On the Song of Songs I*, trans. Kilian Walsh (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian
Publications, Inc., 1981), 152. ". . . ut carnalium videlicet, qui nisi carnaliter amare non poterant, cunctas
primo ad suae carnis salutarem amorem affectiones retraheret, atque ita gradatim ad amorem perduceret
spiritualem." The Latin text is from Bernard of Clairvaux, "Sermo 20," in *Sermones super Cantica
Canticorum 1-35*, vol. 1 of *S. Bernardi Opera*, ed. J. Leclercq, C. H. Talbot, and H. M. Rochais (Rome:
Editiones Cistercienses, 1957), sec. V, para. 6, lines 23-26.

> puritatis similitudo. Tasi, ut opinor, excessus, aut tantum, aut maxime, contemplatio dicitur. Rerum etenim cupiditatibus uiuendo non teneri, humanae uirtutis est; corporum uero similitudinibus speculando non inuolui, angelicae puritatis est. [8]

Such angelic purity is also the ultimate goal of the *Cloud of Unknowing*, a work whose apophatic method—rejecting all concrete images as suitable means of apprehending God—locates it at the other end of the devotional spectrum from an unabashedly kataphatic, affective work such as the *Meditations*. The anonymous *Cloud*-author advises his reader to purge his mind of all images of God's creations and works and to "thenk on ought bot on Hymself, so that nought worche in thi witte ne in thi wille bot only Himself." The person who manages to achieve this state beyond images will find himself in "cloude of unknowyng, thou wost never what," in which nothing is left except "a nakid entent unto God."[9] The cultivation of this "entent" is the primary purpose of contemplative prayer; such prayer does not promise its practitioner a mystical encounter with the Godhead as a reward for his efforts. As McGinn points out, "[C]ontemplation consists not so much in the actual enjoyment of the vision of God here below as in the unceasing desire for reaching the full *visio Dei* in heaven."[10] This unceasing desire for an apprehension of the divine unmediated by language or imagery which, in the words of the *Cloud*-author, leaves the contemplative abiding in a cloud of unknowing "evermore

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[8] John of Caulibus, *Meditations of the Life of Christ*, trans. and ed. Francis X. Taney, Sr., Anne Miller, O.S.F., and C. Mary Stallings-Taney (Asheville, NC: Pegasus Press, 1999), 170. The Latin text is from *Meditaciones vite Christi, olim S. Bonauenturo attributae*, ed. M. Stallings-Taney, Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis vol. 153 (Turnholti: Brepols, 1997), chap. 49, lines 45-53.

[9] *The Cloud of Unknowing*, ed. Patrick J. Gallacher, TEAMS Middle English Text Series (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1997), lines 274-290.

[10] McGinn, *The Growth of Mysticism*, 140.

criing after Him that thou lovest"[11] is the ultimate goal of both kataphatic and apophatic devotional texts; however, as we shall see later, as kataphatic devotional writing began to reach beyond the monastery to a wider lay audience its role as a stepping stone to the more rarified heights of contemplation is de-emphasized since such devotional achievements were regarded as attainable primarily by the spiritual "elites" of the monastery, not by the "carnal men" of the secular world who were best served by meditating upon scenes of Christ's life and Passion.

Whereas contemplative prayer promised the monk only endless yearning for God and spoke not at all to the spiritual novices of the lay world, mysticism provided a more direct consciousness of God to both monk and lay person alike. To speak of "medieval mysticism," however, is to speak anachronistically, for as several scholars have recently pointed out, the word "mystike" in Middle English did not mean what people commonly mean by the word "mystic" or "mystical" today, and to conflate the medieval and the modern meanings is to introduce confusion on the subject.[12] The word "mystical" in the Middle Ages did not denote a particular kind of experience of God, as modern readers typically assume, but the "hidden" or symbolic meaning of a sacred text, the meaning sought for by the monk who engaged in *lectio divina*. The persons known today as the "mystics" of the Middle Ages would not have applied that term to themselves, but would have regarded themselves instead as deeply devout Christians who were graced with a heightened consciousness of God's presence in the world. Some may have experienced

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[11] *The Cloud of Unknowing*, lines 293-294.

[12] For critiques of the application of the term "mysticism" to the Middle Ages, see Baker, "Mystical and Devotional Literature"; Bernard McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism: Vol. 1 of The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad, 1991), xiii-xix; Watson, "The Middle English Mystics."

unio mystica, a union of the soul with God in which the individual can no longer distinguish her own will or self from the all-encompassing divinity. The thirteenth century Beguines Hadewijch and Marguerite Porete, and their contemporary Angela of Foligno, a Franciscan, are examples of mystics for whom union with God was a defining feature of their spiritual experience. But union of this kind is not a requirement for a person to be thought of as a mystic—the "Middle English mystics" Richard Rolle and Julian of Norwich, for example, do not report having such unitive experiences, and although Margery Kempe may have been swept up into a vision of herself marrying God, her devotions were too heavily influenced by the affective piety of her time for her to move beyond a very "worldly," image-rich (what Bernard would call "carnal") experience of the divine in her world. McGinn's definition of mysticism—"the preparation for, the consciousness of, and the reaction to what can be described as the immediate or direct presence of God"[13]—helps us to avoid the trap of limiting the scope of the word "mysticism" to a single kind of experience (union), as well as the tendency of many, noted by Nicholas Watson, to approach mystics and their texts with an eye toward judging whether or not those experiences are "authentic." This heightened consciousness, unlike the "cloud" of darkness in which the contemplative rests, was not necessarily the product of textually-grounded spiritual practice—that is, whereas contemplation was the state achieved by a literate few after long meditation upon sacred texts, direct consciousness of God could, in theory, be granted to anyone of sufficient piety and desire for God. It bestowed an immediate, experiential knowledge of God rather than a "second hand," textual knowledge of the deity.

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[13] McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism*, xvii.

Yet we should not go too far in making hard and fast distinctions between mysticism and contemplation, or between mysticism and meditation either. Devotional texts often blur any clear and bright lines we may attempt to draw between these three kinds of writing. Although meditation, contemplation, and mysticism each establish their own methods of conceiving of and apprehending God, none is ever completely independent of the others: meditation prepares one for contemplation which may or may not lead to a mystical consciousness of God, a consciousness that sometimes expresses itself through meditative imagery—Julian of Norwich, for instance, dwells lovingly upon Christ's face as he hangs upon the cross, all "drye and blodeles with pale deyeng, and sithen more pale, dede, langoring, and than turnid more dede into blew, and sithen more browne blew, as the flesh turnyd more depe dede"[14]—and at other times worries the edges of linguistic possibility in the manner of contemplative prayer and expresses itself in non-linguistic ways—see, for instance, Margery Kempe's tears and Richard Rolle's experience of *canor*. Mystics, as Vincent Gillespie eloquently asserts, "send despatches from the threshold, artists' impressions of the apophatic, postcards from the edge"[15] telling us as best they can about the realm of the ineffable sought after by the monk engaged in contemplative prayer. Sometimes meditation upon the Passion and other stories of Christ's life may itself spark a more direct, mystical apprehension of God without the need to pass through contemplation, as so often happens to Kempe both at home and abroad. Given the rich and varied body of devotional materials produced

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[14] Julian of Norwich, *The Shewings of Julian of Norwich*, ed. Georgina Ronan Crampton, TEAMS Middle English Text Series (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1993), lines 589-592.

[15] Vincent Gillespie, "Postcards From the Edge: Interpreting the Ineffable in the Middle English Mystics," in *Interpretation : Medieval and Modern*, ed. Piero Boitani and Anna Torti (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1993), 153.

during the high and late Middle Ages, and given the fervent popularity of these devotions

within an ever-widening audience of both monastic and lay practitioners, it should be no

surprise that each variety of devotion—meditation, contemplation, and mysticism—

would bear some trace of the others. They are three manifestations of a single desire to

personally encounter the divine that motivates so much of the devotional writing from the

twelfth century until the end of the Middle Ages.

Affective meditations, however, command the largest audience and have the

widest influence of these three types of devotion during the high and late Middle Ages.

This is a period known for its colorful, moving, often bloody and violent meditations

upon the Passion as well as other emotionally evocative moments of Christ's life. The

eleventh-century Benedictine Anselm of Canterbury is commonly regarded as the earliest

contributor to this movement. His *Prayers and Meditations* embody many of the

qualities that came to define affective spirituality. For instance, his "Prayer to Christ"

expresses not just compassion for Christ on the cross but a pained longing to have been

personally present at the crucifixion, combined with a keen awareness of his own

unworthiness:

> Alas that I did not deserve to be amazed
> in the presence of a love marvelous and beyond our grasp.
> Why, O my soul, were you not there
> to be pierced by a sword of bitter sorrow
> when you could not bear
> the piercing of the side of your Saviour with a lance?
> Why could you not bear to see
> the nails violate the hands and feet of your Creator?
> Why did you not see with horror
> the blood that poured out of the side of your Redeemer?

[H]eu qui tam admirabili, tam inaestimabili pietate praesens obstupescere non
merui! Cur, o anima mea, te praesentem non transfixit gladius doloris acutissimi,
cum ferre non posses vulnerari lancea latus tui salvatoris? Cum videre nequires

> violari clavis manus et pedes tui plasmatoris? Cum horreres effundi sanguinem tui redemptoris? [16]

Although Anselm's expressions of deep personal anguish and self-judgment were rather fervent and novel for his time, they were mild in comparison with the kinds of meditations that were to follow. The momentum began to build with the work of the Cistercian Aelred of Rievaulx whose *De institutione inclusarum* developed the affective themes introduced by Anselm. The work, written as a spiritual guide for a female recluse, includes one of the first fully developed Passion meditations in which the reader is enjoined to place herself within the scene and to interact with Christ, Mary, and the apostles. The eagerness to visualize and participate in mental dramas of scenes from Christ's life and death drew some of its inspiration from Bernard of Clairvaux's *Sermons on the Song of Songs* which, as we noted above, justified the use of carnal images as a useful tool for spiritual beginners who first need to learn to love Christ in his humanity before they can learn to love him in his divinity. Meditation, which had begun as a murmured "rumination" upon a text to be committed to memory, had by the first half of the twelfth century become a method of critiquing and consciously shaping one's affective response to God by imaginatively participating in moving, vivid narratives about Christ drawn from the gospels and from legendary material. Soon it was to begin to reach beyond the monastery and ignite the passions of laypeople who also desired a personal, intimate encounter with God.

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[16] Anselm of Canterbury, "Prayer to Christ," in *The Prayers and Meditations of St. Anselm with the Proslogion*, trans. Sister Benedicta Ward (New York: Penguin Books, 1973), lines 77-86. The Latin text is from Anselm of Canterbury, "Oratio ad Christum, cum mens vult eius amore fervere," in *S. Anselmi Cantuariensis Archiepiscopi Opera Omnia*, ed. F. S. Schmitt (Edinburgi: Thomam Nelson et Filios, 1946), 3:7, lines 41-45.

The works of Anselm, Aelred, and Bernard were all composed in Latin and intended for an audience of those committed to life in a monastic order or as a hermit. What brought affective piety out of the cloister and to a wider, more secular audience was the founding of the Franciscan order in the early thirteenth century. Taking their cues from the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 and its call for a revitalization of the *cura animarum* through widespread teaching and preaching, the Franciscans brought the gospel to the burgeoning urban populations wrapped in evocative affective imagery to catch and hold the attention of the "carnal men" in their audiences. Their sermons echoed the themes and styles of meditative literature written by men like Bonaventure (*Lignum vitae*), James of Milan (*Stimulus amoris*), and John of Caulibus (*Meditations on the Life of Christ*). Through preaching and translations into the vernacular, these works found their way to a lay audience of men and women of all classes and levels of literacy. The popularity of the affective style of devotion led to its appearance in a variety of genres (such as lyrics, drama, sermons, books of hours, and meditations) and devotional objects (such as paintings, sculpture, rood screens, and crucifixes). The emphasis upon the concrete and embodied over the abstract and intellectual produced a devotional culture grounded in what Gail McMurray Gibson calls an "incarnational aesthetic"—a "deliberate and conscious effort to objectify the spiritual even as the Incarnation itself had given spirit a concrete form."[17] At the heart of this aesthetic is the body of Christ, no longer the *Christus triumphans* of early Christian devotion—Christ risen, whole, and victorious over death—but *Christus patiens*—Christ beaten, bleeding, and dying upon the cross. Meditations on Christ's Passion may or may not have been accompanied by

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[17] Gail McMurray Gibson, *Theater of Devotion: East Anglian Drama and Society in the Late Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 8.

meditations upon his childhood and ministry, but one never finds meditations upon his childhood or ministry without a meditation upon his Passion as the culmination of the meditative exercise. Devotion to the body of Christ in the eucharist also flourished, especially among women, and the feast of Corpus Christi was officially established in the church calendar in 1264. Despite its broad appeal to laypeople desiring a personal, moving encounter with God, we should not think of affective piety as a uniquely lay style of devotion. As Gillespie notes, "Clerical involvement in the production, transmission, circulation, and ultimately reception . . . of these writings means that it is impossible to identify a distinctively lay devotional ideology."[18] However, it is fair to say that affective meditations fundamentally defined the spiritual climate of lay devotions from the thirteenth century onwards, and made the imagined participation in scenes of death and suffering a favored means of exploring one's conscience and shaping one's interior life. It seems rather odd, then, that so much current scholarship on devotional literature does not examine this connection between imagined suffering and the character-building goals of affective meditations.

Current scholarship on devotional literature connects devotional texts to a broad range of cultural, political, gender, and linguistic issues. Studies of representations of Christ's body, for instance, have been productively framed by the religious debates between orthodox Christianity and Lollardy by Sarah Beckwith, who examines the role of Christ's body as a "bearer of social, political, and economic meanings in late

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[18] Vincent Gillespie, "Anonymous Devotional Writings," in *A Companion to Middle English Prose*, ed. A.S.G. Edwards (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2004), 128.

fourteenth-century and early fifteenth-century England,"[19] and by David Aers and Lynn

Staley, who explore how representations of the humanity of Christ participate in the

"unprecedently public and vernacular contestation" over "the terms, images, rituals, and

ideas of holiness" reflected in texts by Julian of Norwich, Chaucer, Langland, and the

Lollards.[20] The late fourteenth-century English literary milieu, which witnessed the

burgeoning of a vernacular literary culture, provides the context for Watson's argument

that the Middle English mystics (Richard Rolle, Walter Hilton, Margery Kempe, Julian of

Norwich, and the *Cloud*-author) "are part of a huge cultural experiment involving the

translation of Latin and Anglo-Norman texts, images, conceptual structure—the

apparatus of *textual authority*—into what contemporary commentators termed the

'barbarous' mother tongue, English . . .," and therefore can be said to be "involved in the

same socio-political discussion as Chaucer, Langland, and the Lollards."[21] Feminist

scholarship has sharpened our perception of the significance of gender to the nature and

meaning of devotional practice; Caroline Walker Bynum's studies into medieval

women's spirituality (*Fragmentation and Redemption* and *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*)

have contributed greatly to this endeavor, as has the work of numerous scholars of

Margery Kempe and Julian of Norwich, the two earliest medieval English female authors.

The deeply affective devotional experiences of Kempe, Julian of Norwich, and many

other composers of mystical and devotional texts are fruitfully read through the lens of

performance theory in order to illuminate the psychologically complex engagement that a

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[19] Sarah Beckwith, *Christ's Body: Identity, Culture, and Society in Late Medieval Writings* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 5.

[20] David Aers and Lynn Staley, *The Powers of the Holy: Religion, Politics, and Gender in Late Medieval English Culture* (University Park: PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 4.

[21] Nicholas Watson, "The Middle English Mystics," 544.

devout reader would have with devotional materials that required imagining oneself

personally participating in scenes from the lives of Christ, his family, and his followers.[22]

Many of these scholars would probably agree with Anne Bartlett and Thomas Bestul that

medieval devotional texts "serve as powerful agents of ideology" due to the fact that they

"often focus on self-examination and the cultivation of the interior life" and so "have

much to tell us about how medieval texts form religious consciousness in particular, and

subjectivity and the sense of self in general."[23] At the other end of the devotional

spectrum, texts that pursue a more apophatic path to God and which are, as McGinn

notes, "often close to poetry in the ways in which they concentrate and alter language to

achieve their ends,"[24] have inspired studies into the authors' rhetorical strategies and the

nature and limits of linguistic representation itself.[25] In short, modern scholars have

shifted the critical focus from seeing these texts as transparent records of a personal

spiritual experience to be judged as "valid" or not to seeing them as one more node in the

complex web of cultural, religious, gender, political, and linguistic issues that frame our

current discussions of medieval literature.

Yet for all this attention to devotional literature, and especially mystical literature,

as a genre worthy of serious analysis, the general scholarly attitude toward one specific

subcategory of devotional literature—affective piety of the kind found in the *De*

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[22] Mary A. Suydam and Joanna Ziegler, *Performance and Transformation: New Approaches to Late Medieval Spirituality* (New York: St. Martins' Press, 1999); Brantley, *Reading in the Wilderness*.

[23] Anne Clark Bartlett and Thomas H. Bestul, eds., *Cultures of Piety: Medieval English Devotional Literature in Translation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 6.

[24] McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism*, xiv.

[25] Michael A. Sells, *Mystical Languages of Unsaying* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Vincent Gillepsie, "Postcards From the Edge: Interpreting the Ineffable in the Middle English Mystics," in *Interpretation : Medieval and Modern*, ed. Piero Boitani and Anna Torti (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1993), 137-165.

institutione inclusarum, the *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, Rolle's "Meditations on the

Passion," and many other Passion narratives—has changed remarkably little over the

decades. Specifically, scholars seem to have a hard time talking about the function of

suffering and emotion in these texts in a way that does not reduce these works to, in the

words of Bartlett and Bestul, "a site of either affective excess or rhetorical crudity."[26]

The lineage of critics who have repeated this sentiment is a long one. J. Huizinga in *The

Waning of the Middle Ages* names "violent sentimentality" as one of the fundamental

characteristics of a late medieval religious art which embodied "a spirit rather decadent

than primitive, a spirit involving the utmost elaboration, and even decomposition, of

religious thought through the imagination," a spirit whose unsophisticated emotionalism

appealed to "the naïve religious conscience of the multitude."[27] Douglas Gray also

comments on the tendency of medieval affective texts to indulge in "emotional attitudes

which were violent, frenzied, and even theatrical," leading to an "almost fanatic

emotionalism, and to popular beliefs which are often close to magic."[28] The connection

between affective literature and an unreflective, spiritually unrefined audience appears

again in J.A.W. Bennett's *Poetry of the Passion* when Bennett asserts that emotionally

charged images of Christ on the cross "brought the agony of the Passion within the

awareness of the simplest peasant."[29] Even McGinn, who has done much to deepen and

add nuance to our understanding of medieval mystical texts, reduces the visual

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[26] Bartlett and Bestul, *Cultures of Piety*, 3-4.

[27] J. Huizinga, *The Waning of the Middle Ages* (1924; New York: Anchor Books, 1989), 266, 263, 165.

[28] Douglas Gray, *Themes and Images in the Medieval Religious Lyric* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), 30, 33.

[29] J. A. W. Bennett, *Poetry of the Passion: Studies in Twelve Centuries of English Verse* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 39.

meditations on Christ's life in the *Stimulus amoris* by James of Milan to "purple passages inviting the reader to become one with Christ on the cross."[30]

Modern editors of the *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, one of the most popular medieval meditative works and a prime example of "affective excess," are less likely than earlier scholars to make broad assertions about naïve peasants or violent, frenzied emotion. Instead of marginalizing affective devotions by characterizing them as being somehow primitive or unseemly, they reduce them to mere vehicles of a maudlin sentimentality. In their edition of a fourteenth century Italian translation of the *Meditations*, Isa Ragusa and Rosalie B. Green describe the text as possessing a "simple style and tender sentiments,"[31] while the editors of the first modern English translation of the Latin text of the *Meditations* dwell on the "simple yet sublime" rendering of the domestic details of Christ's and Mary's family life, and approvingly quote Cainneach Ó Maonaigh's judgment that the text captures the Franciscan "world of joy and love, and its interests in everything that is small and humble and beautiful."[32] While Ragusa and Green's 1961 edition predates more recent and more thoughtful scholarship on the cultural and religious significance of Christ's body by scholars such as Beckwith, Bynum, and Miri Rubin and so may be excused for not being informed by it, the editors of the 1999 edition of the *Meditations* cited above seem content to fall back on what

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[30] Bernard McGinn, *The Flowering of Mysticism: Vol. 3 of The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism* (New York: Crossroad, 1998), 118.

[31] Isa Ragusa and Rosalie Green, eds., *Meditations on the Life of Christ: An Illustrated Manuscript of the Fourteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), xxii.

[32] John of Caulibus, *Meditations* (ed. Taney), xiii. Ó Maonaigh quotation is from Cainneach Ó Maonaigh, ed., *Smaointe Beatha Chríost*, (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1944) 342.

seems by now to be a clichéd yet persistent response to medieval affective devotional literature.

The religion scholar Ellen M. Ross has also noticed this tendency of some critics to sentimentalize devotional texts and images of Christ's life and Passion, and to dismiss them with the usual claim that they embody the simple, excessive, affective fervor of the unsophisticated laity. Her book *The Grief of God: Images of the Suffering Jesus in Late Medieval England* claims to rectify this situation by exploring the religious meaning and function of such texts and images, but her argument still leaves this topic under-theorized. Her stated project is to examine how medieval people gained a new understanding of their relationship to God and their neighbor by encountering the bleeding body of Jesus in sermons, lyrics, spiritual guides, wall paintings, rood screens, carvings, and dramas such as the Corpus Christi plays. Ross claims to be complicating the idea that Passion narratives and images embody the simple, excessive, affective fervor of the unsophisticated, but she ends up making rather obvious claims about those narratives and images herself, such as that Jesus' suffering manifests God's profound love for humanity, and that images of the Passion invite the viewer to respond with love for God and neighbor. Rather than giving us a new way to think about the role of suffering in medieval devotions, Ross's argument ends with observations that would better serve as starting points for a more nuanced exploration of the topic. Although Gillespie is speaking about medieval interpreters of religious images, he could just as well be referring to modern scholars like Ross when he notes that

> figural and analogical tropes soon fossilize into programmatic and conventional triggers for stock responses. Religious imagery in general, and Passion images in particular, soon acquire, as the *Cloud*-author notes, approved significations and

authorized resonances, creating a self-fuelling chain of low level affective responses.[33]

Like the medieval readers alluded to above whose conditioning leads them to automatically react to Passion imagery in expected and "approved" ways, some modern scholars of those same images seem willing to continue to repeat trite generalizations that reduce their subject to a vehicle for the "authorized resonance" of tearful sentimentality.

Those scholars who have moved beyond such "stock responses" have often done so by using texts about Christ's body and Passion to make larger claims about medieval social and political issues. In *Christ's Body: Identity, Culture, and Society in Late Medieval Writings*, Beckwith analyzes Christ's body as a contested symbol of the body politic, "the arena where social identity was negotiated, where the relationship between self and society, subjectivity and social process found a point of contact and conflict."[34] In a similar vein, Claire Sponsler argues that the image of Christ's broken body in the Corpus Christi plays undercuts the ruling class's preferred image of an intact, unified body politic by "tak[ing] up a subject position that testifies to the logic of subjugation underlying late medieval urban economies," thereby "question[ing] the ideology of social wholeness and its cultural work."[35] Miri Rubin, in *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture*, explores the symbolic role of Christ's body as the host within the late medieval debates between Lollardy and orthodoxy, especially as it was used to argue over the relationship between supernatural and earthly, clerical authority. David Aers also considers the ways in which Lollards connected representation of Christ's humanity

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[33] Gillespie, "Postcards from the Edge," 148.

[34] Beckwith, *Christ's Body*, 23.

[35] Claire Sponsler, *Drama and Resistance: Bodies, Goods, and Theatricality in Late Medieval England* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 140.

to "contingent particularities of human power, authority, justice and self-legitimating ideologies."[36] Such works have done much to broaden our perspective on what Christ's body could mean in medieval culture beyond signifying God's love for a fallen humanity. But in talking about the larger political uses to which Christ's body was put, these studies largely turn away from the question of what meaning an individual meditating upon the Passion might make out of Christ's suffering beyond the usual answer of "God's unfathomable love." While Christ's body has been made to do much cultural work in the arena of religious and secular politics of the Middle Ages, its significance to a person dwelling upon the Passion for private, spiritual ends has generally not enjoyed the same kind of thorough critical reconsideration. Of course, one must acknowledge that scholars such as Bynum and Elizabeth Robertson have enriched our understanding of how women in particular engaged with images of Christ's suffering, feminized body in their devotions to Christ on the cross and in the eucharist; their work has done much to advance our discussions about women's spirituality beyond the worn-out assertions that meditation upon the Passion would lead to compassion, compunction, and a greater love for God. But a broader reconsideration of the function of suffering in general for both male and female readers, of what it might signify within the context of meditation as an ethical exercise (drawing upon Caruthers's argument about the ethical dimension of meditation) has yet to be undertaken. This is the gap in the critical conversation that this project will begin to address.

In referring to devotional texts as "ethical," I do not mean to imply that these texts prescribe rules for "good" behavior or try to teach their readers how to act in

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[36] David Aers and Lynn Staley, *Powers of the Holy*, 46.

morally approved ways. I use the term "ethical" as Carruthers does—to refer to the

texts' primary purpose of providing the materials and "mental exercise," so to speak,

necessary for cultivating a Christian *ēthos* or character. An attentive reader of a text

such as the *De institutione inclusarum* or the *Meditations* can not help but notice that

she herself is as much the subject of the text as is the Gospel scene within which she is

supposed to project herself. Texts such as these relentlessly compel the reader to

question the nature and adequacy of her own response to the suffering that she sees—is

she feeling sufficient contrition for her sins? Which virtues does she lack the most?

What lessons can she learn from the actions of the characters in the imagined scene?

Such rigorous self-examination makes the reader acutely aware of her own short-

comings as a Christian (meditative texts never encourage self-congratulation) and

encourages her to both nurture and be self-conscious of her own interior life. The same

meditations that prompt the reader's insight into the nature of her character will also

provide her with the narratives and images with which she can build a better one, for

like the monk engaged in *meditatio*, the reader of meditative texts gathers up into her

memory a variety of memorable deeds and sayings with which to construct a Christian

conscience and subjectivity. I agree with Jennifer Bryan's argument that "Passion

meditations were in effect the major psychological narratives of the later Middle Ages."[37]

To meditate is not only to reach out to God through the imagination, but also to delve

down inside oneself and to take responsibility for consciously fashioning one's own

ēthos.

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[37] Jennifer Bryan, *Looking Inward: Devotional Reading and the Private Self in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 110.

Suffering is such a pervasive and important element in these meditations that we have to ask how affective texts and their readers make use of it toward this larger goal of fashioning a Christian character. This broad concern hovers over the more specific questions asked by each of the following chapters: What is the role of close, intense, private meditation on suffering in forming a Christian subjectivity? How did imagined scenes of violence come to be so intimately associated with the process of Christian character formation? What do the often violent, colorful, active scenes in affective meditations owe to classical rhetoric, specifically the art of memory? Do the practitioners of affective meditations take pleasure in imagining pain and experiencing their own emotional suffering in response? If so, what is the nature of this pleasure? How does the gender of the witness to suffering and of the suffering object of devotion affect the way the witness interprets that suffering?

My project is shaped not by a single theoretical frame but by a single question— how do specific devotional texts and their readers engage with suffering in ways that go beyond simple sentimental affectivity?—that is most effectively answered by drawing on a variety of frames that allow me to examine the various tensions and dynamics I see in these texts. Chapter one explores the connection between imagined suffering and the ethical function of medieval affective meditations.   The practice of populating one's mind with violent, active images for useful, creative ends can be traced back to the classical art of memory learned by Roman orators as a means of recalling and recombining elements of a speech extemporaneously. As this art was passed down through the Middle Ages, it evolved from a secular tool for public speakers into a Christian tool for private acts of self-fashioning. I argue that the efforts of Albert the

Great and Thomas Aquinas to link memory to ethics via the theories of Aristotle laid the groundwork for this change of focus and for the enthusiastic adoption of affective meditations as a spiritual exercise by the Franciscans in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. In this chapter I draw on the work of Carruthers on memory to make the case that medieval meditative practice is at its heart a demanding mnemonic practice that requires the internalization of images of violence and suffering in order to produce a Christian *ēthos*.

Chapter two examines the process of self-transformation encouraged by the *Meditations of the Life of Christ* and questions the typical critical perception that the *Meditations* merely offers a script for a meditator to passively follow in order to indulge in sentimental, tearful pity for Christ and his family. I argue that the *Meditations* instead cultivates in the reader a complex dynamic between pleasure and pain such that the meditator experiences the act of inflicting emotional pain upon herself as a pleasurable act of self-creation. The result is a kind of *imitatio Christi* that goes beyond merely sharing in Christ's suffering; the meditator, like Christ, is a creator who chooses to suffer. By being both the performer of that emotional pain and the audience who observes and critiques that performance, the meditator is able to transform suffering from something passively endured into a tool for expressing her capacity for purposeful self-transformation. To develop these lines of argument, I draw upon various insights from performance theory that illuminate the relationship between performer and audience and thereby help us to theorize the role of the practitioner of meditation as both the audience of the imagined scene and a performer within it.

Chapter three takes a look at how Margery Kempe put these kinds of affective texts to use, and employs Emmanuel Levinas's ideas about the nature of a truly ethical relationship with the Other to illuminate the nature of her relationship to Christ. This chapter continues the effort to critique overly-simple analyses of affective devotions that assume that the texts' efforts to "domesticate" the divine—to see Christ as "knowable" in his humanity—are both successful and unproblematic. The *Book of Margery Kempe* demonstrates the limits to this effort and the necessity to the affective project of *failing* to fully familiarize God. Kempe's wrestling with these limits produces a relationship to the divine that begins with a "domesticated" Christ but comes to see God as Levinas's Other who resists totalization. In the process, Kempe fashions her Christian subjectivity along the lines of a Levinasian ethics.

In both the *Meditations* and the *Book of Margery Kempe*, we have female meditators contemplating the sufferings of Christ. Chapter four asks the question, what difference does it make if the genders are reversed and we have a male meditator responding to the sufferings of Mary? After demonstrating that medieval readers did tend to relate differently to Christ and to Mary depending on their gender, I direct my question toward the *Quis dabit*, a dialogue between Bernard of Clairvaux and Mary composed in the late twelfth or early thirteenth century by the Cistercian Ogier of Locedio, and one of the most popular and influential texts in the *planctus Mariae* genre during the Middle Ages. The narrative involves Bernard's fruitless attempt to acquire some of Mary's tears for himself so that he can compensate for his own lack of sufficient compassion for Christ. I argue that this text plays out, through Mary and Bernard's relationship, assumptions about gendered spiritual roles that color much

affective devotional writing. What we witness in the *Quis dabit* is an instance of a man's attempt to identify with Mary turning into his appropriation of Mary's own narrative to make her better fit the "feminine" role that Bernard needs her to play. This imitation that turns into appropriation is the result of these assumptions producing in men and women different perceptions of and relationships to the sufferings of Christ and Mary. I draw heavily upon Bynum's work on women's spirituality in this chapter to frame my discussion of the gender dynamics in this text.

In this project I have focused on works that capture the essential features of affective devotional practice and thereby supply us with a comprehensive vocabulary of the beliefs, assumptions, and methods that underlie that practice. At the same time, these works invite us to question some of the beliefs, assumptions, and methods of critics who have too often simply noted *that* those who meditate upon the Passion suffer emotionally, but do not examine the specifics of *how* they suffer, of the nature of their relationship to suffering (both their own and that of the divine Other), or of the complex intellectual history that binds that suffering to medieval beliefs about memory and ethics. I hope that the following chapters may begin to tease out some of the more interesting threads of this extensive and fascinating web.

Chapter 1

Keeping the Passion in Mind: The Art of Memory as an Ethical Practice

In the early fifteenth century, during a pilgrimage to the holy land, Margery

Kempe finds herself on Mount Calvary participating in a tour led by a friar who takes

pains to describe the sufferings that Christ endured during the Passion. In such an

emotionally charged place, with her imagination fired by the friar's narratives, Kempe

famously experiences what could colloquially be called the mother of all affective

devotional moments:

> & þe forseyd creatur wept & sobbyd so plentyvowsly as þow sche had seyn owyr
> Lord with hir bodyly ey sufferyng hys Passyon at þat tyme. Befor hir in hyr
> sowle sche saw hym veryly be contemplacyon, & þat cawsyd hir to haue
> compassyon. &, whan þei cam vp on-to þe Mownt of Caluarye, sche fel down þat
> sche myght not stondyn ne knelyn but walwyd & wrestyd wyth hir body,
> spredyng hir armys a-brode, & cryed wyth a lowde voys as þow hir hert xulde a
> brostyn a-sundyr, for in þe cite of hir sowle sche saw veryly & freschly how owyr
> Lord was crucifyed.[1]

Although Kempe is frequently marginalized by both her contemporaries and modern

readers of her *Book* as hysterical, neurotic, or perhaps just plain mad because of her over-

the-top emotional responses to stories of Christ's life and crucifixion, her behavior is

simply an extreme manifestation of the very mainstream affective devotional practices

common in Christian Europe since the early thirteenth century. The incident cited above

captures many of its main features. Overlaid upon Kempe's bodily tour through the city

of Jerusalem is a parallel imaginative tour through the events of the Passion as if they

were happening all around her. Although we do not know if the friar who led her tour

was a Franciscan, his effort to draw his audience into the scenes from Christ's life is very

much in keeping with the style of many Franciscan devotional manuals and meditations.

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[1] Margery Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. Sanford Brown Meech and Hope Emily Allen, EETS 212 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1940), 68.

The goal of such bloody and violent meditations is to foster feelings of contrition and compassion, sometimes to the point of desiring to suffer on the cross with Christ (as Margery metaphorically does as she falls to the ground with her arms spread wide). Affective devotions, in other words, seek to reform the individual's *ēthos* or character in order to foster love of God in her heart, and they achieve this by inviting the meditator to attentively contemplate the exquisite suffering of another person, usually Christ or Mary.

There are any number of non-violent gospel stories that could conceivably foster love and tenderness for Christ in a meditator's heart, such as his birth, his healing the sick, and his compassion for the poor and outcast. These do occasionally appear in affective texts as well, but their popularity is easily outstripped by that of the Passion narratives. It seems that in medieval Christian devotional meditations the road to God is most often a bloody, anguished one that requires the earnest soul to establish a particular relationship to the suffering of the other in order to realize its own spiritual health and well-being. But why is such violence so popular in these meditations? And what kind of relationship must a meditator have with another's suffering in order to become a more ardent lover of God? In this chapter I demonstrate that medieval affective devotions function as ethical exercises that effect spiritual change in their practitioners through a complex synthesis of memory, ethics, and violence. The evolving relationship between memory, ethics, and violence can be traced back to the classical art of memory recorded in works such as the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*. Classical and medieval arts of memory, like the meditations in question, required their practitioners to construct vivid, sometimes violent mental spaces that, over the course of the Middle Ages, became the arena in which individual character was shaped with an eye toward attaining heaven. After

exploring how the classical art of memory became a medieval tool for cultivating character, I argue that affective devotions centered on the Passion flourished in the early thirteenth century precisely because of the conceptual framework provided at that time by Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas, both of whom firmly linked memory to ethics via Aristotle. The classical art of memory recuperated by Albert and Aquinas with its colorful *imagines agentes* became in the hands of the Franciscans an art of meditation at whose heart is the *imago agens* of Christ crucified. The goal of meditation upon this image goes beyond merely eliciting feelings of compassion. Beneath the surface of sometimes sentimental and often violent imagery lies a rigorous mnemonic and imaginative practice by which the meditator creates for herself a Christian *ēthos* by internalizing the images, narratives, and attitudes of texts in what Mary Carruthers calls the "public memory."   In order to trace the lines of influence that shaped this practice, we must begin with an overview of the art of memory that the Middle Ages inherited from the classical rhetoricians.

The oldest extant complete Latin handbook on rhetoric and therefore the oldest surviving treatment of the art of memory is the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*. Composed by an anonymous teacher of rhetoric around 86 BCE and misattributed to Cicero during the Middle Ages, it offers its readers a systematic, pragmatic, and highly technical exposition of the rules for arousing and directing an audience's emotions so as to win an argument in court, bring an assembly to the speaker's point of view, or win the favor of the patron being publicly praised—in short, to produce hearers who are "attentive, receptive, and well-disposed."[2] Crucial to this endeavor is the *ars memorativa*—the art

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[2] *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, trans. Harry Caplan (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954), I. iv. 6. "Id ita sumitur ut adtentos, ut dociles, ut benivolos auditores habere possimus." The Latin text is also from the

of memory by which the orator could recall at will the individual points of his speech and their order no matter how lengthy or complex his subject matter. The orator accomplishes this by constructing striking and intense visual images for the things he wishes to remember and placing these images in a setting conducive to later recall. This learned or "artificial" memory works through an architectural mnemonic of places and images: we associate an image with what we want to remember and mentally locate it in a particular place we have chosen to remember it in. The basic rule for creating images is, the more visually and emotionally striking, the better. The goal is to create images that adhere the longest in memory, "and we shall do so," says the author,

> if we establish similitudes as striking as possible; if we set up images that are not many or vague but active (*imagines agentes*); if we assign to them exceptional beauty or ugliness; if we ornament some of them, as with crowns or purple cloaks, so that the similitude may be more distinct to us; or if we somehow disfigure them, as by introducing one stained with blood or soiled with mud or smeared with red paint, so that its form is more striking, or by assigning certain comic effects to our images, for that, too, will ensure our remembering them more readily.

> Imagines igitur nos in eo genere constituere oportebit quod genus in memoria diutissime potest haerere. Id accidet si quam maxime notatas similitudines constituemus; si non multas nec vagas, sed aliquid agentes imagines ponemus; si egregiam pulcritudinem aut unicam turpitudinem eis adtribuemus; si aliquas exornabimus, ut si coronis aut veste purpurea, quo nobis notatior sit similitudo; aut si qua re deformabimus, ut si cruentam aut caeno oblitam aut rubrica delibutam inducamus, quo magis insignita sit forma, aut ridiculas res aliquas imaginibus adtribuamus, nam ea res quoquefaciet ut facilius meminisse valeamus.[3]

The orator is to imagine an easily grasped setting ("such scenes as are naturally or artificially set off on a small scale, complete and conspicuous, so that we can grasp and embrace them easily by the natural memory—for example, a house, an intercolumnar

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Caplan edition.

[3] *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, III.xxii.37.

space, a recess, an arch, or the like") [4] and mentally place the active images within in it in

specific *loci* in such a way that he can mentally move through the scene, "see" the

animated, colorful images, and thereby remember the elements of his speech. The rules

for places in the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* imply a practice of great visual precision: the

space between *loci* should not be so great that the images are overly dispersed or so small

that the images crowd into each other; the space should be evenly lit so that the images

are not obscured by glare or shadow; the area must be of adequate size to contain all the

necessary images but not so large as to be unwieldy to remember; it should not be

crowded or noisy or else the speaker will be too distracted to commit anything to

memory; and it must be distinctive enough to stick clearly in the mind. If no real suitable

locations are convenient, the speaker may create one in his imagination as long as it

adheres to the above rules.

  The most well-known and frequently cited example from the *Rhetorica ad*

Herennium of what such a scene may look like is the one designed for a prosecutor who

needs to recall the circumstances of a murder case.[5] The defendant has poisoned a man

in order to get an inheritance, and there are many witnesses to the act. The suggested

scene is evocative of a dreamscape filled with symbolically charged images. The orator

is to visualize a man lying ill in bed (having just been poisoned). The defendant stands

over him bearing a cup in his right hand (representing the poison) and in his left hand a

set of tablets (representing the dying man's will) and, on the fourth finger, a ram's

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[4] *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, III.xvi.29. "Locos appellamus eos qui breviter, perfecte, insignite aut natura aut manu sunt absoluti, ut eos facile naturali memoria conprehendere et ampleti queamus: ut aedes, intercolumnium, angulum, fornicem, et alia quae his similia sunt."

[5] *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, III.xx.33-34.

testicles (representing both the witnesses through a pun on *testes* as well as the money used to bribe the witnesses, since purses were often made out of a ram's scrotum.[6]) One can therefore take in all the preliminary facts of the case at a glance, and by organizing the rest of the points of the case in a similar fashion the prosecutor can move from background to background and remember what he needs to know to pursue his case against the defendant.

Although there are many ways to make an image striking, what we most frequently encounter is images that are notably violent. The classical art of memory creates mental order by evoking vivid images of *dis*order, death, and bloodshed. The scene of the man holding the cup, tablets, and ram's testicles alludes not just to a common civil matter but to a recent murder. In his description of a method for recalling individual words rather than broader facts, the author of the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* gives an example of a scene that opens with a man "raising [his] hands to heaven while he is lashed by the Marcii Reges."[7] Even the mythical origins of the art of memory are grounded in a scene of gruesomely disfigured bodies felled by the punishment of vengeful gods. Cicero gives us the legend in his *De oratore*, as does Quintilian in the *Institutio oratoria*.[8] Scopas, a rich nobleman, commissions the poet Simonides of Ceos to sing his praises at a banquet in Scopas's honor. When Simonides includes in his poem material on Castor and Pollux, Scopas feels slighted for having to share half of the poet's

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[6] See *Rhetorica ad Herennium* 214-215, note *b*.

[7] *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, III.xxi.34. ". . . manus ad caelum tollentem Domitium cum a Regibus Marciis loris caedatur. . . ."

[8] Cicero, *On the Ideal Orator (De oratore)*, trans. James M. May & Jakob Wisse (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 2.350-355; Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, trans. H. E. Butler, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1921-22), XI. 2.11-13.

praise with the gods. In return, Scopas pays Simonides only half the agreed upon fee

and tells him to seek the rest from Castor and Pollux themselves. A short while later a

messenger calls Simonides away from the banquet, telling him that two young men

urgently wish to speak with him outside. As Simonides steps out of the hall seeking the

two mysterious visitors who are no longer there (presumably Castor and Pollux

themselves), the roof of the hall collapses upon Scopas and his guests, killing everyone

inside. The relatives of the dead seek their loved ones but can not identify their friends

and family in the crushed and mangled remains. But Simonides, by his ability to visually

recall precisely where each person had been seated around the table, manages to identify

every one of the dead for burial. "Prompted by this experience," says Cicero,

> he is then said to have made the discovery that order is what most brings light to
> our memory. And he concluded that those who would like to employ this part of
> their abilities should choose localities, then form mental images of the things they
> wanted to store in their memory, and place these in the localities. In this way, the
> order of the localities would preserve the order of the things, while the images
> would represent the things themselves; and we would use the localities like a wax
> tablet, and the representations like the letters written on it.

> [H]ac tum re admonitus invenisse fertur oridnem esse maxime, qui memoriae
> lumen adferret. Itaque eis, qui hanc partem ingenii exercerent, locos esse
> capiendos et ea, quae memoria tenere vellent effingenda animo atque in eis locis
> conlocanda; sic fore, ut ordinem rerum locorum ordo conservaret, res autem ipsas
> rerum effigies notaret atque ut locis pro cera, simulacris pro litteris uteremur.[9]

Out of a scene of disorder, destruction, and death arises an art of ordering, naming, and

making present that which is absent. The *ars memorativa* depends for its efficacy on

violent images not merely because such images stick in one's mind better than bland ones

do. Memory, as an act of creation that organizes fragments of the past into a

comprehensible, memorable narrative, finds fertile ground from which to grow in scenes

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[9] Cicero, *On the Ideal Orator*, 2.353-354. The Latin text is from M. Tulli Ciceronis, *De oratore*, ed.
Augustus S. Wilkins (1890; repr., New York: Arno Press, 1979), 2.353-354.

of fragmentation and obliteration. "At its own inception," Jody Enders observes, "*memoria* can only reanimate what has first been crushed and mutilated. It can only *re-*member what has first been *dis*-membered."[10] The brutality enacted and suffered by the rhetorician's *imagines agentes* is therefore a productive violence that memory both commemorates (*memoria* as a wax tablet upon which the violence is inscribed) and redeems (*memoria* as a site of rebirth, a means of naming the dead).[11] The classical art of memory is as much as art of breaking down as it is an art of building up. This implicit symbiosis between violence and redemption is such an integral part of the art of memory as developed by the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* that when late medieval scholars recuperate this art for Christian ends we find them recuperating this symbiosis for ethical purposes as well.

The power and efficacy of arresting mental images was never in doubt during the classical period; concern over the ethical import of the uses to which they were put, however, drives the debate between philosophy and rhetoric exemplified in Plato's *Gorgias* and *Republic*. The primary distinction between philosophical dialogue and rhetorical oration in Plato's view is that philosophy aims to discover the truth about a subject through dialectic, whereas rhetoric aims merely to persuade an audience to adopt the speaker's position regardless of how true or honorable that position might be. Plato has Socrates assert in the *Gorgias* that the rhetor "doesn't know the things themselves, what is good or bad, what is fine or shameful or just or unjust, but has devised persuasion

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[10] Jody Enders, *The Medieval Theater of Cruelty: Rhetoric, Memory, Violence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 73.

[11] Note that in Greek mythology, Mnemosyne, the goddess of memory, gives birth to the Muses, bestowers of inspiration and embodiments of the creative arts.

about them so that though he doesn't know, among those who don't know he appears to know, rather than the man who knows."[12] Rhetoric consists of a kind of "flattery" that produces pleasure in the audience in order to bring it around to the speaker's point of view even if the speaker has no actual knowledge about the subject in question.[13] Plato levels the same critique at poets in the *Republic*—like the rhetor, the poet presents a pleasing image of reality that has the potential to mislead those in the audience who, "without knowledge, [and] who judge by the words, believe that anything said with meter, rhythm, and tune, be it on cobbling or generalship or anything else whatever, is right. . . ."[14] The danger lies in the pleasure that the audience takes in extravagant depictions of emotion rendered in vivid characterizations reminiscent of the *imagines agentes*. The good citizen of the Republic knows how to master his emotions and keep them in check even in the face of deep personal misfortune. However, when "even the best of us" hear poets imitating a hero's sorrows and lamentations "we enjoy it, surrender ourselves, share their feelings, and earnestly praise as a good poet the one who affects us most in this way." The rational part of our souls relaxes its guard upon the lower, emotional part as the audience is enticed to both identify with the hero's misfortune and to regard an emotionally expressive response as appropriate rather than shameful. The poet, therefore, encourages us to applaud emotional displays that we disdain in real life, with the result that "one who has nurtured and strengthened the part of him that feels pity at those spectacles will not find it easy to hold it in check at the time of his own

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[12] Plato, *Gorgias*, trans. Terence Irwin (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 459d-e.

[13] Plato, *Gorgias*, 464e-465a.

[14] Plato, *Republic*, trans. G.M.A. Grube (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1974), 10.600e-601b.

misfortunes."[15] Vivid, emotionally compelling images of the sort recommended by the art of memory that entice the audience to indulge in "irrational" and extravagant empathy with the suffering of fictional or historical persons thereby pose a direct threat to an audience member's character.   By habituating the hearer to "inappropriate" emotional responses to misfortune, the poet undermines his or her ability to perform more "appropriate," restrained responses when confronted with real-life misfortunes. Enticed by the pleasure of "surrender[ing] ourselves" to our emotions, the hearer unconsciously internalizes an affective style of reacting to his or her own experiences and to other people in his or her life. This is why Plato would bar poets from residing in his ideal republic: they encourage people to imitate and internalize character traits that will permanently color for the worse the kind of citizens they become, for "imitations, if they last from youth for some time, become part of one's nature and settle into habits of gesture, voice, and thought."[16] As we will see later in this chapter, this very same process of shaping one's character by appealing to the pleasure of indulging in empathy for another's suffering—a process which Plato regarded as ethically pernicious—became in the later Middle Ages the preferred method of shaping someone into an ethically sound Christian. As the art of memory with its compelling *imagines agentes* undergoes a centuries-long process of Christianization, the act of surrendering to exuberant compassion for the suffering of another—that is, of Christ and Mary at the scene of the Passion—comes to serves spiritually salutary ends.

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[15] Plato, *Republic*, 10.605d-606c.

[16] Plato, *Republic*, 3.395d.

Before being recuperated for ethical work, the art of memory suffered a period of

relative neglect in the late antique and early medieval period compared to the attention it

had received in previous generations. As early as the first century CE, Quintilian

dismisses the practical utility of what we may, following Mary Carruthers, call the

"architectural mnemonic," apparently at least in part because he misunderstands how the

system is meant to work. He concedes that someone who needs to remember actual

objects, such as a person selling goods at an auction, might find it helpful to furnish the

rooms of a mental "house" with symbols that represent each item sold to each buyer. But

Quintilian regards this system as less useful for remembering the parts of a speech, for

"thoughts do not call up the same images as material things. . . . [H]ow can such a

method grasp a whole series of connected words?"[17] Although the author of the

Rhetorica ad Herennium did include a brief section on using *imagines agentes* to

remember a precise line of text,[18] the example cited above of the murder victim lying in

bed while the defendant stands over him holding tablets and a pair of ram's testicles is

clearly meant to help an orator remember the larger points he wishes to make, not the

exact words with which he will make them. But Quintilian, overwhelmed at the prospect

of creating a unique symbol for every word in a text to be memorized and concerned that

the sheer labor involved in recalling them all would cause "the flow of our speech

inevitably [to] be impeded," decides that those who are famed for their skill in such a

mnemonic "may keep their systems for their own use."[19]

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[17] Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, XI.2.24. "Nam et sensus non eandem imaginem quam res habent. . . . At verborum contextus eadem arte quomodo comprehendetur?" The Latin text is from the Butler edition.

[18] See *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, III.xxi.34.

[19] Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, XI.2.25-26. "[N]onne impediri quoque dicendi cursum necesse est duplici memoriae cura?. . . . [Q]uos Cicero dicit usos hac exercitatione, sibi habeant sua. . . ."

Quintilian's alternative method for remembering a text influenced early medieval understanding and practice of the art of memory, and so deserves attention in a study of memory in the Middle Ages. For Quintilian, remembering a text meant remembering not its overall points but the specific words with which those points are made. Quintilian's strategy for memorizing a speech is to break it into sections and, "by dint of frequent and continuous practice, . . . connect the words in their proper order . . . and subsequently to unite the various sections into a whole when we go over them in order."[20] Instead of striking images that stick in the mind's eye, one places in memory an image of the physical page of text being studied; recollection of the appearance of the page itself will prompt recollection of the words upon it. This is why Quintilian advises that, if possible, one ought to memorize a text from the same pages on which one has written it, for in this case the reader "will have certain tracks to guide him in his pursuit of memory, and the mind's eye will be fixed not merely on the pages on which the words were written, but on individual lines, and at times he will speak as though he were reading aloud."[21] One method of internalizing a text so that one seems to be reading it aloud from before the mind's eye is to actually read it aloud to oneself in a murmur while memorizing it.[22] In Quintilian's view, there is no need for an elaborate art with its formal principles to aid one in achieving this level of memory skill. The "one supreme method of memory" relies

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[20] Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, XI.2.28. "Dandi sunt certi quidam termini, ut contextum verborum, qui est difficilimus, continua et crebra meditatio, partes deinceps ipsas repetitus ordo coniungat."

[21] Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, XI.2.32-33. "Sequitur enim vestigiis quibusdam memoriam, et velut oculis intuetur non paginas modo, sed versus prope ipsos, estque cum dicit similis legenti."

[22] Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, XI.2.33.

on nothing more than "practice and industry", the kind of repeated re-reading of a text

that Quintilian likens to a cow chewing the cud ("quasi eundem cibum remandendi").[23]

During the late classical and early medieval periods, rhetoricians tended to echo

Quintilian's criticism of the architectural mnemonic and promote his alternative "artless"

method for cultivating the memory. For example, the rhetorical treatises of the fourth

century Roman grammarians Julius Victor and Fortunatianus draw heavily on Quintilian

and, through their influence on medieval pedagogy, ensure that Quintilian's views on

memory were the dominant ones during the early Middle Ages. Both of them give little

credit to the architectural mnemonic and, like Quintilian, advise breaking into sections

the text to be memorized which one then murmurs to oneself and writes out repeatedly in

order to impress it in the memory. Both also emphasize the need for a well-ordered

memory, echoing the lesson that Cicero derived from the legend of Simonides, and

regard the two most important activities of memory as *divisio* and *compositio*: the proper

division of a text into manageable segments, and the accurate joining of those segments

in their correct order through a system of mentally numbering each one, a method that

seems to allow for more flexibility than Quintilian's by, as Carruthers notes, allowing for

"digression and all sorts of extempore speaking, while keeping one from losing one's

way, forgetting how much one has left over, or one's chief points."[24] Martianus Capella

in the fifth century reinforces these lessons about *divisio*, *compositio*, and the need for

order in his *Marriage of Philology and Mercury*, but allows for images to assist in the

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[23] Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria*, XI.2.40-41. "Si quis tamen unam maximamque a me artem memoriae quaerat, exercitatio est et labor. . . ."

[24] Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 86. See Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, 85-87 for a more detailed discussion of Julius Victor and Fortunatianus. Julius Victor, *Ars rhetorica*, and Fortunatianus, *Artis rhetoricae libri*, both appear in Carolus Halm, ed., *Rhetores latini minores* (Leipzig: Tuebner, 1863), cited by Carruthers.

remembering of a text, not merely word-for-word memorization: "[F]or example, you might remember a wedding by the bride veiled in saffron or a homicide by a sword and arms—images, as it were, put down in, and given back by, the appropriate section of our memory."[25] Yet this does not constitute an art of memory as we have in the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, for the advice to use images on occasion does not come with a set of rules for their use—how to divide and illuminate the mental space in which the images are placed, how to move among them, how to use them to reconstruct an entire narrative or argument. These are not *imagines agentes*, but static visual markers to aid in the remembrance of blocks of text. During the early medieval period, memory was treated as a skill honed by repetition of reading and writing, not as an art. When Alcuin in the ninth century describes the rhetorical uses of memory in his dialogue with Charlemagne, he cites Cicero's statement, by then a platitude, that memory is "the storehouse of all our experiences" and places the value of memory in its ability to retain "our thoughts and reflections, . . . our subject, our very words," for without this ability there could be no rhetoric at all. Charlemagne inquires if there are any precepts on how to train and strengthen the memory; Alcuin replies, "We do not have other injunctions upon this subject, except exercise in memorizing, practice in writing, and application to studious activity."[26]

Despite the low regard in which the architectural mnemonic was held during this period, knowledge of the precepts of the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* did not fall into

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[25] Martianus Capella, *Martianus Capella and the Seven Liberal Arts*, vol. 2, trans. William Harris Stahl and Richard Johnson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), 203.

[26] Alcuin, *The Rhetoric of Alcuin and Charlemagne*, trans. Wilbur Samuel Howell (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), 137-138.

complete oblivion during the Middle Ages. The fact that the work was erroneously

attributed to Cicero guaranteed that it would continue to be copied, if not admired. Some

twelfth-century scholars such as John of Salisbury continued to dismiss "Tully's"

mnemonic in the spirit of Quintilian. In his *Metalogicon*, John wholeheartedly

recommends that students learn rules concerning such things as tropes, etymologies,

grammatical errors, and the composition of poetry—all of which "must be extremely

advantageous"—but coolly rejects the architectural mnemonic as "not of much help to

men like me."[27] Ironically, it was John's own teacher, Thierry of Chartres, who

approximately two decades earlier had written a fairly lengthy and even-handed

commentary on the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*. Thierry follows the tradition of the text's

earliest editors, regarding it as the "second rhetoric" (*Rhetorica Secunda*) composed by

Cicero as a follow-up to his *De inventione*, which expounds rules for rhetorical

performance that sound similar to the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*'s lessons in persuasion.

Thierry's *Commentarius super Rhetoricam ad Herennium* may not be notable for its

originality—his twentieth-century editor notes that he largely paraphrases the text's rules

for the five parts of rhetoric, giving short shrift to all of them except invention.[28] Nor

does it stand out for its interest in the art of memory *per se*—Carruthers argues that

Thierry comments on memory because it was part of "Tully's" text, not because he

thought it was particularly worth studying in its own right.[29] What makes it unusual is

the fact that Thierry does not share the typical rhetorician's disdainful attitude toward the

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[27] John of Salisbury, *The Metalogicon of John of Salisbury: A Twelfth-Century Defense of the Verbal and Logical Arts of the Trivium*, ed. Daniel D. McGarry (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1962), 59.

[28] Karin M. Fredborg, ed., *The Latin Commentaries by Thierry of Chartres* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1988), 27.

[29] Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, 151.

architectural mnemonic; even if his response to it is less than enthusiastic, he at least does

not dissuade his reader from learning more about it. Despite the opportunity for a

renewal of interest in the architectural mnemonic which Thierry's commentary offered, it

appears to have had little influence on later writers on rhetoric and played no important

role in the late thirteenth-century revival of the classical art of memory.[30]

Although the classical art of memory did not earn much respect in its "pure" form

during this period, a somewhat garbled rendition of the art by John of Salisbury points us

to a second variety of memory practice that had a significant influence upon the

Christianization of "Tully's" art. Sometimes in the 1230s, John of Garland composed his

Parisiana Poetria, an introduction to the *ars dictaminis* and poetry directed to an

audience of beginning university students who needed to learn the basic principles of

composition. Although the work is, according to its editor, "on the whole clearly

derivative,"[31] it is unique in its somewhat peculiar fusion of the architectural mnemonic

with the Quintilian-inspired assumption that one should memorize the very image of the

text before one's eyes. The section *De arte memorandi* (2.85-115) outlines John's

method for training the memory. John seems to have encountered the *Rhetorica ad*

Herennium's guidelines for imagining an open, ordered space such as a familiar street or

columned walkway in which one places *imagines agentes*, but transforms this principle

into the injunction to envision in our minds "some vacant spot" which is "imagined as

separated into three main sections and columns." Each column is further divided into

three sections. The first column contains images of three classes of people—courtiers,

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[30] Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, 150-152.

[31] John of Garland, *The Parisiana Poetria of John of Garland*, trans. and ed. Traugott Lawler (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), xvii.

city dwellers, and peasants. If the teacher tells his student anything about any one of these types of people, the observation should be placed in this column "for later inventing and selecting." The second column holds "examples and sayings and facts from the authors, and the teacher from whom we heard them, and the books in which we have read them." If we happen to forget something we have previously heard or read, we should recall the exact time and place in which we heard or read these "examples and sayings and facts," the clothes and gestures of the teacher from whom we learned them, and even the appearance of the page on which they were written. The third column, the most obscure of the three, contains "all kinds of languages, sounds, and voices of the various living creatures, etymologies, explanations of words, distinctions between words, all in alphabetical order." When the teacher explains the meaning or origin of a word, we need to "gather it into that third column, along with some natural phenomenon that may symbolize the word in question; and by means of its symbol we shall be able to memorize it and later select it for our own use."[32] Two things should be noted about this system. First, John firmly places memory in the service of invention. Its purpose is not so much to recall an argument which one has already invented, as in the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, but to store and organize the materials—characters, *dicta et facta memorabilia*, and etymologies—on which the student can later draw in order to create his own letters and poems. Second, the mental space that John advises his students to divide into columns bears little resemblance to the cityscape populated with *imagines agentes* that the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* recommends, but mirrors the layout of a manuscript page. John's system converts the classical three-dimensional space through which one "walks" while encountering vivid, often violent images into a two-dimensional grid which one

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[32] All of the above quotes are from John of Garland, *Parisiana Poetria*, 2.85-115.

scans visually. John is not alone in treating memory in this way at this time. Carruthers notes that medieval mnemonic schemes frequently advise using the physical layout of the page as an aid for remembering it and goes on to suggest that this transformation from a three-dimensional to a two-dimensional space "may account for some of the confusion medieval writers had in understanding Tully's rules about the making of backgrounds (these gave them more trouble than the ones about the making of images)."[33] These two features—memory as a *tool of invention* used to *internalize a text*—characterize the medieval conception of the art of memory not only among rhetoricians, but especially among a very different audience—religious scholars writing in a monastic setting. In their hands, this model of the workings of memory serves to invent not one's arguments but one's character though the internalization of specifically religious texts. From Fortunatianus in the fourth century to John of Garland in the thirteenth, the architectural mnemonic suffers the disregard, apathy, and misunderstanding of the rhetoricians who nevertheless preserve its ur-text, the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, for the sake of preserving the works of "Tully." During the same period, a model of memory suggested by John of Garland, an "inventive" one grounded in the internalization of a text, flourishes among Christian writers as a crucial tool for the conscious crafting of a virtuous self.

Any overview of the Christian adaptation of the art of memory needs to begin with Augustine whose well-known discussion of memory in Book 10 of the *Confessions* establishes an early connection between memory, self-knowledge, and knowledge of God, a connection deeply colored by Augustine's Christian Platonism. Book 10 opens with Augustine fruitlessly searching for God in the sensory objects of the world. He

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[33] Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, 129.

questions the earth, the sky, the sea, and all of the physical objects around him, but one

by one they each reply that they are not the God that he seeks. After questioning all of

creation and with no where else left to look, Augustine turns his search for God into an

exercise in introspection: "Then I turned towards myself, and said to myself: 'Who are

you?' I replied: 'A man.' I see in myself a body and a soul, one external, the other

internal. Which of these should I have questioned about my God. . . ?"[34] Since God is

immaterial, Augustine resolves to "rise above that natural capacity [i.e. sensory

perception] in a step by step ascent to him who made me" until finally he shall "come to

the fields and vast palaces of memory, where are the treasuries of innumerable images of

all kinds of objects brought in by sense-perception."[35] Augustine's memory is a "vast

hall" ("aula ingenti") within which all manner of sensory images "come before me on

demand with ease and without any confusion in their order. Memories of earlier events

give way to those which followed, and as they pass are stored away available for retieval

when I want them." [36] Despite the passing similarity between Augustine's "great hall"

and the architectural mnemonic, the assumption that Augustine is explicitly drawing upon

the precepts of the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* is doubtful at best. Yates interprets

Augustine's language about memory as evidence of his familiarity with and indebtedness

to the text, but Carruthers and James J. O'Donnell both plausibly argue that the metaphor

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[34] Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 10.6.9.
"Et direxi me ad me et dixi mihi: 'Tu quis es?' Et respondi: 'Homo.' Et ecce corpus et anima in me mihi
praesto sunt, unum exterius et alterum interius. Quid horum est, unde quaerere debui deum meum. . . ?"
The Latin text is from Augustine, *Confessiones*, ed. Lucas Verheijen, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina
vol. 27 (Turnholti: Brepols, 1981), 10.6.9.

[35] Augustine, *Confessions*, 10.8.12. "Transibo ergo et istam naturae mease, gradibus ascendens ad eum, qui
fecit me, et uenio in campos et lata praetoria memoriae, ubi sunt thesauri innumerabilium imaginum de
cuiuscemodi rebus sensis inuectarum."

[36] Augustine, *Confessions*, 10.8.12. "Alia faciliter atque imperturbata serie sicut poscuntur suggeruntur et
cedunt praecedentia consequentibus et cedendo conduntur, iterum cum uoluero processura."

of memory as a storehouse of images placed in orderly sequences was such a commonplace by the late fourth century that anyone with even a passing knowledge of rhetoric would have used the same language to describe the memory.[37] Augustine, like other late classical and early medieval rhetoricians, treats memory not as a tool whose workings are defined by the principles of a detailed art, but as a mental faculty loosely characterized by its facility for storing and retrieving well-organized, vivid images. However, Augustine is interested in memory not merely as a rhetorician—he had studied and taught rhetoric before pursuing a career in the Church--but as a Christian striving to better know God. As a Christian, Augustine is less concerned with the memory's rhetorical function than with its ability to serve spiritual ends. Book 10 details Augustine's discovery that by exploring the farthest reaches of his memory he finds not only God but also a place where one can meet oneself as an object of contemplation, an aspect of memory that will have a long life in Christian spiritual practice throughout the Middle Ages.

It would be a mistake to regard Augustine's memory as merely a storehouse of archived images from the past, stagnantly waiting for him to call them up for the purpose of recollecting some object or event. The memory, while not identical to the mind, nonetheless provides it with the material it needs in order for it to think in the present and about the future. Within his memory Augustine perceives

> Everything that I remember, whether I experienced it directly or believed the word of others. Out of the same abundance in store, I combine with past events images of various things, whether experienced directly or believed on the basis of

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[37] For commentary on Augustine's knowledge of the art of memory, see Frances A. Yates, *The Art of Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 46-49; Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, 146; and James J. O'Donnell in Augustine, *Confessions* vol. III, Commentary on Books 8-13, ed. James J. O'Donnell (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 177.

what I have experienced; and on this basis I reason about future actions and events and hopes, and again think of all these things in the present.

Ibi sunt omnia, quae siue experta a me siue credita memini. Ex eadem copia etiam similitudines rerum uel expertarum uel ex eis, quas expertus sum, creditarum alias atque alias et ipse contexto praeteritis atque ex his etiam futuras actiones et euenta et spes, et haec omnia rursus quasi praesentia meditor.[38]

Our desire to understand anything about the present leads us into that great storehouse of memory, for we comprehend what is happening now and project what may happen in the future only by thinking with the "likenesses" and experiences stored in the memory. The memory includes not only images of sensory experiences, such as the sight of soaring mountains and the roar of mighty rivers (10.8.15). It also contains abstract knowledge such as everything Augustine has ever learned of literature and disputation and mathematical proofs (10.9.16, 10.12.19). The provision of an endless supply of images and knowledge that the memory offers to the mind allows the mind to *think* and not merely *perceive* what is immediately before it at the present, fleeting moment. It permits the mind to synthesize what is with what was in order to consider what might yet be. Therefore Augustine, seeking to find the God he perceives in his present life, finally locates him not in the outer world of sensory objects, but in the inner world of his memory. In Book 10 he illustrates this point with the story in Luke 15:8-9 of a woman who loses a silver coin and is able to find it again only because she remembers having had it before and can recognize it when she sees it again (10.18.27). For Augustine, God is that silver coin—Augustine finds God in his life now by searching for him in his memory. In seeking God, Augustine argues, people are seeking a blessed life, and no one would know how to recognize this blessed life unless at one time everyone had shared in such an existence—like the woman looking for her coin, we would not seek for such a

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[38] Augustine, *Confessions*, 10.8.14.

life unless we remembered having had it once before. "What all agree upon is that they want to be happy," notes Augustine. "Even if one person pursues it one way, and another in a different way, yet there is one goal which all are striving to attain, namely to experience joy. Since no one can say that this is a matter outside experience, the happy life is found in the memory and is recognized when the words are uttered."[39] Therefore this blessedness, or God, resides in memory: "Surely my memory is where you dwell, because I remember you since I first learnt of you, and I find you there when I think about you."[40] Without the memory of God, Augustine could not find God in his life now for "[i]f I find you outside my memory, I am not mindful of you. And how shall I find you if I am not mindful of you?"[41]

Augustine's search for God requires him to delve inward in order to reach outward beyond himself. At the same time, this inward turn produces for Augustine a depth of self-knowledge not otherwise attainable. Memory is where he goes to find God, but he ends up finding himself there as well: "There also," says Augustine, "I meet myself and recall what I am, what I have done, and when and where and how I was affected when I did it."[42] But the self that he finds there is far stranger and more baffling than the mere memories of what he has done, thought, and felt. The powers of memory

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[39] Augustine, *Confessions*, 10.21.31. "Ita se omnes beatos esse uelle consonant. . . . Quod esti alius hinc, alius illinc adsequitur, unum est tamen, quo peruenire omnes nituntur, ut gaudeant. Quae quoniam res est, quam se expertum non esse nemo potest dicere, propterea reperta in memoria recognoscitur, quando beatae uitae nomen auditur."

[40] Augustine, *Confessions*, 10.25.36. "Habitas certe in ea, quoniam tui memini, ex quo te didici, et in ea te inuenio, cum recordor te."

[41] Augustine, *Confessions*, 10.17.26. "Si praeter memoriam meam te inuenio, immemor tui sum. Et quomodo iam inueniam te, si memor non sum tui?"

[42] Augustine, *Confessions*, 10.8.14. "Ibi mihi et ipse occurro meque recolo, quid, quando et ubi egerim quoque modo, cum agerem, affectus fuerim."

leave Augustine in awe: "This power is that of my mind and is a natural endowment," he asserts, "but I myself cannot grasp the totality of what I am."[43] His frustrated attempts to puzzle out the phenomenon of forgetfulness in Book 10 cause him to turn his attention to the workings of his own mind and to identify himself with that mind. The labor of trying to understand how it is possible to remember forgetfulness leaves Augustine exhausted as if he were "measuring the distances between stars or the balancing of the earth." Yet the subject on which he expends these efforts is not the expansive cosmos, but the singular self, "I who remember, I who am mind. . . . Great is the power of memory, an awe-inspiring mystery, my God, a power of profound and infinite multiplicity. And this is mind, this is I myself. What then am I, my God? What is my nature?"[44]

A new realization of the depths and mysteries of his own memory leaves Augustine feeling as if he were trying to understand not only an unfamiliar person, but an entirely different kind of "creature." The "self" he finds in his memory is, in a sense, not the "self" who thought he understood himself before he plunged into the "profound and infinite multiplicity" of his memory. As O'Donnell notes with a good degree of understatement, in the *Confessions* "[t]he sense of alienation implicit in 'meeting' oneself in memory is not minimized."[45] The opportunity to encounter himself from the "outside," as it were, enables Augustine to discover, if not fully comprehend, his nature as a thinking, remembering creature. Without memory, Augustine could neither find God

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[43] Augustine, *Confessions*, 10.8.15. "Et uis est haec animi mei atque ad meam naturam pertinet, nec ego ipse capio totum, quod sum."

[44] Augustine, *Confessions*, 10.16.25-10.17.26. "Neque enim nunc scrutamur plagas caeli aut siderum interualla dimetimur uel terrae libramenta quaerimus: ego sum, qui memini, ego animus. . . . Magna uis est memoriae, nescio quid horrendum, deus meus, profunda et infinita multiplicitas; et hoc animus est, et hoc ego ipse sum. Quid ergo sum, deus meus? Quae natura sum?"

[45] O'Donnell, *Confessions*, 178.

nor attain this enlightenment about who and what he is. Memory, as the place where

Augustine finds God and loses whatever inaccurate certainties he had about himself, is

the place where wisdom and self-consciousness are born. It is the ground on which the

holy and the self-reflecting subject meet, where the self comes to know itself through its

quest to know the divine.

Augustine's understanding of the memory owes very little, if anything, to the

architectural mnemonic of the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*. Indeed, as we saw above in our

review of other late classical and early medieval writers on memory, few teachers of

rhetoric at the time gave much credit to that particular mnemonic system. But orators

were not the only people with an interest in memorizing texts, and scholars of rhetoric

were, therefore, not the only people to develop an art of memory. During the early

Middle Ages, monasteries produced more fruitful thinking about memory than did the

schools which had by this time reduced the art of memory to a handful of general

precepts which seldom received more than a passing mention among the other parts of

rhetoric. Monks, too, devoted their time to memorizing texts, namely sacred texts and the

commentaries upon them, and needed a coherent system for understanding the workings

and effective use of a memory that, in their hands, had become a crucial tool for one's

character development as a Christian. Monks adapted memory practice to explicitly

Christian ends in the same spirit in which Augustine in *On Christian Doctrine* advises his

fellow believers to put pagan learning to "superior" religious ends. Just as the Israelites,

fleeing bondage under the Pharaoh, took with them Egyptian gold and silver ornaments

for their own "better" purposes, so should Christian scholars plunder those elements of

pagan learning that they can employ in furthering the Christian faith.[46] Cassiodorus

shares this sentiment when he recommends memory practice to his monks at Vivarium in

the mid-sixth century. Cassiodorus draws heavily on Fortunatianus's *Artis rhetoricae*

libri III for his discussion of rhetoric in Book II of the *Institutiones*. In regard to both

memory and delivery, Cassiodorus believes that

> the monk will derive a certain advantage from this [Fortunatianus's] book, since it seems not improper for him to adapt to his own uses that which orators have profitably applied to disputation. Duly cautious, he will pay heed to memorization, as applied to divine reading, when he has learned its force and nature from the afore-mentioned book; he will foster the art of delivery in reading the divine law aloud; and he will, moreover, preserve a careful manner of speaking in chanting the psalms. Thus, though he be somewhat occupied by secular books, he will be restored to holy work upon the completion of his instruction.
>
> . . . tamen monachus cum aliqua utilitate discedit, quando ad suas partes non improbe videtur attrahere, quod illi ad exercendas controversias utiliter aptaverunt. Memoriam siquidem lectionis divinae recognita cautela servabit, cum in supradicto libro eius vim qualitatemque cognoverit; artem vero pronuntiationis in divinae legis effatione concipiet; vocis autem diligentiam in psalmodiae cantatione custodit. Sic instructus in opere sancto redditur, quamvis aliquantulum libris saecularibus occupetur.[47]

Monks of the early Middle Ages through the mid-thirteenth century, having received a

formal education including the arts of the Trivium, and especially those having been

taught Fortunatianus's views on memory through the *Institutiones*, would have shared the

general view of the time that the effective use of memory relies not on a detailed

architectural art, but on the basic principles of order, practice, and the attentive imprinting

of a text in one's mind. However, their efforts to adapt this pagan "gold and silver" to

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[46] Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, trans. D. W. Robertson, Jr. (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company,1958), II.40.60.

[47] Cassiodorus Senator, *An Introduction to Divine and Human Readings*, trans. Leslie Webber Jones (New York: Columbia University Press, 1946), 157-158. The Latin text is from Cassiodorus Senator, *Institutiones*, ed. R.A.B. Mynors (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1937), II.ii.16.

Christian ends produced a particularly monastic art of memory whose system and

purpose bear little resemblance to the classical art expounded in the *Rhetorica ad*

Herennium. The orator's mnemonic art allowed him to organize an argument that he had

created and then recall it, through its *imagines agentes*, for public performance. The

monk's mnemonic art permitted him to retain and recall the writings of others—the

"divine reading" assigned by Cassiodorus—so that he could use their arguments and

narratives to fashion his own character out of pieces of these public texts.[48]

Monastic memory practice was architectural, but not in the style of the *Rhetorica*

ad Herennium. Monks did not first imagine an architectural space and then populate it

with distinct images. Instead, their practice guided them in the construction of the

architectural space itself, a mental edifice composed of the sacred texts they had

memorized. Carruthers traces the origins of this system to Paul's metaphor of the

"master-builder" in 1 Corinthians 3:10-17:

> According to the grace of God that is given to me, as a wise architect, I have laid
> the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he
> buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay, but that which is laid,
> which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver,
> precious stones, wood, hay, stubble, every man's work shall be manifest. For the
> day of the Lord shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire
> shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he
> hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work burn, he shall
> suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire. Know you not that
> you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man
> violate the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy,
> which you are.
>
> Secundum gratiam Dei, quae data est mihi, ut sapiens architectus fundamentum
> posui: alius autem superaedificat. Unusquisque autem videat quomodo
> superaedificet. Fundamentum enim alius nemo potest ponere praeter id quod

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> positum est, qui est Christus Iesus. Si quis autem superaedificat super fundamentum hoc, aurum, argentums, lapides pretiosos, ligna, foenum, stipulam, uniuscuiusque opus manifestum erit: dies enim Domini declarabit, quia in igne revelabitur: et uniuscuiusque opus quale sit, ignis probabit. Si cuius opus manserit quod superaedificavit, mercedem accipiet. Si cuius opus arserit, detrimentum patietur: ipse autem salvus erit: sic tamen quasi per ignem. Nescitis quia templum Dei estis, et Spiritus Dei habitat in vobis? Si quis autem templum Dei violaverit, disperdet illum Deus. Templum enim Dei sanctum est, quod estis vos. [49]

According to Carruthers, this passage "gave license to a virtual industry of exegetical architectural metaphors" during the Middle Ages and inspired the monastic mnemonic art in which one carefully collects and arranges the "stones" of sacred text into a superstructure of allegorical and tropological significance. Hugh of St. Victor advocates just such a method to his students in Book 6 of the *Didascalicon*. The student of sacred scripture, says Hugh, needs to attend to history, allegory, and tropology in his studies, and needs as well to study them in the correct order, with history as the foundation upon which allegorical and tropological interpretations are constructed: "In this question it is not without value to call to mind what we see happen in the construction of buildings, where first the foundation is laid, then the structure is raised upon it, and finally, when the work is all finished, the house is decorated by the laying on of color."[50] The student in his studies, like Paul, acts as a master-builder does when he raises a new building:

> Take a look at what the mason does. When the foundation had been laid, he stretches out his string in a straight line, he drops his perpendicular, and then, one by one, he lays the diligently polished stones in a row. Then he asks for other stones, and still others, and if by chance he finds some that do not fit with the

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[49] Carruthers, *Craft of Thought*, 17. I have cited the Latin Vulgate version.

[50] Hugh of St. Victor, *The Didascalicon of Hugh of St. Victor: A Medieval Guide to the Arts*, trans. Jerome Taylor (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), 135. "[I]n quo illus ad memoriam revocare non inutile est, quod in aedificiis fieri conspicitur, ubi primum quidem fundamentum ponitur, dehinc fabrica superaedificatur, ad ultimum consummato opere domus colore superducto vestitur." The Latin text is from Hugonis de Sancto Victore, *Didascalicon: De studio legendi*, ed. Charles Henry Buttimer (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1939), bk. 6, ch. 2.

fixed course he has laid, he takes his file, smoothes off the protruding parts, files down the rough spots, and the places that do not fit, reduces to form, and so at last joins them to the rest of the stones set into the row.

Respice opus caementarii. Collocato fundamento, lineam extendit in directum, perpendiculum demittit, ac deinde lapides diligenter politos in ordinem ponit. Alios deinde atque alios quaerit, et si forte aliquos primae dispositioni non respondentes invenerit, accipit limam, praeeminentia praecidit, aspera planat, et informia ad formam reducit, sicque demum reliquis in ordinem dispositis adiungit. [51]

Once the student is well-versed in the historical, or literal, sense of the scriptures he is ready to lay upon that foundation whatever new material he may learn:

See now, you have come to your study, you are about to construct the spiritual building. . . . You stretch out your cord, you line it up precisely, you place the square stones into the course, and, moving around the course, you lay the track, so to say, of future walls. That taut cord shows the path of true faith. The very bases of your spiritual structure are certain principles of the faith—principles which form your starting point. Truly, the judicious student ought to be sure that, before he makes his way through extensive volumes, he is so instructed in the particulars which bear upon his task and upon his profession of the true faith, that he may safely be able to build onto his structure whatever he afterwards finds.

Ecce ad lectionem venisti, spirituale fabricaturus aedificium. . . . Linum tendis, ponis examussim, quadros in ordinem collocas, et circumgyrans quaedam futurorum murorum vestigia figis. Linea protensa rectae fidei trames est, ipsae spiritualis operis bases quaedam fidei principia sunt, quibus initiaris. Debet siquidemprudens lector curare, ut, antequam spatiosa librorum volumnia prosequatur, sic de singulis quae magis ad propositum suum et professionem verae fidei pertinent instructus sit, ut, quaecumque postmodum invenerit, tuto superaedificare possit.[52]

Each text finds its place in the structure according to the associations it has with the texts around it, thereby helping the student to accumulate a mental library in which each entry elicits a memory of another entry, creating chains of association that assist in recollection.

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[51] Hugh of St. Victor, *Didascalicon*, 140; *Didascalicon: De studio legendi*, bk. 6, ch. 4.

[52] Hugh of St. Victor, *Didascalicon*, 141-142; *Didascalicon: De studio legendi*, bk. 6, ch. 4.

What monks sought through their art of memory was not just knowledge of the Bible and its commentaries, but an experience of them. Jean Leclercq aptly sums up their methods and goals by contrasting them with those of the scholastics. Whereas scholastics debate about and impersonally question the writings of *auctoritates* in order to produce knowledge, monks employ meditation and contemplation of a text, the *sacra pagina*, in order to produce a personal apprehension of God's presence and grace. "The important word is no longer *quaeritur*, but *desideratur*," argues Leclercq, "no longer *sciendum*, but *experiendum*."[53] Over time, *sacra pagina* (or *lectio divina*) came to refer not merely to the page of text itself, but to the act of reading scripture with this experiential goal in mind. The cultivation of an emotional response to a text aids the monk in remembering and relating the texts in his spiritual edifice by giving each one a particular affective tone that defines it. According to the medieval understanding of how memory functions, each memory image consists of both a likeness to the thing to be remembered, or *similitudo*, and an attitude toward that thing, or *intentio*. Remembering an object or experience involves recalling both its *similitudo* and how one felt about that object or experience at the time. Thus, all memories are emotionally colored. Evoking the right *intentio* can assist a person in remembering the *similitudo*, or, conversely, bringing the *similitudo* to mind should recreate the *intentio* associated with that memory.[54]

Hugh of St. Victor's *De arca Noe morali* offers an example of how a monk should use the spiritual edifice in his mind to cultivate both his knowledge of and affective response to God, and in the process consciously reshape his own character to

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[53] Jean Leclercq, *Love of Learning and the Desire for God: A Study of Monastic Culture*, trans. Catherine Misrahi (New York: Fordham University Press, 1961), 7.

[54] See Carruthers, *Craft of Thought*, 14-16 and *Book of Memory*, 59-60, 169.

better embody Christian virtue. The *De arca Noe morali* is written as a guide to help the reader bring God into his heart and thereby turn away from the vain distractions of the world that make the human heart so fickle. Wherever God dwells there is peace and rest, says Hugh; if no such dwelling exists within us yet, "then let us build it; for if we have prepared a place for Him, He will gladly come to us who made us that he might dwell in us. . . ."[55] This dwelling, constructed of "right[,] . . . pure and profitable thoughts,"[56] takes the form of Noah's ark for, like the ark, God carries the faithful soul safely through the stormy waters of this world. The reader who builds this "ark of wisdom" (*arca sapientiae*) must labor to reform his own character if he hopes to create a suitable home for God. He achieves this by metaphorically ascending through three levels of the ark. Each level signifies a type of thought: right, profitable, and necessary. The reader occupies the first level and attains "right" thoughts when he has "begun to love to meditate upon the Scriptures, and [has] always been ready to ponder the virtues of the saints, and the works of God, and whatever else there is that serves to improve [his] conduct and stimulate [his] spirit."[57] This is analogous to the preliminary historical learning that Hugh directs his students to acquire first in the *Didascalicon*, but with the added element of desire—the reader in the first level of the ark not only reads about the deeds of saints and the works of God, but *loves* to read about them. These thoughts about

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[55] Hugh of St. Victor, *De arca Noe morali*, trans. by a Religious of the Community of St. Mary the Virgin, *Hugh of St. Victor: Selected Spiritual Writings* (London: Faber and Faber,1962), 50. "Si vero necdum in nobis esse coepit aedificemus eam, quia si locum ei praeparaverimus ad nos libenter veniet, qui idcirco fecit nos, ut in nobis habitet Jesus Christus Dominus noster." The Latin text is from Hugh of St. Victor, "De arca Noe morali," in *Patrologia Latina*, ed. J.-P. Migne, 176:621c.

[56] Hugh of St. Victor, *De arca Noe morali*, 73. "Habeamus ergo rectas, habeamus utiles et castas cogitationes, quia de tali materia fabricabimus arcam nostram." *PL* 176:635b.

[57] Hugh of St. Victor, *De arca Noe morali*, 81. "Si ego diligere coepero meditationem Scripturarum, et libenter cogitavero de virtutibus sanctorum, et de operibus Dei, et de aliis quaecunque ad emendationem morum, sive ad exercitationem mentis pertinent, jam in arcae mansione prima esse coepi." *PL* 176:639d.

virtue are "right," but not yet "profitable," for merely knowing what virtue looks like

does not make one virtuous oneself, no matter how much one loves to read about it. Such

reading "profits me nothing if I do not take it to myself as a pattern for living."[58] When

the reader has "taken pains not only to know, but also to perform good and profitable

actions," then he has "profitable" thoughts and has reached the second story.[59]   Through

continual practice in consciously performing virtuous actions that the reader knows he

ought to carry out, he eventually internalizes those virtues so that their performance

becomes second nature—he now can be said to "possess within [himself]" the virtues

displayed in his works, and has reached the third story of the ark.[60] Thus has he achieved

the final aim of the meditative memorization outlined in the *Didascalicon*. He has

successfully incorporated the texts upon which he has meditated so that his reading has

changed his habits, desires, and goals. He retains both the *similitudo* of the texts (i.e. the

knowledge they impart to him as impersonal facts) and the *intentio* toward them that

compels him to live out their precepts. He has, in a sense, become the embodiment of the

texts that he has memorized. He has created for himself what Leclercq calls "a holy

imagination": "The memory, fashioned wholly by the Bible and nurtured entirely by

biblical words and the images they evoke, causes [monastic readers] to express

themselves spontaneously in a biblical vocabulary. Reminiscences are not quotations,

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[58] Hugh of St. Victor, *De arca Noe morali*, 81. ". . . sed inutile mihi, si illud ad exemplum vivendi non traho." *PL* 176:639d.

[59] Hugh of St. Victor, *De arca Noe morali*, 81. "Si autem operam dedero non tantum ut sciam, sed etiam ut agam quae bona sunt et utilia,. . . et tunc ascendi in secundam mansionem. . . ." *PL* 176:640a.

[60] Hugh of St. Victor, *De arca Noe morali*, 81. ". . . hoc est, ut quod foris demonstro in opere intus possideam in virtute." *PL* 176:640b.

elements of phrases borrowed from another. They are the words of the person using them; they belong to him."[61]

This effort at self-fashioning is, on the one hand, deeply personal and private. Each individual, by virtue of differences in experience, skill, temperament, and knowledge, will end up with a "spiritual edifice" or "ark of wisdom" that differs from those of his fellow readers in some manner. This is, as Carruthers notes, what makes the activity an ethical one, for the way in which a person connects the texts and responds to them says something about his *ēthos*. Biblical stories, especially from the Old Testament, are often

> treated as though each were a story-outline, one of *One Hundred Great Plots*, whose chief purpose is to be retold. . . . And the proof of a teller is in the quality and character of his fabrication and coloring—the reconstruction, not the repetition of the 'facts' of foundational plots. There seems to be very little interest in 'the facts' *per se*. Instead, retelling a story is cast as a question of judgment and character.[62]

Yet the self that is both created and revealed is at the same time unavoidably social, for it arises within a highly structured community from a pool of shared texts that provide one with a storehouse of *dicta et facta memorabilia* (characters, scenes, dialogue, ethical lessons) gleaned from the texts one would have encountered through a formal education. These "memorable sayings and deeds," internalized through meditative reading and connected in a personal web of associations, constitute the material out of which a public identity is fabricated. Carruthers gives the example of Heloise who, at the moment when she commits herself to the life of a nun, quotes the lines from Lucan's poem *Pharsalia* where Pompey's wife, Cornelia, "greets her husband after his shameful defeat in battle,

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[61] Leclercq, *Love of Learning*, 93-94.

[62] Carruthers, *Craft of Thought*, 19.

offering to kill herself in sacrifice to placate the gods." As Cornelia offers her own life to lessen her husband's shame, so Heloise sacrifices her life to the convent to help Abelard overcome his shame. Heloise draws on her memory of Lucan as a template for giving meaning to her experience. She is not, Carruthers argues, merely playing the role of Cornelia like an actress for the many people gathered with her; instead, she articulates her own predicament "by means of her memory of a text in the public domain. . . . She re-presents Cornelia in her own present situation; the text from Lucan provides a temporal and spatial meeting-ground, a 'common place,' between a 'public memory' and her personal situation, and gives her 'a way of talking about' herself in the present."[63] Memorized texts thus perform three overlapping functions: a cognitive one (supplying the terms in which one imagines oneself), an interpretive one (giving meaning to one's experiences), and a social one (providing a means of communicating that self and its experiences to others through the shared language of the *dicta et facta memorabilia*). Without a well-trained and well-stocked memory, a person simply would not have at hand the materials necessary for creating and communicating his character. Memory, therefore, is necessarily "ethical" in that it is required for the cultivation of an individual's *ēthos*.

Whereas Augustine's Platonism attributed God's presence in our memories to the soul's past experience of the divine, the monastic mnemonic outlined above locates knowledge of God in our memories because we have consciously placed it there ourselves through solicitous reading and memorization of sacred texts. In both cases, memory is the repository of our spiritual knowledge and the tool with which we cultivate

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[63] Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, 181.

our spiritual and ethical selves. The idea that memory inherently possesses an ethical

dimension originates in the definitions of virtue and prudence in both *De inventione* and

the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*. Cicero defines virtue in *De inventione* as "a habit of mind

in harmony with reason and the order of nature" which is divided into four parts:

prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance.[64] Each of these components of virtue is

further subdivided, with prudence characterized as:

> the knowledge of what is good, what is bad and what is neither good nor bad. Its
> parts are memory, intelligence, and foresight. Memory is the faculty by which the
> mind recalls what has happened. Intelligence is the faculty by which it ascertains
> what is. Foresight is the faculty by which it is seen that something is going to
> occur before it occurs.

> Prudentia est rerum bonarum et malarum neutrarumque scientia. Partes eius:
> memoria, intellegentia, providentia. Memoria est per quam animus repetit illa
> quae fuerent; intellegentia, per quam ea perspicit quae sunt; providentia, per quam
> futurum aliquid videtur ante quam factum est.[65]

By this definition, one can not be prudent without a well-furnished and well-organized

memory to supply the mind with lessons from the past that inform both its understanding

of the present and its predictions for the future. The author of the *Rhetorica ad*

Herennium likewise ties memory to prudence, but establishes an even more intimate

connection between the two than does Cicero.   Prudence, an "intelligence capable, by a

certain judicious method, of distinguishing good and bad," is not merely aided by

memory as in the *De inventione*; it is coextensive with memory itself, for "a well-

furnished memory, or experience in diverse matters, is termed Wisdom ."[66] Medieval

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[64] Cicero, *De inventione*, trans. H. M. Hubbell (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960), II. liii. 159. "Nam virtus est animi habitus naturae modo atque rationi consuetaneus." The Latin text is also from the Hubbell edition.

[65] Cicero, *De inventione*, II. liii. 160.

[66] *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, III. ii. 3. "Prudentia est calliditas quae ratione quadam potest dilectum habere bonorum et malorum. . . . [I]tem appellatur prudentia rerum multarum memoria et usus conplurium

scholars, by assigning to Cicero both the *De inventione* and the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, thereby produced a coherent argument for understanding the art of memory as an ethical practice tied to one of the four cardinal virtues: the "First Rhetoric" (*De inventione*) defines memory as part of the virtue of prudence, the "Second Rhetoric" (*Rhetorica ad Herennium*) supports this position and offers a means of artificially developing one's powers of memory; therefore the practice of the art of memory comes to be regarded as a means for developing the virtue of prudence.[67]

This direct connection between mnemonic practice and the virtues found its fullest exposition only after Aristotle's works became widely available to the West in the mid to late thirteenth century, for it was the attempt to reconcile Aristotle's ideas about memory and virtue with the generally accepted classical notions of memory and prudence that compelled scholars such as Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas to articulate an explicitly ethical function for memory. The two Aristotelian texts that played the greatest role in this endeavor were the *De memoria et reminiscentia* and the *Nicomachean Ethics*. In his *De memoria et reminiscentia*, Aristotle attends to the psychological nature of memory and recollection, not to their rhetorical uses as the classical art of memory does. In order for the mind to think at all, it must use images; since it is not possible to think without images, then memory, which furnishes the mind with the objects, persons, and events to think about, must itself be stocked with images. Although memory provides the material for rational thought, Aristotle categorizes it among the perceptive faculties rather than the intellectual faculties because even non-rational animals can form memories.

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negotiorum."

[67] See Yates, *Art of Memory*, 20-21.

Recollection, on the other hand, relies on reason to lead a person from a starting point to the thing or idea being sought. Aristotle gives as an example the chain of associations "from milk to white, from white to air, and from this to fluid, from which one remembers autumn, the season one is seeking."[68] As long as one's memory is well ordered, one can choose any image as a starting point for such a chain, for "whatever has some order, as things in mathematics do, is easily remembered. Other things are remembered badly and with difficulty."[69] Just as the *De memoria et reminiscentia* is interested in the psychology of memory, one might say that the *Nicomachean Ethics* is, to a degree, interested in the psychology of virtue, and it is the shared psychological aspects of memory and virtue that facilitated the medieval synthesis of the art of memory and ethics. The ethics that concern Aristotle are not abstract rules for good behavior, but the nature and cultivation of the individual's character (*ēthos*), and the relationship of that character to his attainment of a fulfilled life (*eudaimonia*). The life of a *eudaimon* expresses virtue (*aretē*) or "excellence" of two sorts—virtue of thought (sometimes translated as "intellectual virtue") such as "wisdom, comprehension, and prudence," and virtue of character (or "moral virtue") such as generosity and temperance.[70] These virtues are not inborn but must be learned and practiced. Virtue of thought is a product of teaching, and "needs experience and time" to manifest itself, whereas "virtue of character [i.e. of *ēthos*] results from habit [*ethos*]; hence its name 'ethical,' slightly varied from 'ethos.'"[71] The

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[68] Aristotle, *On Memory*, trans. Richard Sorabji (London: Duckworth, 1972), 452a12.

[69] Aristotle, *On Memory*, 451b29-452a3.

[70] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1999), 1.13.1103a5-10.

[71] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 2.1.1103a15-19.

role of prudence as an intellectual virtue is to lead us to both recognize and perform the

right action in the right way at the right time—that is, to guide our deliberative reasoning

so that we choose the course of action that will best promote our *eudaimonia*.[72] One can

not achieve excellence of character without exercising the intellectual virtue of prudent

thought.

Faced with these new Aristotelian paradigms for thinking about memory and

virtue, Albert and Aquinas both wrestled with the problem of how to reconcile Aristotle's

views with the classical mnemonic tradition carried down from Cicero and the *Rhetorica*

ad Herennium. Albert tackles this issue directly in *De bono*, tractatus 4, quaestio 2, "De

partibus prudentiae," where he carefully delineates the argument that the classical art of

memory, long neglected but never entirely forgotten during the early Middle Ages,

supplies the method and "habit" necessary for the growth of individual virtue. Albert

opens by noting that while Cicero names memory as one of the parts of prudence,

Aristotle places prudence in the class of intellectual virtues. How, then, can memory, a

storehouse of images, be a part of an intellectual virtue, one which expresses itself

through rational thought? Since prudence consists of "the knowledge of the good and

evil of actions" and, as Aristotle points out, "stands in need of experience and time,"

memory, as the faculty that preserves our experiences over time, "should be generative of

prudence and a part of it."[73] However, memory participates in prudence only "insofar as

memory comes under the definition of reminiscence," for like the process of

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[72] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 3.3.1112a18-1113a12.

[73] Albertus Magnus, "De bono," trans. Mary Carruthers, in *The Book of Memory*, 268. "Prudentia est cognitio agendorum bonorum et malorum. . . . Item, dicit Philosophus, quod 'virtus intellectualis indiget experimento et tempore.' . . . Ergo videtur, quod memoria sit generativum prudentiae et pars eius." The Latin text is from Albertus Magnus, "De bono," in *Opera Omnia*, ed. H. Kühle, C. Feckes, B. Geyer, W. Kübel (Aschendorff: Monasterii Westfalorum, 1951), 28:245 (Tr.4, Q.2, Art.1, contra).

reminiscence that follows chains of association, it is "necessary for [prudence] to progress from a pre-determined starting point, and through intermediate probabilities to arrive at a working hypothesis; and likewise since prudence proceeds from things that happened in the past, it uses memory, insofar as it is a function of reminiscence."[74] Albert maps Aristotle's distinction between memory and reminiscence onto the classical art of memory so that memory constitutes the trained "habit" of fashioning vivid images and placing them in well-constructed architectural spaces, and reminiscence consists of the rational process of moving among these images and recollecting the chain of one's ideas which they represent.[75] Since both memory and reminiscence are required in order to be prudent, one ought to have a formal method for learning both skills. After favorably reviewing the rules for creating *imagines agentes* and the architectural spaces in which to set them from Book 3 of the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, Albert declares,

> [T]hat art of memory is best which Tully teaches, above all with respect to those things-for-remembering which pertain to how we live and to justice, and these memories chiefly relate to ethics and rhetoric because since the action of human life consists in particular events, it is necessary that this art be within the soul through corporeal images; in these images however it will not remain except within the memory. Whence we say that among all those things which point toward ethical wisdom, the most necessary is trained memory. . . .

> Dicimus, quod ars memorandi optima est, quam tradit Tullius et praecipue in memorabilibus pertinentibus ad vitam et iudicium, et illae memoriae praecipue pertinent ad ethicum et rhetorem, quia cum actus humanae vitae consistat in particularibus, necesse est, quod apud animam sit per imagines corporales; in imaginibus autem illis non permanet nisi apud memoriam. Unde dicimus, quod inter amnia quae spectant ad prudentiam, summe necessaria est memoria. . . .[76]

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[74] Albertus Magnus, *De bono*, Tr.4, Q.2, Art.1, solutio. "Dicimus, quod memoria est pars prudentiae, secundum quod memoria cadit in rationem reminiscentiae. . . . [N]ecesse est eam progredi a principio determinato et per media probabilia devenire in propositum operabile; et ideo cum proceditur ex praeteritis, utitur memoria, secundum quod est pars reminiscentiae."

[75] Albertus Magnus, *De bono*, Tr.4, Q.2, Art.1, resp.5.

[76] Albert Magnus, De bono, Tr.4, Q.2, Art.2, solutio.

Thus did the architectural mnemonic art of the *Rhetorica ad Herennium* return to the field of serious intellectual inquiry in the Middle Ages, not merely as a handmaiden to the art of rhetoric, but as a fruitful method of cultivating one's *ēthos* and specifically the cardinal virtue of prudence.

Albert's student and fellow scholastic Thomas Aquinas agreed with his mentor on the moral value of a well-trained memory. The section of his *Summa theologiae* that examines the nature of prudence and its relationship to memory (2a2ae Q.47-49) repeats several of the arguments made by Albert. He locates prudence in the rational faculty since it relies on a process of comparison between the past and the present in order to discern what may happen in the future(2a2ae Q.47 Art. 1). Hence, following Aristotle, it is an intellectual virtue acquired through education and experience (2a2ae Q.47 Art.15). Since memory is the guardian of all our past lessons and experiences, it is an indispensable adjunct to prudence and should be cultivated by applying the rules for creating images and architectural spaces handed down to us by "Cicero" (i.e. the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*), which Aquinas summarizes (2a2ae Q.49 Art. 1).   Aquinas adds to Albert's insights into prudence, however, in his attributing to it a necessary affective quality. Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics* argues that the prudent man not only *knows* what is right to do, but *wills* to do the right thing and acts upon the knowledge that prudence has given him (7.10 1152a6-9). Aquinas, who was well-versed in the *Ethics* when he composed the *Summa theologiae*, cites Aristotle's claim "that prudence is not just a quality of mind, like art; it also involves, as we have stressed, our applying ourselves to a deed, and this comes about by the exercise of will."[77] Building

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[77] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, trans. Thomas Gilby, O.P., vol. 36 (Cambridge: Blackfriars, 1974), 2a2ae, Q.47, Art. 1. "Unde ibidem Philosophus subdit quod *prudentia non est solum cum ratione, sicut*

on Aristotle, Aquinas argues that "to use an art aright a person must have moral virtue, which straightens out his loves" and provides him with "rightly disposed affection." Prudence, therefore, needs "rightly disposed affection" as much as it needs a rightly ordered memory, for "the role of prudence . . . is to charge our conduct with right reason, and this cannot be done without rightful desire."[78] It straddles the boundary between the intellectual and the moral virtues because it participates in both reason and desire. It "does not consist in knowing alone, but also in loving, because, as we have said, its chief act is to command, which is to apply the knowledge one possesses to desiring and acting."[79]

What Albert and Aquinas accomplished was nothing less than the synthesis of the classical art of memory, the monastic rhetoric exemplified in the *De arca Noe morali*, and Aristotelian concepts of memory and virtue. The monks who had long been practicing their own architectural mnemonic exemplified by the *De arca Noe morali* already recognized that memorized texts, linked together in an orderly system, provided the material with which to construct one's *ēthos*. Albert and Aquinas made newly respectable the classical architectural mnemonic as a tool to facilitate the populating of this well-ordered memory with the material that one needs in order to be prudent, spiritually or otherwise. The aims of the prudent man, like those of the monk seeking an

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ars; habet enim, ut dictum est, applicationem ad opus quod fit per voluntatem." Both the English translations and the Latin text are from this edition.

[78] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 2a2ae, Q.47, Art. 4. "[I]deo ad hoc quod homo recte utatur arte requiritur quod habeat virtutem quae faciat rectitudinem appetitus." "Ad prudentiam autem pertinet, sicut dictum est, applicatio rectae rationis ad opus, quod non fit sine appetitu recto."

[79] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 2a2ae, Q.47, Art. 16. "Sed prudentia non consistit in sola cognitione, sed etiam in appetitu, quia, ut dictum est, principalis ejus actus est praecipere, quod est applicare cognitionemhabitam ad appetendum, et operandum."

experience of God, is to train his desires towards prudent ends so that he will not merely *know* but *want to do* what is right—that is, he seeks not merely *sciendum*, but an *experiendum* of what it means to be a good, wise person. Memory contributes to this goal by storing chains of images and narratives, all of our past lessons and experiences, that supply the material reason needs in order to arrive at a prudent choice of action. Habitual "reading" of these memories, which reinforces the reader's *intentio* toward their *similitudo*, conditions us to "straighten out our loves" and have "rightly disposed affection" for the good and for God.   Thus from the thirteenth century onwards, the art of memory was treated less as an element of rhetoric and more as a part of moral philosophy.[80]

This is not to say that the architectural mnemonic no longer served any rhetorical ends in the later Middle Ages. Carruthers points out that several cultural and economic trends of the time encouraged ever more people to hone their public speaking skills, and hence contributed to the growing popularity of the classical mnemonic art: the growing university system with its reliance on public disputations; the burgeoning field of law with its need for solicitors to remember and effectively present many detailed arguments; the Fourth Lateran Council's directive to preachers to deliver more sermons in the vernacular; and the need of both courtiers and merchants to present themselves well in public. Albert's and Aquinas's fellow Dominicans were, according to Carruthers, the most active popularizers of "Tully's" art of memory, and developed a variety of aids to textual study, including Biblical concordances, indexes, and collections of *distinctiones*

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[80] Carruthers and Yates both make this same point. See Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, 152-153, and Yates, *Art of Memory*, 57.

and *quaestiones*.[81] These considerations lead Carruthers to argue that the renascent art of

memory was "specifically an aid for speakers, not for learners, for composers, not for

readers."[82] Certainly, the examples that she gives of scholars, lawyers, preachers, and

merchants who need to compose and deliver public texts support the claim that the

classical mnemonic art *can* be used for speaking and composing, but not that it was *not*

used in other contexts by, in her words, "learners" and "readers." The other context I

have in mind is the practice of affective devotion that attained wide popularity among

men and women across Europe in the thirteenth century, just as the classical mnemonic

was regaining credibility as a tool for character building. The burst of affective passion

texts of the period, especially from the Franciscans, derives at least in part, I argue, from

the renewed popularity of the classical art of memory, for the method and aims of the

kind of meditation taught in the affective tradition echo the method and aims of the art of

memory made popular by Albert and Aquinas.

What we witness in the practices of affective meditation, in fact, amounts to a

Christianization of the art of memory, the possibility of which Yates considered in her

discussion of Augustine: "The glimpses into the memory of the most influential of the

Latin Fathers of the Church raise speculations as to what a Christianized artificial

memory might have been like . Would human images of Faith, Hope, and Charity, and of

other virtues and vices, or of the liberal arts, have been 'placed' in such a memory, and

might the places now have been memorized in churches?"[83] Yates's question is apt, even

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[81] Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, 154.

[82] Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, 155.

[83] Yates, *Art of Memory*, 48.

if its speculation about the form a Christian mnemonic art might take is a bit off.   Texts

that enjoin their readers to meditate upon scenes from Christ's childhood, ministry, and

Passion function less like allegories of virtues and vices than like the scenes filled with

imagines agentes described in the *Rhetorica ad Herennium*. The reader, in his mind's

eye, moves among vivid images of Christ in the manger, among his followers and his

enemies, and upon the cross, all the while cultivating in himself the proper *intentio*

toward what he is witnessing. Late medieval affective meditation, like the monastic

mnemonic practices of earlier centuries, posits that a good memory is necessary for good

character, and therefore strives to populate the reader's memory with the sacred images

and stories that will best help him acquire a kind of "spiritual prudence" that recalls the

past (Christ's life and Passion) and carefully considers the present (the meditator's own

current spiritual state) in order to choose the right course of future action to secure God's

grace in this life and redemption after death.

Affective piety accomplishes this end by encouraging the individual to create and

contemplate vivid, realistic scenes depicting events from Christ's life, especially the

Passion, and to imagine himself an active participant in the events as they unfold.

Although affective devotion is usually associated with the Franciscan movement, its roots

reach back at least to the mid-eleventh century prayers of the Benedictine Anselm of

Canterbury which introduce an emotional intensity and a personal anguish not evident in

earlier religious writings, but very much a part of later affective devotions. In the "Prayer

to Christ," for example, Anselm bitterly regrets that he was born too late to be at Christ's

crucifixion and, in the process, evokes the bloody imagery and pathos of many later

Passion texts:

Alas for me, that I was not able to see
the Lord of angels humbled to converse with men,
when God, the one insulted,
willed to die that the sinner might live.
Alas that I did not deserve to be amazed
in the presence of a love marvelous and beyond our grasp.
Why, O my soul, were you not there
to be pierced by a sword of bitter sorrow
when you could not bear
the piercing of the side of your Saviour with a lance?
Why could you not bear to see
the nails violate the hands and feet of your Creator?
Why did you not see with horror
the blood that poured out of the side of your Redeemer?

Heu mihi, qui videre non potui dominum angelorum humilitatum ad
conversatioem hominum, ut homines exaltaret ad conversationem angelorum!
Cum deus offensus sponte moriebatur ut peccator viveret, heu qui tam admirabili,
tam inaestimabili pietate praesens obstupescere non merui! Cur, o anima mea, te
praesentem non transfixit gladius doloris acutissimi, cum ferre non posses
vulnerari lancea latus tui salvatoris? Cum videre nequires violari clavis manus et
pedes tui plasmatoris? Cum horreres effundi sanguinem tui redemptoris? [84]

Although Anselm does not set a precedent for actually imagining himself present at the

Passion, his prayers capture the intense desire for that presence that later affective works

fulfilled through the imagination. Aelred of Rievaulx, a Cistercian writing in the mid-

twelfth century, provides us with a sterling example of a text that enthusiastically enjoins

its reader to participate in Mary's and Christ's lives from the Annunciation to the

Resurrection. His *De institutione inclusarum* describes for a spiritual "sister" how she is

to enflame her heart with love of God by imagining herself playing a role in gospel

stories of Mary and Christ—for instance, assisting in Christ's birth, traveling with the

holy family on their flight to Egypt, joining Mary Magdalene in washing Christ's feet

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[84] Anselm of Canterbury, "Prayer to Christ," in *The Prayers and Meditations of St. Anselm with the Proslogion*, trans. Sister Benedicta Ward (New York: Penguin Books, 1973), lines 73-86. The Latin text is from Anselm of Canterbury, "Oratio ad Christum, cum mens vult eius amore fervere," in *S. Anselmi Cantuariensis Archiepiscopi Opera Omnia*, ed. F. S. Schmitt (Edinburgi: Thomam Nelson et Filios, 1946), 3:7, lines 38-45.

with her tears and hair, attending the Last Supper, and weeping with Mary at the foot of the cross.[85] Aelred's work took shape under the influence of Bernard of Clairvaux, a fellow Cistercian who concisely expressed the purpose of such concrete, realistic meditations in his sermon 20 on the *Song of Songs*. Empathy and sorrow for Christ's sufferings are intended to set the spiritual novice, inexperienced in rigorously abstract apophatic practices, onto the path toward a more rarified "spiritual love" of God. Bernard describes such "carnal love" for the humanity of Christ as a necessary first step for "carnal men" who are initially incapable of loving God in any other way. For such men, "[t]he soul at prayer should have before it a sacred image of the God-man, in his birth or infancy or as he was teaching, or dying, or rising, or ascending. Whatever form it takes this image must bind the soul with the love of virtue and expel carnal vices, eliminate temptations and quiet desires."[86] Just as a reader of an allegorical text first considers the literal meaning before reaching for the more abstract figurative sense, so those hoping to understand and love God the Word are counseled to first contemplate God the Son in all his physicality.

The practice of meditating on scenes ranging from the exquisitely bloody to the quaintly sentimental found its greatest champion in Francis of Assisi and the Franciscan

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[85] Aelred of Rievaulx, *A Rule of Life for a Recluse*, trans. Mary Paul Macpherson, *Treatises. The Pastoral Prayer*, ed. M. Basil Pennington (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1971), 41-102.

[86] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On the Song of Songs I*, trans. Kilian Walsh (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, Inc., 1981), 152. "Adstat oranti Hominis Dei sacra imago, aut nascentis, aut lactentis, aut docentis, aut morientis, aut resurgentis, aut ascendentis; et quidquid tale occurrerit, vel stringat necesse est animum in amore virtutum, vel carnis exturbet vitia, fuget illecebras, desideria sedet." The Latin text is from Bernard of Clairvaux, "Sermo 20," in *Sermones super Cantica Canticorum 1-35*, vol. 1 of *S. Bernardi Opera*, ed. J. Leclercq, C. H. Talbot, and H. M. Rochais (Rome: Editiones Cistercienses, 1957), V.6, lines 18-21.

movement that so thoroughly colored late medieval devotional practices. [87] Under

Franciscan influence the attitude toward meditation on the physicality of Christ shifted

from concessive—regarding it as a second-best method that will have to do "for now"—

to earnestly unapologetic. Bonaventure's *Lignum vitae*, an allegorical meditation on

Christ's life, death, and resurrection, captures this attitude in its prologue in which

Bonaventure asserts that the reader should contemplate Christ's suffering for us "with

such vividness of memory, such sharpness of intellect and such charity of will that he can

truly say with the bride: *A bundle of myrrh is my beloved to me; He will linger between

my breasts* [Cant. 1:12]."[88] However, meditations of this sort, one of which Bonaventure

dramatically titles "Jesus dripping with blood," are not intended to produce merely tender

love for Christ, but also a keenly judgmental self-assessment of one's own spiritual

shortcomings. When Pilate orders "savage scourgers" to whip Christ so that his

"precious blood flow[s] down the sacred sides of that innocent and loving youth,"

Bonaventure upbraids himself for his deficit of *compassio*: "And you, lost man, the

cause of all this confusion and sorrow, how is it that you do not break down and weep?. .

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[87] For a detailed overview of Passion meditations of the Middle Ages, see Thomas H. Bestul, *Texts of the Passion: Latin Devotional Literature and Medieval Society* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996) and Bert Roest, *Franciscan Literature of Religious Instruction Before the Council of Trent* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 472-514. For a more general history of medieval affective devotional writing, see J. A. W. Bennett, *Poetry of the Passion: Studies in Twelve Centuries of English Verse* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982); John V. Fleming, *An Introduction to the Franciscan Literature of the Middle Ages* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1977); Douglas Gray, *Themes and Images in the Medieval Religious Lyric* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972); David L. Jeffrey, *The Early English Lyric and Franciscan Spirituality* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1975); and Rosemary Woolf, *The English Religious Lyric in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968).

[88] Bonaventure, *The Tree of Life*, in *Bonaventure: The Soul's Journey into God, the Tree of Life, the Life of St. Francis*, trans. and ed. Ewert Cousins, Classics of Western Spirituality (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1978), 119. ". . . tanta memoriae vivacitate, tanto intellectus acumine, tanta voluntatis caritate considerat, quod veraciter illud sponsa proferre potest eloquium: *Fasciculus myrrhae dilectus meus mihi, inter ubera mea commorabitur*." The Latin text is from Bonaventure, *Lignum vitae*, in *Doctoris Seraphici S. Bonaventurae Opera Omnia*, ed. Studio et Cura PP. Collegii a S. Bonaventura (Ad Claras Aquas [Quaracchi]: Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 1898), 8:68 (prologue, sec. 1).

. . And you, my wicked and impious soul, you do not repay him with gratitude and devotion, nor do you recompense him with compassion."[89] The reader of and participant in these meditations is not to uncritically imagine that he is at all up to the task of repaying Christ the immense debt that he owes him. Rather, he is meant to use these meditations to reflect upon his own deficiencies of virtue and strive to amend them. This goal of character building by means of the imagination directs much of the instruction given to the reader by John of Caulibus in the *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, one of the most popular and influential Passion texts of the later Middle Ages. In the prologue John advises his reader, an unnamed Poor Clare, that anyone wishing to "labor in the acquisition of virtues" will find them only in "the Lord of virtues, whose teaching is the seedbed of prudence, whose mercy is the work of justice, whose life is a mirror of temperance, whose death is a standard of fortitude."[90] Therefore, one makes these virtues a part of one's own character only through attentive meditation upon Christ's life: "From frequent meditation one's heart is set on fire and animated to imitate and lay hold of these virtues. Then [the reader] is illuminated by divine virtue in such a way that she both clothes herself with virtue and distinguishes what is false from what is true . . . ."[91] The

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[89] Bonaventure, *The Tree of Life*, 146-147. "Et tu, perdite homo, totius confusionis et contritionis huius causa existens, quomodo non in fletum foras erumpis? . . . [E]t tu, anima mea nequam et impia, nec devotionis exsolvis gratitudinem nec compassionis rependis affectum!" *Lignum vitae* (Quaracchi), 77 (sec. 24).

[90] John of Caulibus, *Meditations of the Life of Christ*, trans. and ed. Francis X. Taney, Sr., Anne Miller, O.S.F., and C. Mary Stallings-Taney (Asheville, NC: Pegasus Press, 1999), 2-3. "Incassum proinde quis laborat in acquisitione uirtutum, si aliunde eas sperandas putat quam a Domino uirtutum, cuius doctrina seminarium prudentiae, cuius misericorida opus iustitiae, cuius uita speculum terperantiae, cuius mors insigne est fortitudinis." The Latin text is from *Meditaciones vite Christi, olim S. Bonauenturo attributae*, ed. M. Stallings-Taney, Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis vol. 153 (Turnholti: Brepols, 1997), prologue, lines 53-57..

[91] John of Caulibus, *Meditations*, 3. "Ad cuius uirtutes imitandas et adipiscendas ex frequenti meditacione cor accenditur et animatur. Deinde diuina illuminatur uirtute, ita quod et uirtutem induit et a ueris falsa discernit." *Meditaciones*, prologue, lines 59-62.

heart thus animated has, to borrow Aquinas's language, produced in itself the "rightly disposed affection" or "rightful desire" necessary for prudence to take root. The Virgin Mary, speaking to Elizabeth in chapter 3 of the *Meditations*, makes the same argument in regard to God's grace: "[T]he soul cannot possess any virtue if it does not love God with its whole heart," Mary asserts. "For from that love descends all fullness of grace. However, after grace has been dispensed, it does not remain constant in the soul, but flows out like water, unless the soul has hated its enemies, that is, vice and sins. Therefore, one who wishes to receive and to retain this grace must order her heart in relation to love and hate."[92] In a line that echoes Hugh of St. Victor's *De arca Noe morali* on the necessity of both *knowing* the Scriptures and being appropriately *moved* by its stories of God's love and justice, John reminds his reader that "[t]here are two things in us we must cleanse, namely, our intellect and our feeling: our intellect that it may know; our feeling that it may will."[93] Passion meditations assist the reader in this endeavor both by supplying the *similitudo* to be remembered (dramatic, memorable scenes from Christ's life) and by frequently goading the reader's conscience to experience the *intentio* that she ought to bring to these scenes. Repeated journeys through these memories instill in the reader the "habit" of loving God, and with enough practice, this habit becomes the bedrock upon which the reader establishes an appropriate Christian *ēthos*.

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[92] John of Caulibus, *Meditations*, 9. "Anima qutem aliquam uirtutem habere non potest si Deum toto corde non diligit. Ab isto enim amore descendit omnis gracie plenitudo. Postquam autem descendit non perseuerat in anima, sed fluit ut aqua, nisi inimicos suos, id est uicia et peccata habuerit odio. Qui uult ergo suam graciam habere et possidere oportet eum cor suum ad amorem et odium ordinare." *Meditaciones*, chap. 3, lines 19-25.

[93] John of Caulibus, *Meditations*, 175. "Duo sunt quae in nobis purganda sunt, scilicet intellectus et affectus: intellectus, ut nouerit; affectus, ut uelit. . . ." *Meditaciones*, chap. 51, lines 1-3.

A person in late medieval Europe did not need an extensive education in order to be familiar with the style and narratives of affective piety exemplified by these texts, for they became part of the "public memory" through their piecemeal incorporation into the sermons delivered far and wide by the Franciscans. Even an illiterate layperson would be familiar with what we might call the "affective genre" of devotional writing due to the fact that "[f]or the vast majority of ordinary men and women of the late Middle Ages, public preaching provided the richest and most familiar 'literary' experience of their lives," one that "exposed them to a wide range of verbal and histrionic artifice and invited their vicarious mental and emotional participation in an endlessly varied sacred history."[94] Just as no two students of Hugh of St. Victor would have built their own "arks" of biblical texts in precisely the same way, so each person who heard passion narratives in sermons or engaged in passion meditations was free to interpret the "script" of the text in his or her own fashion, according to each individual's knowledge, background, and temperament. Although texts such as the *Meditations* often directly order the reader to see a particular scene or go to a particular location or feel a particular emotion, they were quite willing to make accommodation for the reader to "personalize" the meditation. The *Meditations*, for example, explicitly advises the reader that she need not feel compelled to meditate solely upon stories found in the Bible, but should feel free to incorporate a variety of legendary and unwritten narratives "in accord with certain imaginary scenarios, which the mind perceives in a varying way" as long as the imagined scenes "not be contrary to faith or good morals."[95] Aelred's *De institutione inclusarum*

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[94] John V. Fleming, *An Introduction to the Franciscan Literature of the Middle Ages* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1977), 122-123.

[95] John of Caulibus, *Meditations* (ed. Taney), 4.   ". . . secundum quasdam imaginarias representaciones

includes just such a legendary story about a thief (the "good thief" from Mount Calvary in his younger days) who accosts the holy family on the way to Egypt but lets them go when he perceives the Christ child's divinity. Aelred assures his reader that, despite the dubious veracity of the story, she is perfectly justified in accepting the legend as true "in order to kindle love. . .without making any rash assertions as to its authority."[96] Aelred's comment points to the fact that what matters more than getting the story "right" in every last detail is the inventive use to which those stories are put by the reader. A mnemonic edifice constructed of texts or a mental landscape populated with *imagines agentes* fails in its purpose if it merely makes possible the precise recall of public memories of Christ's life. Memory in the Middle Ages is not merely an organized storage and retrieval system, but a tool for linking pieces of stored material together in personalized chains of association that give the individual a way of thinking about a subject[97]—in this case, about Christ's love and sacrifice for humankind, and the meditator's need to return that love through feelings of compassion for Christ's and Mary's suffering. Like Heloise putting Lucan's poem to her own purposes, those who meditate upon Christ's life are free to interpret those public narratives in very personal ways and thereby make them relevant and useful to their own particular spiritual situations and conditions.

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quas animus diuersimode percipit. . . dummodo non sit contra . . . fidem uel bonos mores." *Meditaciones*, prologue, lines 94-95, 97-98.

[96] Aelred of Rievaulx, *A Rule of Life*, 81-82. "Itaque ad incentiuum amoris haud inutile arbitror hac uti opinione, remota omni affirmandi temeritate." The Latin text is from Aelred of Rievaulx, *De institutione inclusarum*, in *Aelredi Rievallensis Opera Omnia*, ed. A. Hoste and C. H. Talbot, Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis 1 (Turnholti: Brepols, 1971), 664 (sec. 30).

[97] Carruthers elaborates on this idea in a monastic context in *The Craft of Thought*, introduction and chapter 1.

Regardless of how a person chooses to customize these stories, the ultimate goal of meditating upon them, as the texts so often remind us, is to feel compassion for Christ and his mother, especially during the Passion. Every lengthy sequence of meditations on Christ's life includes scenes from the Passion; aside from short lyrics, one simply does not find affective texts that focus only on, say, Christ's birth, childhood, or ministry. Fully one-third of Bonaventure's *Lignum vitae* dwells on the Passion. The Passion scenes from the *Meditations*, one of the most popular and influential affective devotional texts of the Middle Ages, achieved their own independent and quite popular existence as the *Meditaciones de Passione Christi*, a text that survives in several manuscripts in Latin and vernacular versions.[98] Later writers such as Richard Rolle and Julian of Norwich dwell in intimate detail on Christ's sufferings on the cross, as do writers composing in Latin and the vernaculars in a wide array of genres including drama, lyric, and sermons. Texts that attend specifically to Mary's sufferings are so numerous that they constitute their own genre, the *planctus Mariae*. The bloody, violent scenes of beatings, humiliation, sorrow, and death that vividly color Passion narratives constitute the emotional core of affective devotional practice and, as such, invite us to ask the same question that Jody Enders asks in her study of rhetoric and violence in medieval French drama: "If, as Aristotle observed of memory in the *De anima*, the soul 'cannot think without a mental picture,' what happens when that picture is violent?"[99] How does imagined violence become spiritually beneficial in Passion meditations?

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[98] Roest, *Franciscan Literature of Religious Instruction*, 484.

[99] Enders, *The Medieval Theater of Cruelty*, 64-65.

One approach to an answer lies in recognizing that Christ functions not merely as an *imago agens* that elicits the meditator's compassion, but as a Lacanian mirror in which the meditator perceives her own spiritual shortcomings. There is a long tradition in the Middle Ages of using mirror metaphors to describe both Christ and the human soul.[100] On the one hand, the human soul acts as a mirror that reflects the image of God. By contemplating the nature of the soul and acquiring self-knowledge, we thereby gain knowledge of God, for "man reflects the divine image because God illumines the intellectual faculty of the human soul directly and thereby allows it a limited perception of truth."[101] In this "positive" type of mirror, the individual recognizes the spark of divinity in his soul that connects him directly to God, elevating him above the rest of creation. On the other hand, Christ acts as a "negative" mirror in which we perceive both what kind of (fallen) persons we are and what kind of (better) persons we should be. Richard Rolle's "Meditations on the Passion" invoke this type of mirror when Rolle contemplates the face of the crucified Christ, "þat swete myrrour and bodily blis of heuene, upon which aungels & seintis haue deinte to loke," and beseeches Christ to "restore þe liknes of þi face in my soule þat foule synness han faded."[102] Clare of Assisi in one of her letters to Agnes of Prague elaborates on the idea that Christ is a "mirror

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[100] For an overview of medieval mirror metaphors, see Ritamary Bradley, "The Speculum Image in Medieval Mystical Writers," in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England*, ed. Marion Glasscoe (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1984), 9-27; Herbert Grabes, *The Mutable Glass: Mirror-Imagery in Titles and Texts of the Middle Ages and English Renaissance*, trans. Gordon Collier (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Anna Torti, *The Glass of Form: Mirroring Structures From Chaucer to Skelton* (Rochester, NY: D. S. Brewer, 1991).

[101] Torti, *The Glass of Form*, 14.

[102] Richard Rolle, "Meditations on the Passion," in *Yorkshire Writers: Richard Rolle of Hampole and His Followers*, vol. 1, ed. C. Horstmann (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1999), 95.

without tarnish" which reflects to us an image of the virtues we ought to strive to

embody:

> Look into this mirror every day, O queen, spouse of Jesus Christ, and continually
> examine your face in it, so that in this was you may adorn yourself completely,
> inwardly and outwardly, clothed and covered in multicolored apparel, adorned in
> the same manner with flowers and garments made of all the virtues as is proper,
> dearest daughter and spouse of the Most High King. Moreover, in this mirror
> shine blessed poverty, holy humility, and charity beyond words, as you will be
> able, with God's grace, to contemplate throughout the entire mirror.[103]

When a meditator contemplates Christ on the cross, then, she is less reminded of her

likeness to God than to her unlikeness to the image of spiritual perfection that he

embodies. In this way, Christ acts as a Lacanian mirror that shows us an image of

wholeness and perfection that we do not perceive in our lived experiences of ourselves as

ethical beings. We see the ideal that we should live up to, and, like Rolle, feel contrition

that we fail to live up to it. Ironically, this image *must* be incorporated in a broken,

bleeding, and dying body, not in a whole, complete, and perfect body of the sort an infant

sees in Lacan's mirror, for Christ's spiritual perfection shines most clearly through his

wounds—his physical brokenness is crucial to our perception of the extent of his love for

mankind, and therefore to our recognition of the gap between his compassion for us and

our compassion for him. Christ, then, is not just an *imago agens* designed to evoke our

pity. That is, he is not just the suffering other "over there" for whom the meditator

sorrows; he is also a critical mirror of "me here," reflecting back to the meditator his own

imperfection and need for spiritual reform. For the meditator who thus sees himself in

the mirror of Christ, there is no "jubilant assumption of his specular image."[104] To the

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[103] Clare of Assisi, *Clare of Assisi: The Letters to Agnes*, trans. Joan Mueller (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2003), 87.

[104] Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the 'I' as Revealed in Psychoanalytic

extent that he attempts to assume the image of spiritual perfection offered by Christ, the meditator does so in a spirit of self-abnegation and remorse over his own fallen state. This is the spirit in which Rolle makes his fervent petition to the Virgin Mary that she grant him "woundys of reuthe" to satisfy his "appetyte to peyne,"[105] for he sees himself as unable to summon up enough compassion for Christ's torment on his own, a shortcoming that numerous other writers of affective meditations see in themselves. Nonetheless, the meditator, like Lacan's infant, undergoes a transformation as a result of encountering this ideal image—not one founded on a *méconaissance* that leads him to falsely identify with the ideal image in the mirror, but one based on a clear, motivating recognition that he is *not* that image and must strive to make its virtues his own through habitually rehearsing a compassionate response to Christ's suffering.

The mental space within which the meditator rehearses these responses and acquires these habits of virtue arises from the generative convergence of rhetoric and religion over the course of the Middle Ages. The intersection of the classical art of memory, Aristotle's ethical theory, and monastic reading practices produced a popular and vibrant form of affective devotion that shaped the spiritual experiences of men and women of all classes in late medieval Europe. For the readers of these meditative texts, memory serves as far more than a mere storehouse of narratives from Christ's life. Memory is not referred to like a phone book, but inhabited like a waking dream full of religiously significant places, people, and events. It is a creative space where character is invented out of one's relationships with images of violence and suffering, where

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Experience," in *Écrits: A Selection*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977), 2.

[105] Rolle, "Meditations on the Passion," 86.

violence emotionally "dis-members" the meditator in order that she can "re-member" herself as a more perfect Christian. Given the widespread popularity and influence of affective meditations in this period, the ways in which vivid scenes of suffering contribute to the cultivation of a Christian self deserve closer attention than they have received so far from scholars of devotional literature. The following chapters build on the larger vision of affective meditations and suffering laid out here by exploring the ways that suffering is interpreted and put to use in specific texts to achieve spiritual ends.

Chapter 2

Pleasure, Pain, and the Devotional Imagination in

the *Meditations on the Life of Christ*

The centrality of bodily and emotional suffering to the working of Christian

spirituality is readily apparent from even a causal reading of medieval religious

narratives. Abundant stories about the gruesome deaths of saints as well as the ubiquity

of textual and visual representations of Christ's passion suggest that the witnessing of

another's pain, both physical and emotional, performs at least as important a spiritual

function as experiencing suffering for oneself. So what makes seeing another's suffering

a religiously meaningful experience? Sarah Kay brings this question to bear on medieval

hagiographical narratives in her article "The Sublime Body of the Martyr"; in this

chapter, I will use Kay's insights as a point of departure for applying this same question

to one of the most popular and influential late medieval devotional texts, the *Meditations*

on the Life of Christ. Critical responses to the *Meditations* more often than not note the

extent to which the text is a product of Franciscan spirituality with all of its emotional

intensity and sentimentality. While this assessment is certainly on target, it fails to

consider in depth the specific narrative and performative strategies that the text employs

to help the reader *use* these emotions to cultivate her own spirituality and virtue. The

Meditations relies less on raw emotion *per se* for its spiritual efficacy than on the training

it gives the reader's imagination in how to perform, in the theater of the mind, those

qualities desired in a proper Christian. By drawing on the performance theory

scholarship of Bert States and David Graver, I hope to demonstrate that the *Meditations*

is, in effect, a performance text that teaches the reader how to use imagination and

emotion, both directed to scenes of physical and emotional suffering, to engage in spiritual self-fashioning.

In her article Kay examines the ideological and psychological function of violence in pre-thirteenth century vernacular saints' lives and argues from the widespread popularity of certain kinds of lives—especially those of the virgin martyrs whose graphic, sexualized deaths offer, in Kay's words, "a kind of pious pornography"—that violence, far from being something distressing to the reader, is "something both desired and enjoyed."[1] What enables this pleasure is the saints' resolute refusal to die no matter how brutal the ordeals they must endure. The pleasure is that of the torturer in the Marquis de Sade's *Juliette* who inflicts repeated torments upon a woman who, like the saints, uncannily remains whole and alive. Slavoj Žižek, commenting on Jacques Lacan's reading of the novel, observes that "it is as though, above and beyond her natural body (a part of the cycle of generation and corruption), and thus above and beyond her natural death, she possessed another body, a body composed of some other substance, one excepted from the vital cycle—a sublime body."[2] Saints who seemingly refuse to die possess, in Kay's view, "sublime bodies" that, like Juliette's body, function more as fantasy objects than as "real" bodies. What this sublime body supports, according to Kay, is "the fantasy of the torturer that by placing it before him he can transgress the bounds of reason, unleash all the psychotic violence of which he is capable, and yet evade its consequences."[3] The sublime body allows one to simultaneously satisfy and

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[1] Sarah Kay, "The Sublime Body of the Martyr: Violence in Early Modern Saints' Lives," in *Violence in Medieval Society*, ed. Richard Kaeuper (Rochester, NY: Boydell Press 2000), 4-5.

[2] Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (New York: Verso 1989), 134.

[3] Kay, "The Sublime Body," 7.

thwart one's violent urges, to both indulge in that violence and yet, through the sublime object's inherent indestructibility, avoid any permanent repercussions from that indulgence. This dynamic plays itself out repeatedly in the hagiographic tradition where saints who are supernaturally resistant to the repeated attempts of their persecutors to kill them function as just this sort of sublime body.

Certainly, the saints' ultimate resistance to death and destruction implicitly enacts the doctrine of resurrection, but as Kay argues, "it is impossible not to see it also as an opportunity for the enjoyment of violence," an enjoyment that is "channeled into the enforcement of religious truth [which] allows us to see the propounding of principle as an expression of violence, rather than merely a curb upon it."[4] If readers of hagiography, then, are indulging their own enjoyment of bodily violence while spiritually reaching beyond the realm of the physical, then what dynamic between pain, pleasure and devotion do we see in Passion texts where the reader is "seeing" in the mind's eye not a saint's imitation of Christ, but Christ himself on the cross? Just as hagiographic accounts of the saints' tortures emphasize the body in pain to the point of seeming to endorse a kind of sadistic voyeurism, so the texts describing the Passion often dwell in loving detail on each pain and indignity suffered by the Son of God. For example, Richard Rolle in his "Meditations on the Passion" paints a vivid and not uncommon picture of the bruised and bloodied Christ on the way to the crucifixion:

> [N]ow þei lede þe for the, nakyd os a worm, þe turmentoures abowtyn þe, & armede knyʒtes. Þe prees of þe peple was wonderly strong; þei hurled þe and haryed þe so schamefully, þei spurned þe with here feet, os þou hadde been a dogge. . . . þi body is so blody, so rowed and so bledderyd, þi crowne is so kene þat sytteth on þi hed; þi heere meuyth with þe wynde clemyd with þe blood; þi

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[4] Kay, "The Sublime Body," 14, 5.

louely face so wan & so bolnyd with bofetynge and with betynge, with spyttynge with spowtynge, þe blood ran þere-with, þat grysyth in my syȝt; so lothly and so wlatsome þe Iues had þe mad, þat a mysel [i.e.leper] art þou lyckere þan a clene man.[5]

Whereas Rolle's text attends to the social aspects of Christ's torment (Christ's nakedness in a crowd, the scorning and beating he endures, his symbolic marginalization through being likened to a leper), Julian of Norwich in her own passion meditation dwells on the subtle changes in the color of Christ's flesh as he dies upon the cross, evoking a more intimate but equally brutal scene:

I saw His swete face as it was drye and blodeles with pale deyeng, and sithen more pale, dede, langoring, and than turned more dede into blew, and sithen more browne blew, and the flesh turnyd more depe dede. For His passion shewid to me most properly in His blissid face, and namly in His lippis. There I saw these four colowres, tho that were aforn freshe, redy, and liking to my sigte. This was a swemful chonge to sene, this depe deyeng, and also the nose clange and dryed, to my sigte, and the swete body was brown and blak, al turnyd oute of faire lifely colowr of Hymselfe on to drye deyeng.[6]

Echoes of this same loving attention to the details of Christ's suffering appear in hagiography in the narrator's rehearsal of the numerous Christ-like afflictions of the saints. But there is a central and interesting difference in the way pain and suffering are encountered by the reader of hagiography and the reader of passion texts such as those above, and especially of the *Meditations on the Life of Christ*. The *Meditations* do not leave the reader "outside" the scene, watching events unfold from a "safe distance," as it were, but compel the reader to place herself at the foot of the cross, to see herself as one of the crowd witnessing the crucifixion, and to cultivate in herself a doctrinally appropriate degree of emotional suffering—in other words, to become an active

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[5] Richard Rolle, "Meditations on the Passion," in *Yorkshire Writers: Richard Rolle of Hampole and his Followers*, ed. C. Horstmann (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1999), I.85.

[6] Julian of Norwich, *The Shewings of Julian of Norwich*, ed. Georgina Ronan Crampton, TEAMS Middle English Text Series (Medieval Institute Publications: Kalamazoo, MI, 1993), chap. 16, page 59.

performer in the proceedings.   The spiritual efficaciousness of an attentive reading of Christ's sufferings depends on the reader taking advantage of the pleasurable possibilities for self-transformation inherent in performance. In order to explore the dynamics between pain and pleasure in the *Meditations* I draw on David Graver's arguments about theatrical representations of pain and Bert States's ideas about the meaning and pleasures of "performance." This chapter develops the argument that the ability of contemplative texts to offer their readers a path to spiritual growth relies on the reader performing the suffering of Christ for an audience of one, herself, creating a kind of "double vision" in which the reader simultaneously sees Christ's Passion and sees herself seeing the Passion. This performance of one's own suffering converts the hagiographic pleasure of witnessing another's pain into a redemptive pleasure of inflicting emotional suffering on oneself.

The *Meditations* is widely recognized as one of the most ubiquitous and influential texts of the Middle Ages—a text "variously referred to as a life of Christ, a biography of the Blessed Virgin, the fifth gospel, the last of the apocrypha, one of the masterpieces of Franciscan literature, a summary of medieval spirituality, a religious handbook of contemplation, a manual of Christian iconography, one of the chief sources of the mystery plays."[7] Attributed to John de Caulibus, a Franciscan friar in Tuscany in the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century, and addressed to an anonymous member of the Order of the Poor Clares, the work describes the life of Christ from God's first deciding to send his son to Earth to save mankind to the resurrection.[8] The author's

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[7] Cainneach Ó Maonaigh, ed., *Smaointe Beatha Chríost* (Dublin: Dublin Institute for Advanced Studies, 1944), 325.

[8] Regarding the authorship of the *Meditations*, see Isa Ragusa and Rosalie Green, eds., *Meditations on the*

stated purpose in writing the text is to teach his reader a fruitful way of meditating on Christ's life so as to fortify herself against the passing vanities and tribulations of the world and to learn to imitate the virtues of prudence, justice, temperance and fortitude embodied by Christ, "for as a result of its frequent and habitual meditation on his life," he says, "the soul is influenced toward a certain familiarity with it, confidence in it, and love for it, so that the soul despises and holds in contempt all else."[9] The means by which he encourages her to become familiar with Christ is to imaginatively create in her mind's eye realistic, detailed scenes from the lives of Christ, Mary and the disciples in which she is both spectator to the unfolding Gospel stories and an occasional participant in the vivid and emotionally charged events. He admonishes her that if she wishes to benefit at all from the text he has composed for her, she "must place [herself] in the presence of whatever is related as having been said or done . . . as if [she] were hearing it with [her] own ears and seeing it with [her] own eyes, giving it [her] total mental response."[10] The aim is to transform a third-person narrative of events removed in time and place into the reader's personal, first-hand experience.

The *Meditations* enjoyed great popularity throughout the Middle Ages, attested to by the fact that it survives in over a hundred manuscripts in the original Latin, as well as

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Life of Christ: An Illustrated Manuscript of the Fourteenth Century (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), xxi n2; see also Michael Sargent, ed., *Nicholas Love's Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ: A Critical Edition* (New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1992), ix.

[9] John of Caulibus, *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, trans. and ed. Francis X. Taney, Anne Miller, & C. Mary Stallings-Taney (Asheville, NC: Pegasus Press, 1999), 1. All modern English translations are cited from this edition (referred to in the notes simply as *Meditations*). "Ex frequenti enim et assueta meditacione uite ipsius adducitur anima in quondam familiaritatem, confidenciam et amorem ipsius, ita quod alia uilipendit et contemnit." The Latin text is from *Meditaciones vite Christi, olim S. Bonauenturo attributae*, ed. M. Stallings-Taney, Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Mediaevalis vol. 153 (Turnholti: Brepols, 1997), prologue, lines 18-20.

[10] John of Caulibus, *Meditations* 4. "Tu autem si ex his fructum sumere cupis, ita presentem te exhibeas his que per Dominum Iesum dicta et facta narrantur ac si tuis auribus audires et oculis ea uideres, toto mentis affectu . . . ." *Meditaciones*, prologue, lines 103-106.

in numerous translations, in whole or in part, into a wide range of vernaculars, including

French, Provençal, Italian, German, Dutch, Gaelic, Swedish, Spanish, Catalan and

Bulgarian.[11] Nicholas Love produced a Middle English edition of the *Meditations* in the

early fifteenth century, and as Michael Sargent observes in his edition of Love's

translation, "It was thus in large part through the wide dissemination and vernacular

translation of the [*Meditations*] that the Franciscan tradition of devotional meditation on

the life and Passion of Christ became popular throughout western Europe--and

particularly in England--in the later middle ages."[12] Its influence spread across the

continent and through a number of artistic and religious cultural products: It is

acknowledged as a formative influence on late medieval drama, including the N-Town

cycle in England and various Passion plays in France[13]; late medieval mystical and

contemplative writers including Margery Kempe, Richard Rolle, and the anonymous

author of the *Stimulus amoris* owe much of their style and emotional energy to the

influence of the *Meditations*; and in iconography and other representational arts, the

Meditations did much to instigate the period's "ever growing tendency to transform the

abstract and the theological to the personal and concrete"—what Gail McMurray Gibson

calls the "incarnational aesthetic" of the late Middle Ages.[14] In short, the text is an

excellent representative of the kind of ardent affective piety that attracted a wide range of

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[11] Sargent, *Nicholas Love's Mirror*, xix-xx.

[12] Sargent, *Nicholas Love's Mirror*, xx.

[13] John of Caulibus, *Meditations*, xxix.

[14] Gail McMurray Gibson, *The Theater of Devotion: East Anglian Drama and Society in the Late Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 7-8. For more on the cultural influence of the *Meditations*, see Ó Maonaigh, *Smaointe Beatha Chríost*, 325-328.

both lay and monastic readers across all classes from approximately the twelfth century

until the end of the Middle Ages.

Modern scholarly responses to the text typically focus on its "personal and

concrete" aspects above all else, often in a way that over-sentimentalizes the work.. They

speak of the text as possessing a "simple style and tender sentiments,"[15] as giving its

reader "insight into a new world of joy and love, an interest in everything that is small

and humble and beautiful, a personal affection for Jesus and Mary, the sweet sadness of

all Franciscan Christianity."[16] The text presents the lives of Jesus, Mary, and the

disciples as "emotionally accessible" through images that offer the reader "opportunities

for personal intimacy"[17] with God. The *Meditations* elides the transcendence of the

divine and builds "a bridge . . .between [the text's readers] . . . and a divinity who was

too often remote."[18] Robert Worth Frank, Jr., sees this effort to reduce the distance

between the human and the divine as "a revolutionary reinterpretation of the relationship

between God and man" and contrasts it with earlier meditations by Anselm of Canterbury

who feels not an intense closeness with Christ but deep abjection because he could not be

at the crucifixion.[19] The *Meditations* is very much a product of an age that perceived

one's relationship to God in emotional terms and familial, homey images, so scholars

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[15] Ragusa and Green, *Meditations*, xxii.

[16] Ó Maonaigh, *Smaointe Beatha Chríost*, 342.

[17] Lawrence Hundersmarck, "The Use of Imagination, Emotion, and the Will in a Medieval Classic: The Meditaciones Vite Christi," *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 6, no. 2 (2003), http://www.stthomas.edu/cathstudies/logos/vol6_2/hundersmarck.html (accessed 16 April 2005).

[18] John of Caulibus, *Meditations*, xxviii-xxx.

[19] Robert Worth Frank, Jr., "*Meditationes Vitae Christi*: The Logistics of Access to Divinity," in *Hermeneutics and Medieval Culture*, ed. Patrick Gallacher and Helen Damico (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 40-41.

certainly are not mistaken in paying attention to these qualities of the text. However, few critics seem able to break out of this familiar model for analyzing the *Meditations* in order to explore other dimensions of the text. My project in this chapter is to open up some new avenues of exploration by looking not just at *what* the text does to its reader (inculcate an affective response to divinity), or *how* it does it (by placing the reader within scenes from Christ's life), but *why* this method works in the first place. The specific mechanisms by which affective devotion fosters spiritual growth and transformation are under-theorized in current critical responses to the *Mediations;* this is the gap which this chapter aims to fill.

The *Meditations* blends the voice of a sermon with the "hominess" of everyday events from Christ's life, with the narrator frequently punctuating the narrative with explicit instructions to the reader to make herself, in mediation, present at the scene being described. It epitomizes the affective devotional tradition in its design to draw the reader emotionally into the scene either through sorrow (by drawing attention to the bloody, physical details of the crucifixion) or through affection (by means of the charming hominess with which it presents earlier scenes of Christ's life). Both ways of envisioning Christ serve the same rhetorical function—to foster in the reader an appropriate degree of compassion and love for God. Throughout the text, God appears as "one of us," living and dying in very human ways in familiar, realistically rendered settings. The author encourages the reader at every step to participate in the scenes from Christ's life and to relate to him in the most loving and heart-felt manner. For example, at the Nativity the narrator directs the reader to "kiss the feet of the child Jesus lying in the manger, and ask our Lady to hand him to you and even allow you to hold him. Take him and hold him

fast in your arms; gaze on his face. Kiss him with loving reverence and delight confidently in him. . . . Afterwards hand him back to his mother . . . . Stay and help her if you can."[20] Such homey, familial scenes downplay the transcendence of God as the reader's attention and compassion are directed toward his human experiences with which the reader can easily relate.

The *Meditations* relies heavily for its approach on the writings of Bernard of Clairvaux who in his twentieth sermon on the *Song of Songs* advises that "the soul at prayer should have before it a sacred image of the God-man, in his birth or infancy or as he was teaching, or dying, or rising, or ascending" because "carnal men" are "unable to love in any other way [except] by first drawing them to the salutary love of his own humanity, and then gradually to raise them to a spiritual love."[21] The *Meditations* is aimed at just such an "imperfect" beginner who is not yet ready for the more abstract contemplation of God's majesty and the heavenly court which is reserved for the "perfect": "You must begin with this kind [of contemplation of the humanity of Christ]," advises the narrator, "if you wish to ascend to the higher kinds; otherwise, you could not so much rise to the others as be in awe of them."[22] At this stage in the reader's spiritual

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[20] John of Caulibus, *Meditations*, 28. "Deinde osculare pedes pueri Iesu iacentis in presepio, et roga Dominam ut eum tibi porrigat uel permittat accipere. Accipias eum, et inter brachia tua retine. Intuere faciem eius. Diligenter ac reuerenter deosculare, et delectare in eo confidenter. . . . Postea redde ipsum matri. . . . Sta et tu et adiuua eam si potes." *Meditaciones*, chap. 7, lines 135-139, 145-147.

[21] Bernard of Clairvaux, *On the Song of Songs I*, trans. Kilian Walsh (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1981), 152. "Adstat oranti Hominis Dei sacra imago, aut nascentis, aut lactentis, aut docentis, aut morientis, aut resurgentis, aut ascendentis. . . . Hanc ego arbitror praecipuam invisibili Deo fuisse causam, quod voluit in carne videri et cum hominibus homo conversari, ut carnalium videlicet, qui nisi carnaliter amare non poterant, cunctas primo ad suae carnis salutarem amorem affectiones retraheret, atque ita gradatim ad amorem perduceret spiritualem." The Latin text is from Bernard of Clairvaux, "Sermo 20," in *Sermones super Cantica Canticorum 1-35*, vol. 1 of *S. Bernardi Opera*, ed. J. Leclercq, C. H. Talbot, and H. M. Rochais (Rome: Editiones Cistercienses, 1957), V.6, lines 18-26.

[22] John of Caulibus, *Meditations*, 172. "Et ideo ab hac tibi incipiendum est si uis ascendere ad maiora; alias non tam ascendere quam reuereri posses." *Meditaciones*, chap. 50, lines 7-8.

training, the point of the exercise is the attainment of an appropriate level of compassion for Christ in his humanity, to repay God's love for us with a suitable depth of compassion for him. This is especially noticeable during the Passion scenes in which the narrator's injunctions to the reader to suffer with Christ multiply on the page: In the garden of Gethsemane, the narrator enjoins the reader to "contemplate and watch carefully all the actions and each and every affliction of your Lord. As closely as you can suffer together with him"[23]; as Christ is mocked by the soldiers, the reader should suffer with him "to [her] utmost"[24]; and when Christ is led to Pilate amid the sorrowing of Mary and her companions the reader is told outright, "You will suffer deeply with them."[25]

The requisite degree of suffering and compassion is cultivated in the reader through two main directives that repeatedly come up in the text: to be present at the events described, and to feel pity for the sufferings that are witnessed. Before the narrator even begins to relate the stories from Christ's life, he admonishes his reader, "[I]f you wish to profit from all this, Sister, you must place yourself in the presence of whatever is related as having been said or done by the Lord Jesus, as if you were hearing it with your own ears and seeing it with your own eyes, giving it your total mental response," for "in this lies the full efficacy of these meditations."[26] Reminders to be in

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[23] John of Caulibus, *Meditations*, 243. "Intime quantum potes compatere ei, considera et uide diligenter omnes actus et singulas affliciones Domini tui." *Meditaciones*, chap. 75, lines 130-132.

[24] John of Caulibus, *Meditations*, 245. ". . .uehementer compatere." *Meditaciones*, chap. 75, line 189.

[25] John of Caulibus, *Meditations*, 246. "Considera igitur et intuere ista diligenter per singlua que multum sunt compassiua." *Meditaciones*, chap. 76, lines 15-16.

[26] John of Caulibus, *Meditations*, 4, 34. "Tu autem si ex his fructum sumere cupis, ita presentem te exhibeas his que per Dominum Iesum dicta et facta narrantur ac si tuis auribus audires et oculis ea uideres, toto mentis affectu . . . . [I]n hoc est tota uis harum meditacionum." *Meditaciones*, prologue, lines 103-106; chap. 9, lines 45-46.

the middle of the action pepper the text, as when the narrator tells the reader to make

herself present at the humble abode of Mary, Jesus, and Joseph (chapter 15), Christ's

transfiguration (chapter 41), the Passion (chapters 74-75), and the ascension (chapter

105). Often the narrator reminds the reader not only to "be there," but to participate in

the action, as at the raising of Lazarus where the reader should "[f]eel free to enter into

conversation not only with the Lord Jesus and his disciples, but also with that blessed

family [of Lazarus]."[27] The reader's immersion in the text is so complete that she is to

"conduct [herself] both intellectually and physically as if [she] were on the scene."[28]

The reader's purpose for being in the middle of it all is to feel pity and

compassion for the sufferings of Christ and his family. During the holy family's flight

into Egypt, for example, the reader is enjoined to "pity them, because the journey was

difficult, and great and long lasting as much for them as for the boy Jesus. Go along with

them: help carry the child, and serve in whatever way you can."[29] Instructions to feel pity

and compassion appear even more frequently in the text than those to be present, as when

the reader is reminded to pity Christ for the temptations and fasting he endures (chapter

17), to cry along with his mother Mary and Mary Magdalene when he foretells his death

(chapter 72), to commiserate with Christ while he prays in the garden of Gethsemane

(chapter 75), and to pity him when the guards come to take him away (chapter 75).

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[27] John of Caulibus, *Meditations*, 215. "[E]t libenter conuerseris non solum cum Domino Iesu et discipulis eius. Sed eciam cum ista benedicta familia sic Domino deuota et a Domino dilecta, scilicet Lazaro. . . ." *Meditaciones*, chap. 66, lines 4-7.

[28] John of Caulibus, *Meditations*, 286. ". . . ita sis animo ac si presens esses et corpore." *Meditaciones*, chap. 85, lines 12-13.

[29] John of Caulibus, *Meditations*, 44. "Compatere igitur eis, quia labor difficilis, magnus et longus est tam ipsis quam puero Iesu. Et uade cum eis et adiuua puerum portare, et seruias in omnibus quibus potes." *Meditaciones*, chap. 12, lines 77-79.

This exhortations to feel tearful pity become most pronounced in the Passion

scenes where the reader is assailed by suffering on all sides. Shortly after having to share

in the sufferings of Christ's mother and companions as Christ is led to Pilate, the reader is

led to the scene of Christ's whipping, a moment reminiscent of the tortures of the saints

in its sexualized attention to the details of a tormented body:

> A young man, elegant and modest, *handsome in appearance beyond the sons of men* (Ps 44:3), stands naked in front of everybody; that flesh, most innocent and tender, most pure and beautiful, undergoes the harsh and painful whips of the foulest men. *The flower of all flesh* (Is 11:1) and of all human nature is covered with bruises and cuts. From all parts of his body the royal blood flows everywhere; bruise upon bruise, cut upon cut is laid on, given again, and accelerated; until finally when not only the torturers but the onlookers as well were utterly exhausted, he is ordered untied. . . . [I]f you do not feel compassion for him here, know that your heart is *a heart of stone* (Ez 11:19).

> Stat nudus coram omnibus iuuenis elegans et uerecundus, *speciosus forma pre filiis hominum*, suscipit spurcissimorum flagella dura et dolorosa caro illa, innocentissima et tenerima, mundissima et pulcherima; *flos omnis carnis* et tocius humane nature, replretur liuoribus et farcturis. Fluit undique regius sanguis de omnibus partibus corporis, superadditur, reiteratur et spissatur liuor super liuorem et fractura super fracturam, quousque tam tortoribus quam inspectoribus fatigatis, iubetur solui. . . . [S]i his ei non compateris, *cor lapideum* te habere reputa.[30]

A short time later, as Christ carries his cross, the narrator pauses to ask the reader if it

does not seem to her "that what he suffered during the time of Matins, Prime and Terce

was fraught with the most violent and bitter pain; and with really astounding horror, even

without any crucifixion? I certainly think so," he says, "and quite productive of the

compassion that results in your own suffering with him."[31] When faced with the

enormity of the crucifixion itself, the reader is told simply to "strive to absorb all this

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[30] John of Caulibus, *Meditations*, 247; *Meditaciones*, chap. 76, lines 37-45, 47-48.

[31] John of Caulibus, *Meditations*, 251. "Nonne igitur hec que in matutinali, prima et tercia hora passus est uidentur tibi absque aliqua crucifixione uehementissimi doloris esse et amarissimi, et horroris ualde stupendi? Certe sic puto et multum ad compassionem faciencia, quinimmo passionem inferencia." *Meditaciones*, chap. 77, lines 70-74.

devotedly, faithfully and meticulously"[32] so that with all of the details stored in her memory she may ruminate upon them and refine her affective response to the scene.

This continual refinement is crucial to the reader's spiritual goals and is openly called for by the text. At the same time that the reader projects herself into scenes from Christ's life, she is expected to critically appraise her own desires and emotional responses to those scenes and then "calibrate" her subjective responses, through penance and prayer, to more closely approximate Christian ideals. The narrator of the *Meditations* is quite explicit about the need for the reader to self-consciously engage in this art of self-fashioning. He is most explicit about the reader's need to critically assess herself when he approvingly cites Bernard of Clairvaux's letter to the monks of the Mount of God: "Learn to take charge of yourself, to order your life, to put your morals in order, to judge yourself: to accuse yourself, often even to condemn and not let yourself off unpunished. Let justice sit in judgment, let conscience be the accused and the self the accusing one. No one loves you more, no one will judge more reliably." Morning and evening, one is to critically assess one's conduct of the previous day and set goals for right behavior for the day or night to come. "Thus occupied," says the narrator, "there will never be any time for capricious behavior."[33]

Rather than leaving the reader "outside" the scene as do hagiographic narratives, devotional texts like the *Meditations* plunge the reader into the middle of Christ's suffering and demand that she suffer alongside Him, emotionally if not

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[32] John of Caulibus, *Meditations*, 256. "Tu autem studeas deuote fideliter et sollicite inherere." *Meditaciones*, chap. 78, lines 155-156.

[33] John of Caulibus, *Meditations*, 187. "Disceto tibi praeesse et uitam ordinare, mores componere, temetipsum iudicare: et temetipsum accusare, saepe etiam condemnare nec impunitum dimittere. Sedeat iudicans iusticia, stet rea et semetipsum accusans conscientia. Nemo te plus diligit, nemo fidelius iudicabit. . . . Sic districto numquam aliquando lasciuire uacabit." *Meditaciones*, chap. 54, lines 61-66, 69-70.

physically. She is expected to feel compassion and compunction in their most etymologically strict senses of *com-passio* ("suffering-with") and *com-punctio* ("being-pierced-with" Christ). Yet the reader, while imagining herself in the scene, can not afford to lose herself entirely in the emotionally charged moment. For at the same time that she is giving in to the emotional weight of the carefully scripted moment, she is required to stand apart from her suffering self and critically judge the nature, propriety, and intensity of her feelings. In other words, the *Meditations* and similar affective devotional texts create a curious kind of split in the reader whereby she both sees the scene painted before her and observes herself reacting to that scene. In order to become a better Christian, the reader is required to develop a habit of regular, rigorous self-reflection. This self-reflection produces a split in the reader between the "I" who feels compassion and the "I" who stands back and assesses that compassion. The Christian identity thus produced is essentially a divided one, subject to constant self-supervision and plagued by guilt for its repeated failures to live up to the standards demanded by the meditative text. It is forever a work-in-progress; perfection is desired but can not be attained by flawed, fallen humans, yet the need to strive for that perfection drives the meditator to return to the scenes from Christ's life again and again not just as a detached spectator, but as a full participant in the sufferings that she witnesses. Where the reader of a saint's life is wholly absorbed in another's pain and suffering, the contemplative reader of the *Meditations* is focused as much in the qualities of her own emotional suffering as on the physical suffering of Christ.

According to theater scholar David Graver, such border straddling between being engaged in a scene and viewing that scene from a detached point of view (i.e. seeing

oneself reacting to the scene from "outside" the action) marks the boundary between

performance and spectacle:

> To follow the enactment of a performance requires a certain degree of engagement (an emotional or intellectual empathy that attaches one to the interiority of purpose, attention, and flow involved in the making of performance), while to appreciate the spectacle requires distance (one must stand back in order to take it all in, to make it an object of sight rather than a subject-oriented process or action).[34]

Graver uses this distinction to question to what extent theatrical representations of

violence succeed in embodying aggression and pain. Performances that can pull this off

are the exception rather than the rule, he argues, because of the tendency of the artist to

present suffering bodies as metaphors of something else, thereby turning "performance"

into "spectacle" and undercutting the audience's necessary "emotional or intellectual

empathy." Graver explains:

> [F]or violence to take part in theatre it must be disguised as discourse. In [Kafka's] penal colony the spectacle of needles tearing into flesh would be difficult to contemplate if they were not simultaneously writing the code of justice upon the body of the condemned. Signification disguises suffering, making it, at best, a sign of itself, if not a sign of something far removed from the anguish of the victim. . . . Under the pressure of a master narrative pain easily becomes a sentimental footnote and aggression the graceful gestures of power.[35]

The audience to such a scene sees not the suffering body *as* a body in pain, but as a

metaphor of something else that draws their attention towards more abstract concerns

(e.g. the "code of justice" in Kafka's story).   It is for this reason that Graver disqualifies

Artaud's Theater of Cruelty as a successful vehicle for the performance of violence—

despite its shocking content and appeal to the senses, such cruelty "places aggression at

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[34] David Graver, "Violent Theatricality: Displayed Enactments of Aggression and Pain," *Theatre Journal* 47 (1995): 59.

[35] Graver, "Violent Theatricality," 46.

the service of discourse: the metaphysical motivation buffers the audience from an immediate contact with violence."[36] (Kay makes a related argument when she observes that in hagiography, "the speech of the martyrs is endowed with authority and permanence by their steadfastness in the face of suffering, and the sacrifice of their life for their religion. . . . Thus enjoyment of violence is configured with sacrificial desire, the endorsement of value, the enforcement of belief, and the production of vernacular texts."[37] In other words, the violence suffered by the saints is transmuted into a sign that points to and serves an orthodox religious discourse.

Although the *Meditations* is not a "theatrical text" *per se*, Graver's observations about representations of violence shed light on the way in which the "inside/outside" position of the text's reader functions as a useful and necessary element of the reader's experience. On the one hand, the *Meditations* represents Christ's suffering "metaphorically," as a sign of God's love for humanity and the cost of human sin. If the reader attends to the suffering body as a sign of something else, something removed from the immediacy of that body, then the body becomes a signifying spectacle in the service of a discourse of sin and redemption. However, under this "master narrative" of sin and redemption, the pain from which the reader is distanced is not just Christ's, but her own emotional anguish at the sight of Christ's suffering. By temporarily disengaging from the immediacy of what is happening before her mind's eye, she enables herself to also step back from her own reactions and judge them. Her own affective pain becomes a sign of her status as a Christian who responds "properly" to God's love. She becomes temporarily removed from her own emotions in order to rationally assess them and

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[36] Graver, "Violent Theatricality," 49.

[37] Kay, "The Sublime Body," 19.

measure them against the ideals demanded of her by the text. In losing "immediate contact" with her own sorrow, she becomes a spectacle for herself—an object from which she must "stand back in order to take it all in" so that she can "make [her experience] an object of sight rather than a subject-oriented process or action." In effect, the reader performs for herself the same function that her fellow Christians serve for her in her everyday life—the function of witness to both her virtues and her moral failings. In his chapter on living the active life, the narrator of the *Meditations* points out that when a person's behavior is observed by other members of the community, "he becomes embarrassed over the faults he has and the virtues he lacks, and starts correcting himself on both counts. . . . For these reasons, when he is in a congregation, he does make progress in light of the morals and corrections of others."[38] An individual in solitary meditation escapes such social monitoring of her behavior, since all of her behavior takes place purely within the intensely private space of her imagination. There is no one else there to shame her if she lets her mind wander or fails to react appropriately to scenes of suffering. The *Meditations* compensates for this lack first by explicitly telling the reader what to feel and to what degree, and then by encouraging her to internalize these standards and assume the critical role that would in other circumstances be played by her fellow Christians. She becomes her own spiritual supervisor and learns to react to herself as the narrator might react if he could see into her heart and mind.

For a meditative exercise to be spiritually useful to the reader, however, it cannot afford to drift too far toward presenting suffering—either Christ's or the meditator's—as

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[38] John of Caulibus, *Meditations*, 185. "Erubescit enim inter alios de uiciis que habet et de uirtutibus quas non habet, et ideo in utrisque se corrigit. . . . Propterea proficit in correccionibus et moribus aliorum, cum est in congregacione." *Meditaciones*, chap. 54, lines 9-11, 13-14.

a spectacle. If the distance between the meditator and the scene of suffering becomes too wide, then the pain, in Graver's words, "becomes a sentimental footnote" rather than a force for effecting real change in the meditator's personality. In order to adequately enact pain and suffering on stage, argues Graver, one must find a balance between distancing the audience from it and drawing them emotionally into the scene:

> For performative violence to remain theatrical [i.e. to not devolve into overwhelming, senseless suffering] there must be some sort of distance between the audience and the spectacle. For the violence to retain its materiality, to avoid sinking into discursive space and becoming an image of itself, it must move in some way to rupture the frame within which it is viewed."[39]

The problem delineated by Graves, I argue, is the same one faced by the author of the *Meditations*, and by all authors of affective meditative texts. The *Meditations* must allow the reader to step back from the scene in order to step away from herself and effectively monitor her own emotions, but it can not allow her to stay too far "outside" of the scene or else she will not be motivated to feel adequate sorrow and compassion for Christ. One way in which this balance can be disrupted, says Graver, is when the suffering is presented as the result of cruelty by a third party. Cruelty implies an intent to wound another; a narrative emphasis on the intention of the tormentor rather than on the raw suffering of the victim turns suffering into a sign of the tormentor's power over the victim and thereby "buffers the audience from an immediate contact with violence."[40] Suffering becomes a sign of something other than itself, and so the audience is distanced from the materiality of that suffering.

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[39] Graver, "Violent Theatricality," 51.

[40] Graver, "Violent Theatricality," 49.

The narrator of the *Meditations* must walk this fine line between distancing the reader and drawing her into the suffering before her mind's eye when he describes the Jews' cruelty to Christ during the Passion.   Given the ubiquity of the "perfidious Jew" in medieval religious dramas, legends, and exempla, it is no surprise that descriptions of the Jewish cruelty toward Christ play a regular part in Passion narratives as well—it is practically an obligatory feature of the genre. Unsurprisingly, the *Meditations* includes references to Christ's Jewish tormentors, as at the beginning of chapter 77 when Christ is brought before Pilate:

> The entire crowd of Jews, shouting loudly, demanded that Jesus be crucified, and so he is condemned by Pilate, the beleaguered presiding judge. No one remembers his kindnesses and good works; his innocence matters to no one. What seems even more cruel, they are not taken aback by his obvious suffering, and the leaders and elders rejoice because they are achieving their depraved intent. They ridicule and mock him, the true and eternal God; and as much as they can, they hurry along his death.

> Petit igitur tota Iudeorum multitudo uocibus magnis ut crucifigatur et sic condempnatur a preside misero Pilato. Non recordantur beneficiorum et operum eius; non mouentur propter innocenciam eius. Et quod crudelius uidetur, non retrahuntur propter affliccionem quam ei uident, et gaudent principes et maiores quod habent intemtum suum prauum. Rident et derident eum, qui est uerus et eternus Deus; et eius mortem accelerant quantum possunt.[41]

The Jews' cruelty is not physical in this scene, but emotional. They fail to perceive Christ's goodness and, most shocking to the narrator, are completely unmoved by his suffering. If Mary's tears are meant as a model of how a meditative reader ought to react to the Passion, then the Jews here are a model of how depraved one can become when one's affections are stunted or perverted from their proper object. Rather than focusing on Christ's suffering as a result of the Jews' ridicule and mockery, the narrator presents the ridicule and mockery as a sign of the Jews' spiritual corruption. Christ suffers in the

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[41] John of Caulibus, *Meditations*, 249; *Meditaciones*, chap. 77, lines 1-9.

background, as it were, while the wickedness of the Jews assumes the spotlight on center

stage. Christ's suffering has become a sign of Jewish depravity, and the reader is

temporarily made a spectator to that suffering rather than a compassionate participant in

it.

The narrator, however, does not leave the reader in the spectator's position for

very long. After those few sentences on the cruelty of the Jews, the text abruptly shifts

back to a sustained focus on Christ's suffering caused by his tormentors. The Jews now

fade into the background as the humble, wounded Christ comes to the fore:

> Pay attention here and think about his demeanor in each and every thing he does.
> And so that you may be deeply compassionate and spiritually nourished at the
> same time, avert your eyes briefly from his divinity and think of him as just a
> man. You will see a fine young man: very noble, most innocent, and very loving,
> but thoroughly whipped and splattered with blood and bruises. You will see him
> picking up his clothes thrown down on the floor, scattered everywhere. You will
> see him, with unmistakable modesty, reverence, and blushing, getting dressed
> again right in front of them, while they keep on ridiculing him. . . . Watch him
> closely, and be moved to both devotion as well as compassion. . . .
>
> Attende igitur hic diligenter et considera staturam eius in singulis actibus. Et ut
> intime compaciaris ac simul pascaris, auerte autem parumper oculos a diuinitate et
> eum purum hominem considera. Et uidebis iuuenem elegantem, nobilissimum, et
> innocentissimum et amantissimum, totum autem flagellatum et sanguine
> liuoribusque respersum; pannos suos undique sparsim proiectos de terra
> recolligere; et cum quadam uerecundia, reuerencia et rubore se coram illis, ipsum
> semper irridentibus, reuestire. . . . Intuere igitur diligenter et pietate et
> compassione mouearis. . . .[42]

The Christ who in the earlier passage was "the true and eternal God" is now "just a man."

Rhetorically, this makes a great deal of sense: the Jews' crime is all the greater for

having attacked God rather than a mere man, and the reader can more easily empathize

with the suffering a fellow human than apprehend an eternal deity. Whereas the chapter

begins with a third-person account of what "they," the Jews, did to Christ, it soon

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[42] John of Caulibus, *Meditations*, 249; *Meditaciones*, chap. 77, lines 11-21.

switches to the more familiar second person conversational style of much of the narrative

("You will see..."). The repeated injunctions to notice the details of Christ's suffering

draws the reader back into the scene, and the injunction to feel devotion and compassion

converts Christ's suffering from an abstract, signifying spectacle to an immediate

opportunity for the meditator to become personally engaged with that suffering. The

necessary focus on the suffering body of Christ and the suffering heart of the reader is

restored.

The desire of the narrator to maintain this focus causes him to almost completely

erase those who inflict the cruelty of nailing Christ to the cross, and to attend entirely to

the physical suffering of Christ instead. In chapter 78, the actual nailing of Christ to the

cross takes place with no indication of malice on the part of the persons assigned to the

task. After Christ climbs a ladder to ascend the cross,

> At this point the one who is behind the cross takes his right hand and fastens it
> firmly to the cross. That done, the one who is on the left side takes his left hand
> also and pulls and stretches it as tightly as he can; and another sets the nail,
> hammers and fastens it in place. . . . Only the nails, hammered into his hands,
> hold up the Lord while his body weight pulls him down. With all that, still
> another comes along and pulls him downward by the feet as tightly as he can; and
> when he is at full extension, someone else attaches both feet with a very heavy
> nail. . . . Here is the crucified Lord Jesus: so stretched out on the cross that *all* of
> his *bones* can be *counted* (Ps 21:18). . . .

> Qui autem post crucem est accipit manum eius dexteram et eam fortiter cruci
> affigit. Quo facto, ille qui est ex latere sinistro eciam sinistram accipit manum et
> trahit quantum potest et extendit; et alium clauum immittit et percutit et configit. .
> . . Pendet Dominus ex grauedine corporis deorsum trahentis solum clauis
> manibus infixis sustenatur. Nichilominus occurit et alius, et per pedes eum
> quantum potest trahit, et eo sic extento, alius configit ambos pedes clauo
> durissimo. . . . Ecce crucifixus est Dominus Iesus, et sic in cruce extensus quod
> *dinumerari omnia ossa* eius possunt. . . .[43]

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[43] John of Caulibus, *Meditations*, 253; *Meditaciones*, chap. 78, lines 36-44, 53-54.

Although the actions of the anonymous "one," "another," and "someone else" certainly qualify as cruel, they do not seem to be motivated by a desire to be cruel. The actions seem more workmanlike than malevolent. The intentions of the men nailing Christ to the cross, beyond their desire to get the job done, are unreadable, and so do not draw the reader's attention away from the physical suffering that their actions cause. They do not get in the way of the meditator's emotional participation in the scene in the way that the Jews' mockery of Christ did. Even though the narrator does not speak directly to the reader here, she is not given a reason to focus on anything other than Christ's agony, and so does not need to be called back to it as she did at the beginning of chapter 77. The actions of the workmen are not presented as acts of cruelty, and so they do not turn Christ's suffering into a sign of something other than itself. The reader, who is reminded to "see how they grab hold of him" and to "watch this [stretching] done the same way with his feet,"[44] is always present as a participant in the scene.

Just as Christ's suffering is sometimes a distancing spectacle and sometimes an immediate enactment of pain, so the reader's emotional suffering for Christ is sometimes a spectacle for her to evaluate at a distance, but at other times a condition to be performed—that is, the reader must be an actor who performs her own pain, not just an audience to pain. The *Meditations* could not effect the spiritual development in the reader for which it was written if it did not also include a strong element of performance. The reader's objective assessment of her emotional reactions must be balanced with a deep affective engagement with the material in order to produce the very reactions to be assessed. Because of this need both to evoke an emotion and to rationally measure it, the

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[44] John of Caulibus, *Meditations*, 253. ". . . conspice qualiter ipsum capiunt. . . . Similiter et de pedibus factum intuere. . . ." *Meditaciones*, chap. 78, lines 48, 51.

reader of the *Meditations* is placed in quite a different position relative to the "performance" than is Gravers's hypothetical audience member. Whereas Gravers's audience member can separate himself wholly from the spectacle of violence being performed on stage, our reader performs her own suffering, engaging with the imagined scenes in the "theater" of her imagination as a participant embodying pain and suffering evoked by the vivid environment around her, for an audience of one—herself. She can not entirely step back from this performance in the way that Graver describes because of the limit-problem of the subject posited by Bert States: "No observer (subject) can fully observe or confront the self or the world because we can never stand outside what it is that we are trying to encompass and understand."[45]   States introduces this conundrum to explain what he perceives as the inherent difficulty of defining "performance"—we are, in some sense of the word, always performing, and so when we attempt to define what it is we are doing, we are unable to step outside of the phenomenon of "performance" in order to define it from a "non-performing" position. This is precisely the situation in which the reader of the *Meditations* finds herself. She is compelled to cultivate a kind of "double-vision" in which she is simultaneously seeing the scenes from Christ's life before her (so that she can evoke the appropriate emotional responses), and seeing herself seeing those scenes (so she can determine the adequacy of those responses).   The audience and the performer become one, a situation which may seem odd if we think of "performance" as necessarily being "performance for someone else." In States's view, however, such a requirement that the audience be distinct from the performer is "short-sighted."   A chamber music quartet that plays to an empty room, States argues, is

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[45] Bert O. States, "Performance as Metaphor," *Theatre Journal* 48 (1996): 2.

nonetheless performing and serving as its own audience at the same time: "It does no

good," says States,

> to say that each member of the quartet becomes an audience when (and only
> when) his or her instrument isn't playing and the musician 'only' listens. The
> work is being performed and the performers are there to hear and feel it, and to
> insist that the two variables be different entities seems a misunderstanding of the
> pleasurable purpose of performance.[46]

The fact that the reader plays her dual role of performer and audience within a private

mental space while engaged in the solitary act of reading does not undermine the

performative nature of what she is doing. In effect, she "does to the text of a book what

an actor does to the text of a play, except that the enactment takes place in a mental

space."[47] Within this mental space, according to Mikel Dufrenne, the reader grasps the

text's meaning "only by imagining the performance in his own way—in short, by being a

performer, if only vicariously and in imagination."[48]

States's understanding of performance suggests that the *Meditations* is, in a sense,

a performance text not merely because of the active role that the reader plays in

"performing" the work, but because of the text's larger aim of self-transformation by

means of this performance. At its core, performance is, according to States, a process of

transformation: "Something is always transformed" in a theatrical performance; "it is

simultaneously 'not itself' and 'not not itself.'" Performance finds its very purpose in this

act of transformation: the audience attends in order "to witness a transformation of the

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[46] States, "Performance as Metaphor," 24. States derives his example of the chamber music quartet from Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, ed. Garrett Barden and John Cumming (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1975), 99.

[47] States, "Performance as Metaphor," 12.

[48] Mikel Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, trans. Edward S. Casey, et al. (Evanston: Northwestern UP, 1973), 51.

things of reality (or fantasy)," and the actor "performs in order to undergo a

transformation, or to become a twice-*not*ted self." The motivation of both audience and

actor to seek out such transformations is, according to States, "the pleasure of

transformation," which is "a fundamental pleasure at the very core of mind and

memory."[49]

The intersection of pleasure, transformation, audience, and actor grounds States's

theory of performance, which

> has to begin at the ontological floor where the human desire to participate in
> performative transformations begins. This is the point where there is not yet a
> differentiation between performer and audience; there is only an abiding interest
> in the spectacular possibilities of the world (the voice, sound, physical material,
> behavior) which one uncovers in perception and at once feels the pleasure of the
> discovery. . . . Here is what we might call the kernel or gene of performativity
> from which all divided forms of artistic performance spring: the collapse of means
> and ends into each other, the simultaneity of producing something and responding
> to it in the same behavioral act.[50]

It is this "desire to participate in performative transformation," embodied in the reader-

performer who simultaneously produces and responds to her experience of events in

Christ's life, that the *Meditations* cultivates in its reader. One way in which the text

fosters this performance is by explicitly asking the reader to follow "stage directions"

provided by the narrator for how she should interact with the persons around her in the

imagined scenes. In chapter 13, for example, the narrator gives the following

instructions, complete with dialogue:

> On your return to Egypt to visit the boy Jesus, and when perchance you have
> found him outside with the children, he will catch sight of you and run up to you
> immediately . . . . Kneel and kiss his feet; and sweeping him into your arms with
> a hug, find a bit of sweet respite with him. Then he will say to you, "We've been
> given permission to return to our own land, and tomorrow we must leave. You've

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[49] States, "Performance as Metaphor," 21.

[50] States, "Performance as Metaphor," 25.

come at a good time, because you will be going back with us." Answer him at once that you are overjoyed at this; and that you hope *to follow him wherever he goes* (Rv 4:4).

Rediens igitur in Egyptum gracia uisitandi puerum Iesum, quem cum extra inter pueros forte inueneris, ipse te uidens statim occuret tibi. . . . Tu uero genuflectens osculeris pedes ipsius; et pectus inter brachia ipsum suscipiens et aliquantulum cum eo quiescas. Tunc dicet tibi: Data est nobis licencia redeundi in terram nostram, et cras hinc recedere debemus. Bona hora uenisti, quia redibis nobiscum. Cui alacriter respondeas te ex hoc multum gaudere; et quod eum optas sequi quocumque ierit.[51]

More often, the script-like aspects of the text are not quite as obvious as in the passage above; nonetheless, the reader is regularly presented with scenes in which she is expected to play a well-defined role, sometimes for seemingly extended lengths of time. During Mary's vigil at Christ's crib in chapter 10, the narrator points out that "[a]ny faithful soul, and especially a religious person, from the day of our Lord's birth all the way up to the Purification, ought at least once a day visit our Lady at the aforementioned crib to adore the boy Jesus . . ."[52] Presumably the reader was not meant literally to repeat the same meditation for forty days (the time between birth and purification), yet the implication is that the reader is playing her part throughout the full duration of the imagined events, following along in a dramatically foreshortened time frame. Chapter 12 clearly relies on such foreshortening when the narrator tells the reader to "become like a little girl with the little child [Jesus] and grow with him as he grows older, always, however, preserving your humility."[53] If the reader obviously can not follow such directions in real-time, then

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[51] John of Caulibus, *Meditations*, 49-50; *Meditaciones*, chap. 13, lines 21-30.

[52] John of Caulibus, *Meditations*, 38. "Quelibet anima fidelis et maxime religiosa persona a die natiuitatis Domini usque ad purificacionem, deberet saltem semel in die apud dictum presepe Dominam uisitare, adorare puerum Iesum; et matrem eius affectuose meditari de paupertate, humilitate et benignitate ipsorum." *Meditaciones*, chap. 10, lines 34-37.

[53] John of Caulibus, *Meditations*, 45. "Sis ergo ut dixi, cum paruulo paruula et cum grandescente grandescis, semper tamen humilitate seruata." *Meditaciones*, chap. 12, lines 126-127.

how is the reader to understand them? What they imply is that the reader's performances

should not be thought of as merely brief, intermittent interludes during which she slips

into and out of the narrative, but that she is to imaginatively *inhabit* the text, to *dwell* in

and on the narratives at length so that she spiritually becomes the person she imagines

herself to be. Just as an actor is said to "become" the character that he plays, so the

reader of the *Meditations* transforms herself into a better Christian by consistently

thinking, acting, and feeling as the text directs her to. Her manner of relating to Christ,

and the emotions that she performs over and over in her mind become a kind of habit that

produces the spiritual refinement that she seeks.

       The reader knows whether or not she has attained this refinement because

throughout her reading of the *Meditations* she experiences the "simultaneity of producing

something and responding to it in the same behavioral act" that States describes above.

That is, the reader both plays her parts in the narrative and critically assesses her own

performance in order to judge her progress toward her goal. The roles of performer and

audience blur into one as the reader, motivated by the pleasurable spiritual possibilities of

meditation uses her experience of self-transformation as a tool for developing self-

knowledge. The narrator offers Bernard of Clairvaux's fifty-fourth sermon on the *Song*

of Songs as a lesson in the necessity and desirability of such self-assessment: When one

perceives that others possess more highly developed virtues than oneself, Bernard

admonishes his listeners "not to spare [themselves] but to accuse [themselves], whenever

[they] realize that grace is cooling even slightly, and virtue is languishing in [them]. This

is how a man acts who carefully examines himself, and scrutinizes his ways and desires. .

. .".[54] This passage captures two crucial components of the reader's quest for virtue: the need to *imitate* the virtues of others, and to rightly *organize one's desires*. At many places in the text, the narrator reminds the reader that she needs to constantly assess her emotional reactions and follow Bernard's advice to be zealous "in [her] obligation to examine [herself] and to aspire to the virtues of others; to become a humbled imitator, and always to retain the apprehension that [she does] not possess similar virtues"[55] Before he even begins to lead the reader through the stories of Christ's life, the narrator in the prologue describes the path to virtue as consisting of regular meditation on these stories through which exercise "one's heart is set on fire and animated to imitate and lay hold of these virtues"[56] so that the reader may share in the accomplishment of Francis of Assisi, who was "so ardently drawn toward that life that his own life became a mirror resemblance of Christ' life. For as perfectly as he could he strove toward him in all the virtues; and finally, . . . Francis was totally transformed into him."[57] If the reader wishes to be able to look upon the face of God, her face in turn must be "bright and pure; transformed into the very image of the brightness it beholds. Otherwise, repulsed by the

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[54] John of Caulibus, *Meditations*, 186. "Volo uos non parcere uobis, sed accusare uosmetipsos quoties forte in uobis, uel ad modicum, tepere gratiam, uirtutem languescere deprehenditis. Hoc facere hominis est, qui curiosus circumspector est sui, et scrutator uiarum suarumac studiorum. . . ." *Meditaciones*, chap. 54, lines 52-56.

[55] John of Caulibus, *Meditations*, 185. "Considera diligenter que ibi dicta sunt de uirtutibus et uiciis, et secundum ipsum modum uiuere stude quomodo autem teipsam examinare et ad uirtutes aliorum aspicere debeas; et imitari et ex inde humiliari, et in timore semper manere quia tu similes uirtutes non habes." *Meditaciones*, chap. 54, lines 19-23.

[56] John of Caulibus, *Meditations*, 3. "Ad cuius uirtutes imitandas et adipiscendas ex frequenti meditacione cor accenditur et animatur." *Meditaciones*, prologue, lines 59-60.

[57] John of Caulibus, *Meditations*, 3. "Propterea sic ardenter afficiebaturad ipsam, ut quasi sua similitudo fuerit. Nam in cunctis uirtutibus quam perfeccius poterat innitebatur eundem, . . . fuit in eum totaliter transformatus." *Meditaciones*, prologue, lines 67-72. Throughout the text, the narrator urges the reader to imitate Christ (pages 75, 100, 108, 109, 147, 268), Bernard (page 124), and the angels (page 309).

unaccustomed splendor, it would shrink from the sheer dissimilarity."[58] The end result

of spiritually refining the self is, in a sense, to lose it as the reader brings herself ever

closer to conforming to the model of virtue that the text presents. The more she refines

her "performing" self from the perspective of the "audience's" position, the more the gap

between performer and audience shrinks until the reader's "double vision" resolves into

the single perspective of the disciplined and virtuous soul at union with God.

  One hallmark of this transformation is a realignment of the reader's desires,

which the narrator implicitly equates with good works as a requirement for the cultivation

of righteousness: Fasts, vigils, and bodily discipline may all "sow unto righteousness,"

yet the necessary "seeds" consist of not only "your good works," but also "your good

desires, your tears, for the Psalmist says, '*They wept as they went forth, sowing their*

seeds (Ps 125:6).'"[59] Indeed, the importance of "good desire" goes far beyond the need

to feel the appropriate pity and sorrow at the right moments. The purpose of leading the

reader through emotionally trying scenes is not merely to impress upon her the enormity

of her debt to God, but to train her to call up only the desired feelings at the right time—

in other words, to discipline her emotions so that she may use them as a tool for

reshaping herself in the image of Christ. The narrator, drawing on Bernard, asserts that

"[t]here are two things in us we must cleanse, namely, our intellect and our feeling: our

intellect that it may know; our feeling that it may will. . . . The feelings, which are

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[58] John of Caulibus, *Meditations*, 173. "Neque id posset, nisi clara quoque ipsa esset et pura, utique transformata in eamdem quam conspicit claritatis imaginem. Alioquin ipsa dissimilitudine resiliret, insolito uerberata fulgore." *Meditaciones*, chap. 50, lines 56-59.

[59] John of Caulibus, *Meditations*, 166. "Hoc siquidem seminare est ad justitiam. Semina sunt bona opera, bona studia, semina lacrimae sunt. *Ibant*, inquit, *et flebant, mittentes semina sua.*" *Meditaciones*, chap. 48, lines 17-19.

influenced by the ever-changing passions of a corrupt body, can never be tamed, not to

mention cleansed, until the will seeks one goal and moves toward one goal."[60] The

Meditations provides rigorous exercise toward reaching that one goal—imitation of

Christ's virtues—the pursuit of which will "cleanse" the reader's feelings of corrupt

desires and distractions. Feeling may then assist the will in attaining its goal rather than

thwart it ("we must cleanse . . .our feeling that it may will"). The narrator uses Mary's

revelations to Elizabeth to express this same idea: "I have preserved [God's] commands

in my soul and steadfastly I have laid hold of all the virtues contained in them, and that is

the way I want you to be instructed," Mary says to Elizabeth.

> Consequently, the soul cannot possess any virtue if it does not love God with its whole heart. For from that love descends all fullness of grace. However, after grace has been dispensed, it does not remain constant in the soul, but flows out like water, unless the soul has hated its enemies, that is, vice and sins. *Therefore, one who wishes to receive and to retain this grace must order her heart in relation to love and hate.* I want you to do just as I did.

> Ista seruaui in animo, et statim omnes uirtutues comprehendi que in ipsis continentur, et ita te uolo doceri. Anima qutem aliquam uirtutem habere non potest si Deum toto corde non diligit. Ab isto enim amore descendit omnis gracie plenitudo. Postquam autem descendit non perseuerat in anima, sed fluit ut aqua, nisi inimicos suos, id est uicia et peccata habuerit odio. Qui uult ergo suam graciam habere et possidere oportet eum cor suum ad amorem et odium ordinare. Volo te ergo facere sicut faciebam ego.[61]

Behind the sentimentality of much of the *Meditations* lies a purpose quite at odds with

the indulgence of the affections that most people perceive in the text. The tears and

anguish elicited by the narrative are not so much tokens of emotional immoderation, but

are the outcome of a highly self-conscious effort to discipline and train the emotions to

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[60] John of Caulibus, *Meditations*, 175. "Duo sunt quae in nobis purganda sunt, scilicet intellectus et affectus: intellectus, ut nouerit; affectus, ut uelit. . . . Affecctiones, uero quae corpore corrupto diuersis passionibus afficiuntur, mitigari numquam possunt, ne dicam sanari, donec uoluntas unum quaerat et tendat ad unum." *Meditaciones*, chap. 51, lines 1-4, 7-10.

[61] John of Caulibus, *Meditations*, 9 (emphasis mine); *Meditaciones*, chap. 3, lines 17-25.

respond in religiously approved ways, to engage in what medieval theologians called *ordinatio caritatis*. Just as the mind in meditation must be conditioned to focus intently on God without being drawn away by a welter of distractions, so too must the reader's affections be conditioned to respond intently to the divine without being diverted by less spiritually salutary concerns. "Virtue" requires not only the performance of good works, but also the nurturing of proper feeling through the repeated rehearsal of proper emotional responses to carefully delineated prompts. Like a performer on stage, the reader of the *Meditations* "becomes" the person that she imagines herself to be; unlike the stage performer, her ultimate goal is to never quite stop being that person, but to inhabit her spiritually refined role throughout her life. Practice, in the theater of the imagination, makes the soul perfect.

Yet for all its desire to direct the reader's attention, behavior, and emotions within the narrative scenes, the *Meditations* also allows a degree of creative license on the part of the reader that is just as necessary to her spiritual development as is the text's script-like nature that we have just examined. The creative tension between the narrator's desire to control the reader's response and at the same time to give it some free rein becomes apparent at various points during the narrative. Throughout the *Meditations*, the reader negotiates this boundary between taking direction and taking her own lead by adapting the "script" given to her in order to create her own personalized drama of individual spiritual transformation. Far from being a subversive act that challenges orthodox portrayals of Christ, the spontaneous elaboration of novel scenes from Christ's life in which the reader participates is required in order for the reader to realize her desired spiritual development.

As we noted earlier, the *Meditations* makes it clear how the reader should internalize its teachings so as to create a "proper," self-regulating subjectivity. She is expected to "follow the script," as it were, reacting to the carefully delineated and internalized scenes in the way directed by the text, feeling love, compassion, and sorrow to the right degree at the right time. The most frequent injunctions to the reader are to *see* and pay attention to what is happening before her, as when she's told to observe Christ's baptism (chapter 16), gaze upon Christ's face as he preaches to the gathered crowds (chapter 21), witness the execution of John the Baptist (chapter 30), and make herself present "with total mental absorption"[62] as Christ is nailed to the cross (chapter 78). Occasionally the reader is also told explicitly what to do, as when she is told to visit Christ as he fasts in the wilderness (chapter 17), and when she is enjoined to feed Christ's mother as she mourns after the crucifixion (chapter 80). As a result of following the narrator's directions, the reader ought to feel appropriate compassion and sorrow, which the narrator reminds her of at many places in the text. She is directed to feel compassion for Mary's poverty (chapter 5) and Christ's humility (chapter 6), and to pity the holy family as it flees to Egypt (chapter 12) and Christ for his anguish as he drives the money changers from the temple (chapter 42). In her quest to relate to Christ the man, the reader is advised to join in with the suffering that she sees, as when Christ and his disciples are rebuked and driven away by the Jews ("Share in their suffering as much as you can"[63]) and when Christ takes up the cross ("As much as you can, suffer with him, as

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[62] John of Caulibus, *Meditations*, 252. "Hiis autem toto mentis intuitu te presentem exhibeas. . . ." *Meditaciones*, chap. 78, line 4.

[63] John of Caulibus, *Meditations*, 214. ". . . eis compatere toto posse." *Meditaciones*, chap. 65, lines 26-27.

he is placed in the midst of so much agony and renewed ridicule"[64]).   In these respects, the text leads the reader to respond in an "officially approved" manner.

But at the same time, the practice of "domesticating" these narratives—of successfully making them a part of the reader's personal, private experience—requires that the individual be given a degree of license over the shape of that narrative. The pleasure of performance is not passive, but active and creative. The reader must be allowed to take some personal responsibility for the shape of the "script" in order for meditation to be a pleasurable, transformative experience. Just as the classical practitioner of the arts of memory was expected to select memory images that were personally significant to him to make them easier to remember—for example, by casting his personified concepts in the guise of people he knew—so the reader of devotional manuals is explicitly given permission to create stories of Christ's life that are not in the Gospels if they will aid her spiritual development. At several points during the meditative exercise, the script-like stage directions of the text yield to the creative indeterminacy of a narrative created by the reader. The author of the *Meditations*, for example, supplies some stories about the holy family's life while in Egypt, then leaves the rest up to the reader: "Meditate on these and similar thoughts about the boy Jesus: I have given you the setting. Enlarge on it and proceed as it seems fit . . . ."[65] Not everything done by Christ was put down in writing, so the author says he will tell such things to us "just as if they had actually happened, at least insofar as they can piously be believed to be occurring or to have occurred; doing this in accord with certain imaginary

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[64] John of Caulibus, *Meditations*, 250. "Compatere igitur ei et tu, quantum potes, in tot angustiis et ludibriorum renouacionibus posito." *Meditaciones*, chap. 77, lines 47-48.

[65] John of Caulibus, *Meditations*, 45. "Hec et his similia de puero Iesu meditari potes: dedi tibi occasionem. Tu uero sicut uidebitur extendas et prosequaris. . . ." *Meditaciones*, chap. 12, lines 114-116.

scenarios, which the mind perceives in a varying way."[66] Explicit permission to

manipulate the narrative is given quite often throughout the *Meditations*.   Sometimes the

narrator suggests various options for the reader to choose from, as in chapter 17 after

Christ is tempted by Satan and the narrator wonders what food Christ ate afterwards to

refresh himself. Since the Bible does not say, the narrator reviews some possibilities,

assesses their plausibility, and finally settles on the idea that Christ may well have asked

the angels to bring him some of his mother's home cooking (chapter 17). As long as a

particular meditation is pious and helps the reader in her spiritual growth, she should

visualize it regardless of "whatever measure of truth it does have."[67]

     But the most intriguing instances of reader improvisation are those in which the

reader is left to decide how other people in the imagined scenes will react to her presence

among them. The narrator does not tell the reader how others will perceive her, but

leaves it up to her own conscience to decide how Christ, Mary, and the rest will treat her.

As the reader accompanies Mary and the young Christ child on a visit to Elizabeth and

her son John, the narrator advises the reader to "receive John with due reverence . . . and

he just might give you his blessing."[68] Whether or not the reader will actually receive

this blessing depends on how she chooses to construct the events that follow, for the

narrator does not give any further hints as to the reader's reception by John. A short

while later, the narrator instructs the reader to "[g]aze upon them [Jesus and John] then,

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[66] John of Caulibus, *Meditations*, 4. "Ego uero ad maiorem impressionem ea sic ac si ita fuissent tibi narrabo prout contingere uel contigisse pie credi possunt, secundum quasdam imaginarias representaciones quas animus diuersimode percipit." *Meditaciones*, prologue, lines 92-95.

[67] John of Caulibus, *Meditations*, 58. "Quomodocumque autem se habeat ueritas. . . ." *Meditaciones*, chap. 15, lines 82-83.

[68] John of Caulibus, *Meditations*, 41. "Accipe et tu reuerenter Ioannem . . . si forte benedixerit tibi." *Meditaciones*, chap. 11, lines 70-71.

as they talked together, at least to the extent the Lord will allow you."[69] Later, at the

Sermon on the Mount, the reader is told to meditate on Christ and his disciples "as an

onlooker and then by approaching them if you should see him speaking. And if by

chance you have been called over, stay there awhile, should the Lord allow you to do

so."[70] Will the Lord allow the reader these privileges? It is up to her to decide, but it is

difficult to see how the decision could be made based on her sense of her own spiritual

worthiness. If a reader were to think, "Yes, I *am* worthy of John's blessing and Christ's

personal attention," then that reader would lack the humility and sense of incompleteness

that the narrator wants to instill in her. Perhaps, says the narrator, the reader may

perceive that she possesses some virtue which another person lacks, but

> *if you are devoted to what is good* (1 Pt 3:13), you will find many things in which
> you can judge yourself inferior. For what if you can work or fast more than he;
> but he is more patient than you, surpasses you in humility, excels in charity?
> Why spend the entire day stupidly thinking about something you seem to possess?
> Be more anxious *to know what you lack* (Ps 38:5). This is much better.
>
> *si bonus aemulator fueris*, iudicare te poteris inferiorem. Quid enim si forte
> laborare aut ieiunare plus isto potes, et ille te patientia superat, et humilitate
> praecedit, supereminet caritate? Quid tota die circa id quod uideris habere,
> insipienti cogotatione uersaris? Esto magis solicitus, *ut scias quid desit tibi*. Hoc
> enim melius.[71]

If the only acceptable attitude is one of unworthiness for such blessings, then on what

grounds might the reader receive them? Why would the narrator even make receiving

them a possibility? Certainly, the reader could imagine receiving them because of the

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[69] John of Caulibus, *Meditations*, 52. "Intuere itaque ipsos simul stantes et conuersantes, sicut Dominus dabit tibi." *Meditaciones*, chap. 13, lines 115-116.

[70] John of Caulibus, *Meditations*, 90. "In hac consideracione iucunderis et tu, aspiciendo ac si eum uideres loquentem et approximando eis, si forte uocata fueris et immorando ibidem, ut Dominus tibi dabit." *Meditaciones*, chap. 21, lines 71-74.

[71] John of Caulibus, *Meditations*, 187-188; *Meditaciones*, chap. 54, lines 91-96.

abundance of God's grace and the extent of his mercy toward flawed sinners such as her. But these scenes also function as a test of how well the reader has managed to integrate herself into the narrative. It is not so much a question of the extent of God's grace and mercy, but of whether or not she is fully *there* in the scene for John or Christ to give blessings and attention to her. As long as she is merely watching events unfold from "outside," she can not interact with anyone. If, however, she has made herself as completely present and emotionally involved as the narrator requires—that is, if she is a performer and not a mere spectator—then being personally acknowledged by Christ and John becomes a possibility. Indeed, the reader who has cultivated pity for Christ's sufferings may even enjoy a certain affective reciprocity with him in the scene where he converses with Mary and his friends after the resurrection: "You too, place yourself there, in reverence, modesty and joy, but at a distance apart," says the narrator to the reader. "[I]t may be that, moved with pity, he [Christ] would have you called over."[72]

The *Meditations*, then, produces a creative tension between the need to "follow directions" and go along with the narrative as it is laid out by the narrator, and the requirement to shape the narrative oneself as one goes along. Although the reader is encouraged to play with the details of a narrative, her creative license is limited to just that–the *details* of a story. The narrator lays out for her the major narratives that she must meditate upon, all of which, he takes pains to remind her, are doctrinally orthodox. Although she should "accept all things capable of providing material for [her] to meditate on in piety," she should accept them "just as I [the narrator] shall relate them. For I do not intend to state anything in this little work that is not confirmed by sacred Scripture, or

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[72] John of Caulibus, *Meditations*, 311. "Sta et tu reuerenter et uerecunde sed gaudenter, a longe tamen, si forte misericordia motus faciat te uocari." *Meditaciones*, chap. 100, lines 31-33.

not spoken about in either the words of the saints or in approved interpretations."[73] Yet within the bounds of orthodoxy, the narrator allows for flexibility in the reader's treatment of a story, pointing out that "we may understand the Scriptures in multifarious ways, insofar as we believe it useful; provided it not be contrary to the truth about his life, or justice or doctrine; that is, that it not be contrary to faith or good morals."[74] Orthodoxy may ask the reader to attentively follow the directions given to her, but successful spiritual transformation requires that the reader also be allowed the freedom and responsibility to customize her own narrative space in order to realize her own potential for self-transformation.

The reader of the *Meditations* expresses this capacity for self-transformation through the cultivation of her own emotional pain. This may at first seem a paradoxical claim to make, since we are accustomed to thinking of pain as a destructive force rather than as a tool for creativity. Elaine Scarry's well-known representation of bodily pain as self- and language-destroying undoubtedly contributes to this impression. But the psychological impact of pain depends greatly on its source. Pain that is inflicted upon a helpless victim who does not wish to suffer does have the potential to erode that person's sense of self until, in Scarry's words, "[w]orld, self, and voice are lost" to the torturer's brutality.[75] Passivity is the hallmark of this kind of suffering, which we might call

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[73] John of Caulibus, *Meditations*, 236. "Cuncta uero cum solita meditacione accipe, scilicet que sic pie meditari poterunt, ut narrabo. Non enim in hoc opusculo aliquid affirmare intendo quod non per Scripturam sacram uel dicta sanctorum uel opiniones approbatas affirmetur uel dicatur." *Meditaciones*, chap. 74, lines 22-26.

[74] John of Caulibus, *Meditations*, 4. "Nam circa diuinam Scripturam meditari, exponere et intelligere multifarie, prout expedire credimus possumus: dummodo non sit contra ueritatem uite, iusticie aut doctrine, id est non sit contra fidem uel bonos mores." *Meditaciones*, prologue, lines 95-98.

[75] Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 35.

"corrosive pain." The sufferer has no control over the situation or even over his own body as the torturer inscribes upon it signs of his power over the victim. However, when pain is chosen and freely assumed by an individual, it becomes a tool by which the suffering individual can actively remake herself and her world. Christ suffered, but his pain did not destroy his self because he had willed to suffer. He was not obliterated by his pain; rather, his love and compassion for humankind could only be fully manifested through his assumption of such suffering. His was what we might call a "generative pain" out of which humankind is redeemed and the world is spiritually renewed. By willingly inducing emotional suffering in herself, the reader of the *Meditations* cultivates precisely this kind of generative pain.

The narrative and performative strategies employed by the *Meditations* encourage the meditator to perceive herself as an agent of her own transformation through self-induced emotional suffering. The text offers a devotional exercise in which self-inflicted emotional wounds enable her to reshape her own spiritual identity. These wounds are of two kinds: compassion for Christ's sufferings, and sorrow over the insufficiency of that same compassion as revealed by relentless self-scrutiny. The meditator's performance of her own suffering for herself falls between what Graver describes as a display of pain that "condones voyeurism" (a display "for the spectators to eat up with their eyes") and a performance of pain that "beatifies an interiority to which voyeurism has no access."[76] The meditator both sees her own pain and defines her own interiority through the willed experience of suffering for the sake of God's love. She realizes her power of self-creation through her ability to suffer emotionally along with Christ, his family, and his

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[76] Graver, "Violent Theatricality," 54.

disciples—suffering does not destroy her self, but is a necessary tool with which she creates that self anew in the image of Christ. By combining her ability to suffer with her capacity for self-creation, the reader achieves a kind of *imitatio Christi* that goes beyond just sharing in Christ's pain. Like Christ, she is both a creator (within the disembodied realm of her imagination), and an embodied being who chooses to suffer in order to narrow the gap between the human and the divine. The performance for herself of her own emotional suffering enables this pleasurable self-transformation which, in the words of States, comes to be in "the simultaneity of producing something and responding to it in the same behavioral act." When the "I" who feels pity and compassion is simultaneously the "me" whose suffering is witnessed, that suffering can be imaginatively made into a religiously meaningful experience.

The spiritual work that the *Meditations* aims to do brings the apparently opposite poles of pleasure and pain into a single experience of pleasurable pain for religious ends. Rather than indulging in the pleasure of witnessing the violent transformation of the body of another as in hagiography, the *Meditations*, by making the reader into a creative performer of the text, makes spiritual growth a process of taking pleasure in altering one's own mind and soul through self-induced emotional pain. Power, pain, and pleasure thus converge and reinforce each other in the reader's drive to transcend the very worldly realm that is home to such suffering hearts and bodies.

Chapter 3

"Face to Face" with God: *The Book of Margery Kempe* **and Levinasian Ethics at the**

Limits of the Affective Devotional Project

If modern readers of medieval affective mediations would like to better

understand the impact that these devotions had on their medieval readers, we ideally

ought to study not merely the "script" that these texts expected their readers to follow, but

also the actual "performances" of that script that individuals created at the intersection of

the text's directions and their own imaginations. How did actual readers engage with the

material to create a new relationship between themselves and God? What do these

performances tell us about the reader as well as the text? Perhaps the most famous (or

notorious, depending on one's point of view) "performer" of such devotions, Margery

Kempe, provides us a detailed and colorful example of what a creative, head-strong, and

devout individual could accomplish with Franciscan devotions as her paradigm for

spiritual growth. Kempe's narrative of her own life offers us an extended look at how

one woman internalized the lessons of Franciscan spirituality and used them to shape her

public and private lives. It is especially useful as an example of how intense meditation

on Christ's suffering could instill in an individual a particular pattern of response to

suffering endured by both the divine and the mundane Other. This chapter applies the

philosophical arguments of Emmanuel Levinas regarding the ethical relationship between

the Self and the Other in order to examine the nature of the relationship that Kempe

establishes between herself and Christ, as well as between herself and her fellow

Christians. Although affective practices encourage the reader to familiarize God and his

suffering in order to know him better, Kempe's use of these practices demonstrates the

limits of this project and, in the language of Levinas, demonstrates that in order for the affective project to succeed, one must experience a *failure* to fully "know" the Other so that the Other (in Kempe's case, God) becomes not an object to be known, but an alterity to be encountered in a meeting that establishes the reader as an ethical Christian. A careful reading of Kempe's *Book* in light of Levinas's ideas about ethics reveals that the evolution of Kempe's relationship with God demonstrates the very repeated "calling into question" of the self that founds ethics. Kempe's spiritual growth occurs not merely through *imitatio Christi*, but through repeated realizations that no matter how closely she imitates Christ and the saints, she will fall short of "grasping" the sanctity of Christ. The recognition of this failure interrupts her heretofore familiar relationship with God and throws her into a situation in which she is forced to acknowledge the limits of her own ability to know him. This interruption is not indicative of any personal flaw in Kempe, but of a tension latent within affective devotional practices themselves. This tension between the desire to familiarize God and the need to make him "strange" opens the way for Kempe to approach God in the spirit of Levinas's ethical subject who relates to God as to the ultimately unknowable Other for whom she bears an incalculable responsibility. The manner in which Kempe accomplishes this, however, causes her to achieve an "ethical" relationship with God at the expense of her fellow humans whose suffering Kempe uses to bolster her sense of her own sanctity. Kempe fails to translate her realization of the ungraspable Otherness of God into a comparable ethical relationship with her fellow Christians.

Kempe's colorful, strained, and often strange relationships with God and her fellow humans have caused both her contemporaries and her modern critics to be baffled,

intrigued, and frustrated by this "creature." Kempe simply defies categorization. She is a

mother of fourteen children who, after the birth of her first child, begins to have visions

of Christ that throughout her life grow increasingly elaborate and emotionally intense,

leading to repeated episodes of public weeping and wailing before bewildered onlookers

who often can not decide if she is a saintly woman, a Lollard, or a self-centered

hypocrite. She is a failed businesswoman who, in exchange for paying off her husband's

debts, is granted a chaste marriage and the freedom to travel on her own on pilgrimages

throughout Europe and the Holy Land, staying in nearly constant motion well into her

sixties. As a self-proclaimed mystic, her "dalliances" with God give her the self-

confidence to verbally spar with mayors, priests, and archbishops, clearing herself of

repeated charges of heresy. She is also a devout Christian who uses her religious

experiences to redefine social and gender roles. Sandra McEntire suggests that "'most

controversial' is the only issue about which critics agree."[1] Since the discovery of the

manuscript of *The Book of Margery Kempe* in 1934, Kempe has inspired a remarkably

diverse variety of both popular and scholarly assessments, ranging from effusive

admiration to contemptuous disregard. The modern English translation of Kempe's *Book*

by W. Butler-Bowden, which preceded in print the Middle English version edited by

Sanford Brown Meech and Hope Emily Allen, was greeted enthusiastically by reviewers

in the press. *The New York Times* heralded the newly discovered "life tale of [a] 1437

feminist," while *The Times* of London proclaimed it "among the English classics" and

asserted confidently that "a generation that knows not this fearless East Anglian fifteenth-

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[1] Sandra McEntire, introduction to *Margery Kempe: A Book of Essays,* ed. Sandra McEntire (NY: Garland Publishing, 1992), x.

century mystic is poor-minded indeed."[2] The timing of the discovery of the manuscript

had much to do with this warm reception since, as Marea Mitchell notes, the manuscript

came to light during a time when English literature and history began to be thought of as

deserving the pride of place in education previously held by the venerable field of

Classics. Kempe's *Book* was readily adopted by this cause for its perceived ability to

open a window onto a "realistic" view of everyday life in fifteenth-century England.[3]

Early readers like T. W. Coleman and Katherine Cholmley indulge in a similarly

uncritical appreciation for the text's face-value when they laud the *Book* on the grounds

that "as an intimate record of spiritual experience it has few equals" (Coleman) and argue

that the text's "immense value" lies in its ability to restore to the people of England a

"direct, frank, intimate love of Jesus" (Cholmley).[4]

Unfortunately, the timing of the manuscript's publication also posed a stumbling-

block to its acceptance, for as Clarissa Atkinson points out, this was a time when, under

the influence of Freud, people were ready to interpret aberrant behavior as a sign of

psychological disorder, and assessed Kempe accordingly.[5] Allen, in her preface to the

EETS edition of the *Book*, sets the tone for much criticism to follow when she

pronounces Kempe to be "petty, neurotic, vain, illiterate, physically and nervously over-

strained," albeit "devout, much-travelled, forceful and talented." She goes on to cite one

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[2] Marea Mitchell, *The Book of Margery Kempe: Scholarship, Community, and Criticism* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005), 57-59.

[3] Mitchell, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, 60.

[4] T. W. Coleman, *English Mystics of the Fourteenth Century* (London: Epworth Press, 1938), 155; Katherine Cholmley, *Margery Kempe: Genius and Mystic* (London: Longman, 1947), vii.

[5] Clarissa Atkinson, *Mystic and Pilgrim: The Book and the World of Margery Kempe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 195.

Father Thurston whose "long experience of psychological types like Margery" leads him to assert that, without a doubt, Kempe was "a victim of hysteria."[6] Many later critics labeled Kempe with this same diagnosis well into the 1980s.[7] By this time, she had been variously regarded across the years as a troublemaker and a madwoman, a wanna-be saint and a pseudo-mystic, as egotistical, eccentric, neurotic, psychopathic, and just plain odd.[8] However, the 1980s was the decade when Kempe criticism underwent a sea change as scholars, many working from a feminist perspective, began to offer serious alternatives to the argument that Kempe's "sick, neurotic psyche" led her to manifest "the unpleasant side of female mysticism."[9] Criticism largely shifted away from damning assessments of Kempe's personal psychological profile toward more sympathetic examinations of the interplay between Kempe's activities and her social, cultural, and political contexts.[10]

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[6] Hope Emily Allen, prefatory note to *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. Sanford Brown Meech and Hope Emily Allen, EETS 212 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1940), lxiv-lxv.

[7] For example, see John C. Hirsh, *The Revelations of Margery Kempe: Paramystical Practices in Late Medieval England* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1989); Donald R. Howard, *Writers and Pilgrims* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980); David Knowles, *The English Mystical Tradition* (London: Burns and Oates, 1961); Stephen Medcalf, "Inner and Outer," in *The Later Middle Ages*, ed. Stephen Medcalf (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1981); Nancy Partner, "Reading the Book of Margery Kempe," *Exemplaria* 3 (1991): 29-66; Wolfgang Riehle, *The Middle English Mystics*, trans. Bernard Standring (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1981).

[8] For comprehensive overviews of the history of popular and critical responses to Margery Kempe and her *Book*, see Mitchell, *The Book of Margery Kempe*; McEntire, *Margery Kempe: A Book of Essays*; and Barry Windeatt, "Reading and Re-reading Margery Kempe," in *A Companion to The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. John H. Arnold and Katherine J. Lewis (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004), 1-16.

[9] Riehle, *The Middle English Mystics*, 96, 114.

[10] For instance, see David Aers, *Community, Gender, and Individual Identity: English Writing 1360-1430* (New York: Routledge, 1988); Atkinson, *Mystic and Pilgrim*; Sarah Beckwith, "A Very Material Mysticism: The Medieval Mysticism of Margery Kempe," in *Medieval Literature: Criticism, Ideology, and History*, ed. David Aers (New York: St. Martin's,1986), 34-57; Susan Dickman, "Margery Kempe and the English Devotional Tradition," in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England: Papers Read at the Exeter Symposium, July 1980*, ed. Marion Glasscoe (Exeter: Exeter UP, 1980), 156-72; Anthony Goodman, "The Piety of John Brunham's Daughter of Lynn," in *Medieval Women: Essays Dedicated and Presented to Professor Rosalind M. T. Hill*, ed. Derek Baker (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978), 347-58; David Wallace, "Mystics and Followers in Sienna and East Anglia: A Study in Taxonomy, Class, and Cultural Mediation," in *The Medieval Mystical Tradition in England, Exeter Symposium III : Papers Read at Dartington Hall,*

The question at hand was no longer whether Kempe was a "real" mystic or just mentally disturbed, but rather issues such as her strategies for negotiating her own authority as an independent religious woman, the degree of self-conscious artistry evident in her *Book*, and the way in which Kempe's very physical experience of the divine makes her body itself into a text to be read.[11]

However, in recuperating Kempe's reputation by focusing on the broader cultural and political influences under which she wrote, critics have not so much revised the earlier arguments about Kempe's religious experiences as they have side-stepped them. Barry Windeatt makes the case that:

> Despite so many exceptionally insightful contextualizings, significant aspects of *The Book of Margery Kempe* still resist or repel modern assessment. . . . [S]he seems no nearer to being read for that greater part of her text that disappointed and embarrassed when it was first rediscovered. In an appropriately postmodern spirit, much modern writing about the *Book* ignores the centre for the margins, averting its gaze from what its author might have regarded her text as being centrally concerned to put on record: her lifetime of conversations with Christ. Compared with this wholly extraordinary and justifying inward experience, all else that is included in the *Book* is significant but secondary. . . ."[12]

This chapter begins to address this situation by analyzing the nature of these conversations and encounters with God. In returning to a close reading of Kempe's intensely personal spiritual experiences, I am not interested in also returning to the

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July 1984, ed. Marion Glasscoe (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1984), 169-91; McEntire, *Margery Kempe: A Book of Essays*.

[11] See Sarah Beckwith, "Problems of Authority in Late Medieval English Mysticism: Agency and Authority in *The Book of Margery Kempe*," *Exemplaria* 4 (1992): 171-200; Karma Lochrie, "The Book of Margery Kempe: The Marginal Woman's Quest for Literary Authority," *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 16 (1986): 33-55; Gail McMurray Gibson, *The Theater of Devotion: East Anglian Drama and Society in the Late Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); Lynn Staley, *Margery Kempe's Dissenting Fictions* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994); Wendy Harding, "Body into Text: *The Book of Margery Kempe*," in *Feminist Approaches to the Body in Medieval Literature*, ed. Linda Lomperis and Sarah Stanbury (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 168-187; Karma Lochrie, *Margery Kempe and Translations of the Flesh* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991).

[12] Windeatt, "Reading and Re-reading Margery Kempe," 6-7.

argument over whether her mysticism was "real" or not—her experiences were real enough to her, and her status as a "genuine" mystic is beside the point of my project. Rather, I believe that by examining the way Kempe presents and understands her relationship with God, we can begin to perceive how Kempe not only takes the strategies of affective devotion to an extreme, but by doing do encounters the limits in such devotion's ability to bring the reader closer to God. Kempe's perpetual need for reassurances from God regarding the status of her salvation is not indicative of an inadequacy of the affective devotional project to bring the reader closer to God, but is a *necessary* failure of the imagination that rescues God from becoming a too-familiar, "knowable" entity. The way in which Kempe employs affective strategies results in a style of devotion that builds on Christ's familiarity as a fellow human, yet sees in God the Other who resists totalizing and whose call to Kempe founds her subjectivity within a framework of Levinasian ethics. Before applying Levinas's ideas to Kempe, we first need to understand why Levinas believes we need to revise our views on the Self's relationship with the Other.

In Levinas's view, Western philosophy has developed in such a way that the Other more often occupies the status of an object to be *analyzed* than a sentient being to be *encountered*. The tendency to approach the Other in this way prevents us from understanding the fundamental obligations we have toward the Other and, taken to its extreme but logical conclusion, fosters genocides such as the Holocaust, which profoundly shaped Levinas's thinking about ethics. The common purpose running through all of his major works is his attempt to address what he sees as this critical flaw in the Western philosophical tradition—its inability to relate to the Other *as* Other. The

knowing subject, cognitively shaping the objects it perceives in the world, constitutes that

world through acts of consciousness. The problem is that in doing so, the subject does

not encounter objects in themselves, but objects as already shaped by consciousness. The

result, as Colin Davis observes, is that "consciousness can never meet anything truly

alien to itself because the external world is a product of its own activity."[13] This problem

earns Western philosophy the status of an "egology"[14] in which knowledge is not to be

gained "out there" in the world, but discovered already lodged within the individual. It is

> by essence a relation with what one equals and includes, with that whose alterity
> one suspends, with what becomes immanent, because it is to my measure and to
> my scale. . . . Knowledge has always been interpreted as assimilation. Even the
> most surprising discoveries end by being absorbed, comprehended, with all that
> there is of 'prehending' in 'comprehending.' The most audacious and remote
> knowledge does not put us in communion with the truly other; it does not take the
> place of sociality; it is still and always a solitude.[15]

The encounter of the solitary, comprehending subject ("the Same") with what is

"outside" of the Same ("the Other")[16] adds nothing to the Same because to encounter that

Other is "to receive nothing of the Other but what is in me, as though from all eternity I

was in possession of what comes to me from the outside." Epistemology, like

philosophy, is thus an egology since to comprehend is, in a sense, to domesticate and

make familiar the unsettling alterity of the Other. In reducing the Other to the terms of

the already known, we run the risk of forgetting, as Nancy Armstrong and Leonard

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[13] Colin Davis, *Levinas: An Introduction* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1996), 19.

[14] Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 44.

[15] Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo*, trans. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985), 60.

[16] Levinas himself is inconsistent in his use of capitalization when discussing the Other. All quotes reflect Levinas's usage in those particular passages. When I refer to the Other, I will use capital O.

Tennenhouse state, that "there is always more . . . than discourse expresses, a self on the other side of words, bursting forth in words, only to find itself falsified and diminished because standardized and contained" by our representations of it.[17] This process is what Levinas refers to as the "neutralization of the other who becomes a theme or an object" that thereby undergoes a "reduction to the same."[18]

A "reduction to the same" would seem to be what medieval affective devotions are all about. The emphasis of Franciscan texts on Christ's humanity is meant to make God *familiar* to us. The long-standing perception that the popular affective devotional exercises of the late Middle Ages foster an "incarnational aesthetic"—a "deliberate and conscious effort to objectify the spiritual even as the Incarnation itself had given spirit a concrete form"—is not without merit.[19] Franciscan preachers and writers encouraged their listeners to always keep Christ's human nature in mind and to imagine themselves as participants in the events of Christ's life as if those events were actually happening in the flesh, all with the aim of helping their lay audience to nurture a closer emotional bond with God. God is presented in affective meditations as knowable through his incarnation in the familiar guises of a helpless infant, a devoted son, or a suffering man on the cross. Just as children must be fed on milk before they are ready to eat meat, so the thinking goes, the spiritual "child" must begin her personal relationship with God through concrete, easily grasped images of the divine before moving on to more abstract contemplations of divinity. One comes to comprehend the magnitude of God's love and

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[17] Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse, introduction to *The Violence of Representation: Literature and the History of Violence*, ed. Nancy Armstrong and Leonard Tennenhouse (New York: Routledge, 1989), 8.

[18] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 43.

[19] Gibson, *Theater of Devotion*, 8.

sacrifice by relating his physical suffering to one's own capacity to feel pain, and to

appreciate the depth of Mary's and the apostles' sorrow through one's own capacity for

emotional affliction. In other words, the reader learns about God by using her own

human condition as a yardstick by which to measure the experiences of Christ, his family,

and his followers. Participating in the scenes of Christ's life casts God as "Christ the

neighbor," someone knowable because he is essentially like us. In other words, God as

Other is absorbed within the horizons of the Same. Christ's dual nature implicitly

encourages just this kind of totalization: either we focus on his divinity, in which case he

is everything we flawed humans are not, or we focus on his humanity, in which case he is

"just like us." Either way, we fail to see him as Levinas's Other. Focusing exclusively

on Christ's humanity does not work because, as Levinas explains, "The reversibility of a

relation where the terms are indifferently read from left to right and from right to left

would couple them one to the other; they would complete one another in a system visible

from the outside. The intended transcendence would be thus reabsorbed into the unity of

the system, destroying the radical alterity of the other."[20] In other words, if the reader

focuses too exclusively on Christ's humanity, Christ becomes a part of a totalizing

system of thought in which his human nature and the reader's human nature become

interchangeable, thereby undermining Christ's fundamental alterity. If, like the

proponents of apophatic mysticism, we focus instead on how God is not like us, then we

fail to recognize that, as Levinas argues, "The metaphysical other is other with an alterity

that is not formal, is not the simple reverse of identity, and is not formed out of resistance

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[20] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 35-36.

to the same, but is prior to every initiative, to all imperialism of the same."[21] That is, God's alterity can not be understood as a negation of the terms that describe humankind because we would still be working within a totalizing system that defines God relative to the Same of humanity. Either approach is egotistical (an example of Levinas's "egology") in that each one uses the Same as the standard against which the Other is measured. Affective practices that make Christ intimately knowable through our conceptualizations of him seem to be following just this path of totalization described by Levinas.

However, we should not forget that meditative practices were never meant to reduce Christ to *only* his human or divine natures. Affective meditations focus heavily on Christ's manhood because it is easier for a beginner in spiritual pursuits to relate to God when God looks and sounds like himself. But "incarnational" meditations are intended as preparatory exercises for "higher" contemplation of God's divine nature, not as substitutions for it. The aim is to see the divine nature in the human nature, and from there to progress to more and more rarified contemplations of God's divinity that rely as little as possible on any linguistic or visual representations of God. In other words, although affective meditations reduce God to the familiar, they implicitly expect their readers to ultimately reach beyond such representations when they are prepared to do so; they are expected, in Levinas's terms, to eventually acknowledge the alterity of God that can not be reduced to the Same. I argue that Kempe, of all people, achieves an ethical, "face to face" encounter with divinity in her affective devotions to God.

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[21] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 38-39.

I say "of all people" because if anyone has acquired a reputation for quaint, childlike literalism and affective exuberance in her devotions to God, it's Kempe. She is probably not the first person who would come to mind if one were asked to think of someone who might show us how to *avoid* a totalizing, overly-familiar relationship with God. This is, after all, the woman who, in one of her famously vivid visions, married God before a wedding party that included, among others, the Holy Spirit, the Virgin Mary, and all twelve apostles. The affective devotional tradition deeply shaped her religious experiences. Although there is no evidence that she specifically knew the *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, one of the most popular and influential affective meditative texts of the Middle Ages, she tells us in her *Book* that others had read to her "many a good boke of hy contemplacyon" including Saint Bridget's *Revelations*, *Stimulus amoris*, "Hyltons boke" (possibly Walter Hilton's *Scale of Perfection*), Richard Rolle's *Incendium amoris*, "& swech oþer." [22] Steeped in texts that encourage highly visual, emotional, and participatory meditations on Christ's life, Kempe creatively uses them to place herself in personal relationships with the transcendent. She becomes Mary's handmaid after the Annunciation (chapter 6), makes a confession of her sins directly to John the Baptist (chapter 32), and vicariously participates in Christ's crucifixion on Calvary (chapter 28). In a later meditation on the Passion, Kempe, in a touching, realistic gesture of compassion for the grieving Mary, "mad for owr Lady a good cawdel & browt it hir to comfortyn hir."[23] Occasionally, Kempe's imagined interactions with the transcendent Other break with the traditional gospel narratives and

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[22] Margery Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, ed. Sanford Brown Meech and Hope Emily Allen, EETS 212 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1940), 143.

[23] Kempe, *Book*, 195.

reveal just how "incarnational" her imagination could be. Not only does she see herself

marrying God, but after the marriage her new husband reminds Kempe, "[Þ]u mayst

boldly, whan þu art in þi bed, take me to þe as for þi weddyd husband, as thy derworthy

derlyng, & as for thy swete sone. . . . & þerfor þu mayst boldly take me in þe armys of þi

sowle & kyssen my mowth, myn hed, & my fete as sweetly as thow wylt."[24] Her

physical intimacy with God is matched by the intimacy of their friendship which

becomes apparent when God reveals to Kempe, after Kempe sees the eucharist flutter like

a dove in a priest's hands, that even Saint Bridget, Kempe's role model, was never graced

with such a vision as this.[25]

Early in her career as a mystic, Kempe perceives her relationship with God from

the perspective of "the Same"—that is, she defines the relationship and comprehends the

nature of God from the point of view of one who self-assuredly maps out an ego-centered

world organized according to her own terms and interests. At the beginning of her *Book*,

we meet a Kempe who indulges in fashionable apparel because "sche was comyn of

worthy kenred" and "had ful greet envye at hir neybowrs þat þei schuld ben arayd so wel

as sche."[26] This is the Kempe who "for pure covetyse & for to maynten hir pride"

established her own brewery and, after attributing its failure to God's punishment of "hir

pride and synne," repeated her quest for ever more profit with a mill that met a similar

fate.[27] After the failures of her brewery and mill, Kempe acknowledges "hir pride, hir

coueytyse, & desyr þat sche had of þe worshepys of þe world" and begins to weep "with

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[24] Kempe, *Book*, 90.

[25] Kempe, *Book*, 47.

[26] Kempe, *Book*, 9.

[27] Kempe, *Book*, 9, 10.

plentyouws teerys and many boystows sobbyngys for hir synnes & for hir vnkyndnesse a-geyns hir Maker."[28] Unlike her boisterous sobs later in the *Book*, these tears are solely for her own sins and compelled by her own personal desire for heaven, not for the sins of her fellow men and women or for the sufferings of Christ. To the extent that she acknowledges Others—for example, her fellow townspeople—they exist only as a means to bolster her own sense of social prestige, for "[a]lle hir desyr was for to be worshepd of þe pepul."[29] Even Christ, whose bedside visit to Kempe cures her of her temporary madness, becomes little more than an excuse to garner the attention of her neighbors who "cam to hir to se how owyr Lord Ihesu Cryst had wrowt hys grace in hir."[30] At this point, Kempe is so wrapped up in her own ego-pursuits that, despite a personal visit from Christ, "sche knew not veryli þe drawt [i.e. spiritual "pull"] of owyr Lord."[31] Indeed, even after two years of devoting her life to Christ, Kempe still considers herself to be the measure of what she perceives. Her new religious vocation goes so well for her—fasts pose no hardship, material and physical temptations fail to sway her—that she begins to believe "þat sche louyd God mor þan he hir."[32] God for her is not yet a true alterity, but rather an object of knowledge to be assessed by her own standards. Ironically, her efforts to "know" God are leading her farther from her desired goal, for as Levinas argues, "in knowledge, in the final account, [there is] an impossibility of escaping the self."[33] As

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[28] Kempe, *Book*, 11, 13.

[29] Kempe, *Book*, 9.

[30] Kempe, *Book*, 8-9.

[31] Kempe, *Book*, 9.

[32] Kempe, *Book*, 13-14.

[33] Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, 60.

long as she keeps trying to "know" God in this way, she will never free herself of the solipsism of the Same, and hence fail to encounter God in his alterity.

God responds to Kempe's "veynglory" and "presumpcyon" by sending her a three-year span of sexual temptations that ends with Christ visiting Kempe again to establish a covenant with her: she will trade in her hair shirt for a "hair" in her heart and forego eating meat. In return, Christ will never forsake her, will give her grace to endure the reproofs of her enemies, and will send her "hey medytacyon and very contemplacyon."[34] We see immediately in the beginning of the next chapter that the meditations and contemplations are of the deeply emotional, Franciscan variety. As soon as God sends Kempe her first meditation, she finds herself an active participant in scenes from Mary's and Christ's lives. After Mary's birth, Kempe tends to Christ's future mother during her first twelve years "wyth good mete & drynke, wyth fayr whyte clothys & whyte kerchys"[35] and does the same at Christ's birth where she arranges for food and bedding for Mary and her son, and then again during the flight into Egypt where she makes sure that the traveling party has lodgings throughout the journey. Such hands-on participation is, in part, the goal of this type of meditation. The reader is meant to cultivate compassion for the suffering and hardships of Christ, Mary, and the apostles, and to humbly assist them as best she can. The point is not to puff up the ego by making the reader an intimate of Christ and his family, but rather to deflate an ego that may think too highly of its own virtues. Each scene of suffering and hardship reminds the reader of just how much she owes to Christ and compels her to judge the extent to which she embodies (or fails to embody) the virtues exemplified by Christ and his family. The

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[34] Kempe, *Book*, 17.

[35] Kempe, *Book*, 18.

exercise is designed to undermine the self-satisfaction of the Same by exposing its shortcomings in relation to the divine Other. For Kempe, such a vivid, lifelike meditation serves as a kind of training ground for relating to the Other in a non-appropriating spirit of "generosity, incapable of approaching the other with empty hands."[36] No longer does she weep only for her own sins. As a result of these meditations, Kempe would sometimes weep for "ij owyres & oftyn lengar in þe mend of owyr Lordys Passyon wyth-owtyn sesyng, sumtyme for hir owyn synne, sumtyme for þe synne of þe pepyl, sumtyme for þe sowlys in Purgatory, sumtyme for hem þat arn in pouerte er in any dysese, for sche desyred to comfort hem alle."[37] Nor does she hoard the fruits of her labors for her own advancement as when she founded her misbegotten brewery and mill. Instead, she "wills" half of her spiritual goods—"in prayng, in thynkyng, in wepyng, in pilgrimage goyng, in fasting, er in any good word spekyng"—to her confessor "to encres of hys meryte as yf he dede hem hys owyn self," and the other half to all of her friends and enemies for their own spiritual benefit.[38] At this point she is just beginning to recognize her responsibility toward the Other in the form of her fellow humans, but she does not quite enter into the kind of incommensurable relationship of obligation and responsibility found in what Levinas calls the face-to-face encounter with the Other. When she prays for other persons along with herself, or gives over her spiritual merits to another as if he had performed her good works himself, Kempe establishes relationships in which the Same and Other are equal and interchangeable. The other person is generally a variant of

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[36] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 50-51.

[37] Kempe, *Book*, 19-20.

[38] Kempe, *Book*, 20, 21.

herself on whose behalf she can speak and earn salvation. There is no sense yet that Kempe has truly encountered an Other that resists her attempt to comprehend it.

What interrupts this reduction of the Other to the Same is the alterity, or "infinity" of the Other—the remnant that resists appropriation and remains beyond the grasp of representation or comprehension. It is "that which can not be reduced to the Same, that which escapes the cognitive powers of the knowing subject,"[39] and calls the Same into question by exposing the limits of its ability to fit the world into its cognitive framework. Alterity, however, is not a *quality* of a given Other, but the *experience* of a particular perceiver encountering that which he can not reduce to the known or quantifiable. One does not find alterity existing in an Other; one provokes the manifestation of alterity by attempting to reduce the Other to one's pre-existing conceptual categories and discovering the impossibility of the endeavor. The experience is "nothing more than a subjective acknowledgment of the limits of the percipient's knowing, of his or her inability to contain all that is perceivable within the ambit of understanding."[40] Faced with this situation, the percipient experiences what James Meffan and Kim L. Worthington, in their Levinasian reading of J. M. Coetzee's novel *Disgrace*, call a "necessary failure of the imaginative attempt,"[41] an effort to comprehend the Other which *must* fail if one is to become aware of one's limitations and relate to the Other in an ethical way.

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[39] Simon Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1992), 5.

[40] James Meffan and Kim L. Worthington, "Ethics Before Politics: J. M. Coetzee's *Disgrace*," in *Mapping the Ethical Turn: A Reader in Ethics, Culture, and Literary Theory*, ed. Todd F. Davis and Kenneth Womack (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2001), 135.

[41] Meffan and Worthington, "Ethics Before Politics," 145.

So if the core problem of Western philosophy is its ontological bent—its desire to possess intellectually the objects it encounters—then the remedy lies here, in this moment of failure to "contain" the Other. By coming up against the limits of comprehension and encountering that which resists possession ("[t]he strangeness of the Other, his irreducibility to the I, to my thoughts and my possessions"), the self recognizes the limit of its power and freedom; Levinas names "this calling into question of my spontaneity by the presence of the Other ethics."[42] This is not "ethics" in the sense of a set of rules or principles for determining how we ought to act. Rather, it is "ethics" as the awakening of the self to its limitations and its responsibility for the Other. For Levinas, ethics is not a pre-conceived code of conduct that one brings ready-made to a relationship with the Other; it arises from the encounter itself. It is not a way of *knowing* one's position relative to the Other, which would make ethics a type of totalizing epistemology. Rather, it is a way of *relating to* the Other. To be "ethical" is to be vulnerable to the Other's call and gaze. It is to participate in a relationship that interrupts one's self-sufficient enjoyment of the world and throws that self-containment into question.
The encounter with the Other which takes the self by surprise and establishes ethics occurs in what Levinas calls the "face to face." The face of the Other resists totalization; the manner in which it presents itself "exceed[s] *the idea of the other in me*."[43] If we think of the world as bounded by our conceptions of it, then the Other seems to come from beyond our world, and is thus "transcendent." Its transcendence is precisely what makes ethics, in the Levinasian sense, possible because this transcendence breaks the

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[42] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 43.

[43] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 50.

Same's totalizing grasp of the world, which denies the uniqueness of the Other by

reducing it to just another anonymous member of one abstract conceptual category or

another. The calling into question of the Same comes across as a demand by the Other to

which we are obliged to respond. To encounter the face is to encounter the stranger, the

widow, and the orphan who "solicit[s] us by his destitution."[44] The presence of the face

summons me to assume my responsibility for the Other, "to say: here I am [*me voici*]. To

do something for the Other. To give. . . . [H]is face, the expressive in the Other (and the

whole human body is in this sense more or less face) . . . *ordains* me to serve him" as if

one were told, "Someone's asking for you."[45] The self opens up to the transcendent

alterity of the Other and by this process comes into being as a subject grounded in

responsibility. For Levinas, subjectivity is realized in this moment of call and response

when the "I" assumes an unequal relationship of obligation toward the Other. Levinas's

is a uniquely ethical definition of human subjectivity, for the subject comes into existence

as an "I" precisely because of a responsibility for the Other that is always anterior to it.

The "I" is inherently social—indeed, one is human not because one possesses some

particular qualities or propensities oneself, but because "all propensities and qualities,

indeed, my very interiority, is defined by a prior responsibility to the other. . . . Before I

say the words 'I' or 'my' or 'mine,' *it* has hold of *me*."[46] The manifestation of the face

founds the "I" by a double movement—first by throwing its freedom and spontaneity into

question ("The visitation [of the face] consists in overwhelming the very egoism of the

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[44] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 78.

[45] Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, 97-98.

[46] Jeffrey Bloechl, *Liturgy of the Neighbor: Emmanuel Levinas and the Religion of Responsibility* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2000), 54.

I"), and then by recentering it on its particular responsibility for the Other ("The unicity of the I is the fact that no one can answer in my place").[47] Of course, no one is compelling the self to honor the face's summons to a peaceful encounter. It is entirely possible to choose to respond with violence toward the Other, to seek to destroy it or subsume it into the Same, as much of human history makes evident. Levinas is not arguing that the self inevitably responds in an ethical way to the presence of the Other, but that ethics is fundamentally about this moment of choice and the way we elect to respond—with a violent effort to protect the Same against alterity, or with a relationship of generous responsibility for the Other. The summons of the Other is always there—we are always already for-the-Other, and hence our subjectivity is grounded in a primordial responsibility for the Other who always precedes us. But we also have the responsibility, in the more common sense of the term, to attempt to answer that summons—to not walk away like the priest and the Levite in the parable of the Good Samaritan, but rather, like the Samaritan, to give of ourselves to the Other with no thought of personal gain or recompense. Such, for Levinas, is the means to bring about goodness in the world.

Kempe's early encounters with God have not yet compelled her to recognize this responsibility of hers. All of that changes during her pilgrimage to Mount Calvary, where the final stage in Kempe's evolving relationship with the divine Other occurs. While visiting the site of Christ's crucifixion, Kempe experiences another participatory meditation so that "in þe cite of hir sowle sche saw verily & freschly how owyr Lord was crucifyed" and witnessed, as if first hand, the sorrowing of Mary, John, and Mary

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[47] Emmanuel Levinas, "The Trace of the Other," in *Deconstruction in Context: Literature and Philosophy*, ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 353.

Magdalene.[48] Here at the most emotionally charged site in the holy land, Kempe not only

sees herself sorrowing along with the others at the foot of the cross, but breaks out in the

first of her famous, roaring, crying spells. The narrator notes that "þis was þe first cry þat

euyr sche cryed in any contemplacyon."[49] For the first time, the boundary between her

inner spiritual experiences and her activities in the "outer," material world has been

breached; it will by no means be the last such incident, for "þis maner of crying enduryd

many ȝerys aftyr þis tyme for owt þat any man myt do," but "þei come neuyr wyth-owtyn

passing gret swetnesse of deuocyon & hey contemplacyon."[50] The *Book* offers many

similar subsequent incidents of Kempe's participatory meditations bleeding over into the

"real world" via her wailing and tears. On a Good Friday, while witnessing the priests

performing a resurrection play before a representation of Christ's sepulcher, Kempe

"sobbyd, roryd, & cryed, and, spredyng hir armys a-brood, seyd with lowde voys, 'I dey,

I dey,' þat many man on hir wonderyd & merueyled what hir eyled."[51] Once on a Holy

Thursday while in a procession with other churchgoers, Kempe saw in her mind's eye so

vividly the parting between Christ and his mother as he prepared for his Passion that

Kempe "fel down in þe feld a-mong þe pepil. Sche cryid, sche roryd, sche wept as þow

sche xulde a brostyn þer-with."[52] Later she "sees" the Passion events along with Mary

and "must nedys wepyn & cryin when sche sey swech gostly syȝtys in hir sowle as

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[48] Kempe, *Book*, 68.

[49] Kempe, *Book*, 68.

[50] Kempe, *Book*, 68, 69.

[51] Kempe, *Book*, 140.

[52] Kempe, *Book*, 174.

freschly & as verily as ȝyf it had ben don in dede in hir bodily syght."[53] No longer do her

meditations constitute a self-contained inner world separate from her material social

milieu. The two now permeate each other, leading Kempe to perceive in the material

world the divine that up to now she has only perceived in her private meditations.

Kempe's inner, private devotional exercises have begun to train her to respond to the call

of the divine Other, whom she is now better prepared to recognize in the "outer" world as

well. Her meditations on serving Christ and his family have inculcated in her an

openness to and readiness to serve the Other. When her inner and outer worlds intersect,

she begins to apply the lessons of one to the other and refines her ability to recognize the

Other in the people and events around her.

Movement across this inner/outer boundary goes both ways—not only do

Kempe's inner visions manifest themselves in outer, physical displays, but scenes in the

"outer" world frequently evoke for Kempe an "inner" perception of God's presence in the

world. For instance, when Kempe sees a wounded man or beast, or sees someone beating

a child or a horse, she weeps and cries out because "hir thowt sche saw owyr Lord be

betyn er wowndyd lyk as sche saw in þe man er in þe best."[54] When she meets women

carrying small boys in their arms, "sche schuld þan cryin, roryn, & wepyn as þei sche had

seyn Crist in hys childhode."[55] Even when the women that Kempe meets are carrying

only girls, Kempe is still "so raueschyd in-to þe chilhod of Crist for desir þat sche had for

to see hym þat sche mith not beryn it but fel downe & wept & cryid so sor þat it was

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[53] Kempe, *Book*, 190.

[54] Kempe, *Book*, 69.

[55] Kempe, *Book*, 86.

merueyl to her it."[56] Any "semly" young man, too, brings Christ to Kempe's mind

(chapter 35), as does the sight of a poor mother nursing her infant son (chapter 39).

People are not the only trigger for these "waking visions": rituals for Purification Day

bring to her mind Mary's purification in the temple, as weddings elicit for her the

marriage of Mary and Joseph (chapter 82). Holy sites such as Christ's tomb throw

Kempe into the company of Mary mourning her son's crucifixion and turn Kempe into a

veritable one-woman Corpus Christi cycle as she "performs" her experience of Christ's

suffering and holiness from place to place throughout the Holy Land (chapter 29). At

times the inner becomes so entangled with the outer that one is hard pressed to say

whether the people marveling at Kempe's cries are those in the "outer" world or the

persons in the "inner" one. Given that at one point the apostles themselves, echoing the

censure Kempe frequently receives from people in the "outer" world, "comawndyd

[Kempe] to cesyn & be stille" as she wept at Mary's deathbed, it is not unreasonable to

ask whether it is not Saint John and Mary Magdalene as well as people in the "outer"

world who "wondryd vpon hir, hauyng gret merueyl what hir eylyd" as she cries

vociferously at Christ's burial.[57]

In his examination of the relationship between inner and outer in late medieval

literature, Stephen Medcalf argues that Kempe locates the supernatural not in "the *inner*

in the sense of the 'contents of the human mind,'" but squarely in "the *outer* in the sense

of 'the everyday external world'"; for him, even her meditations are an embodied

experience on a par with weeping, good works, and ritual acts. Allegories, he argues,

better capture "the indeterminateness of boundary between the inner and outer worlds"

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[56] Kempe, *Book*, 200.

[57] Kempe, *Book*, 175, 194.

than does Kempe's literal-minded apprehension of the divine.[58] I propose the counter-

argument that Kempe's *Book* chronicles her gradual transformation from someone who

originally occupies the self-interested position of Levinas's "Same" into someone who

learns to recognize the alterity of the divine Other everywhere around her precisely by

first learning to encounter the divine in her "inner" world and then transferring those

encounters to her "outer" world as well. There is anything but a rigid boundary between

Kempe's inner and outer experiences. The breakdown between them is a necessary step

in her progression toward a recognition of the alterity of the divine Other, despite the

apparently totalizing tendencies of affective devotional practices.

To the extent that affective devotions of the kind that influenced Kempe's

spiritual imagination make God knowable and thereby subsume him within the Same,

they express his nature through what Levinas calls the Said [*le Dit*]—ontological

language that casts the Other as an object to be contemplated and comprehended, a being

to be known through our customary conceptual frameworks. The Said is what, in

Levinas's words, "betrays" the Saying [*le Dire*], the encounter with the Other that

precedes and makes possible the Said: "Saying is communication, to be sure, but as a

condition for all communication, as exposure." It is not communication as "the

circulation of information" (or the Said) but as "the risky uncovering of oneself, in

sincerity, the breaking up of inwardness and the abandon of all shelter, exposure to

traumas, vulnerability."[59] One does not *express* the Saying—one *performs* it repeatedly

in every encounter with the Other. It is what Meffan and Worthington call "a relational

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[58] Medcalf, "Inner and Outer," 119, 123.

[59] Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being, or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1998), 48.

process rather than a fixed relationship; it is movement, not stasis; it reaches toward an

infinite future (of further Saying), rather than recording a past interaction or history (the

Said)."[60]   Affective devotion is premised on the assumption that one can positively

ascribe familiar qualities to God and thereby bring the reader to a keener state of

compassion for Christ's understandable suffering—in other words, that the meditator can

approach God as an object of the Said. Yet these same affective devotional strategies

contain the potential to push the reader out of a comfortably totalizing position relative to

God by requiring the reader's active engagement in the imagined scenes—that is, by

recasting the relationship as an instance of a Levinasian Saying. Simon Critchley

observes that

> when I totalize, I conceive of the relation to the other from some imagined point
> that would be outside of it and I turn myself into a theoretical spectator on the
> social world of which I am really a part, and in which I am an agent. . . . But for
> Levinas, there is no view from nowhere. Every view is from somewhere, and the
> ethical relation is a description from the point of view of an agent in the social
> world, not a spectator upon it.[61]

By compelling the reader to not only *see* the unfolding Gospel stories, but to

imaginatively *participate* in them, affective devotional texts offer up the divine as that

which is found through social relationships in which the reader is personally invested.

The engaged reader does not merely conceptualize God, but experiences his presence

through activities such as accompanying the holy family on their flight into Egypt,

conversing with Christ and his apostles, and weeping with Mary at the foot of the cross.

The reader encounters God not through intellectual conceptualization, but through

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[60] Meffan and Worthington, "Ethics Before Politics," 136.

[61] Simon Critchley, introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, ed. Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 13-14.

emotional openness and vulnerability. Affective devotions also deny the reader the self-assurance of the Same by reminding her that, for all her pains, she is expected to harshly judge her own efforts to feel sufficient compassion for Christ. For example, the narrator in the *Meditations* enjoins the reader "to judge yourself: to accuse yourself, often even to condemn and not let yourself off unpunished" for failures to live up the virtues exemplified in the text.[62] First-person accounts of affective meditations such as Richard Rolle's "Meditations on the Passion" frequently includes similar self-recriminations, as when Rolle, wanting for adequate grief and tears at the Passion, pleads with Mary to share some of hers with him. Affective devotions, then, operate through an inner tension between setting the reader up to "know" God, yet undermining any presumptuous sense of accomplishment in the reader by reminding her that whatever she has done so far is not quite enough. Rather than leading the reader in a straight line to God, such devotions produce an asymptotic relationship between the reader and the divine. Levinas's "Saying" operates at the site of this tension.

In Levinasian terms, Kempe's recurring encounters with the divine in the material realm undermine any impulse to regard Christ through the language of "the Said" by repeatedly placing Kempe in the performative moment of "the Saying." When Kempe sees God in the people and even the animals around her, she finds herself in a face-to-face encounter with the divine Other. Caught by surprise by these epiphanies that interrupt her perception of the quotidian world, startled out of her comfortable apprehension of things by the sudden manifestation of the face of Levinas's destitute

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[62] John of Caulibus, *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, trans and ed. Francis X. Taney, Anne Miller, & C. Mary Stallings-Taney (Asheville, NC: Pegasus Press, 1999), 187. ". . . temetipsum iudicare: et temetipsum accusare, saepe etiam condemnare nec impunitum dimittere." *Meditaciones*, chap. 54, lines 62-64.

widow, orphan, or stranger, Kempe responds in a manner that is as ethical (in the Levinasian sense) as it is dramatic. Not responding at all, merely observing the divine Other there before her, would leave Kempe mired in the position of the Same that grasps the world through the ontological language of the Said; the Other would be reduced to an object of intellectual contemplation. Levinas's Saying, in contrast, "is the fact that before the face I do not simply remain there contemplating it, I respond to it."[63] Kempe hears the summons of the Other and, in this moment of the traumatic calling into account of the Same by the Other, replies with her tears. For all the derision Kempe endures for her vociferous crying, such a response actually takes the process of the Saying to its logical conclusion. The Saying that disrupts the fixity of the Said can not be *stated*, but must be *performed* in repeated encounters with the Other. It is a situation of exposure to the Other in which the self engages the Other in dialogue—the necessary condition for the Said to exist at all—and the situation in which the ethical relationship between the Same and the Other occurs. This Saying is, in Levinas's words, "always betrayed" by the Said; the Other which is beyond ontological categorization can not be approached through ontological language. The problem at hand is very much like the one faced by the apophatic mystics—we must of necessity use language to talk about God, but in doing so we must continually deny the adequacy of our propositional statements by "unsaying" them. Critchley notes that such a desire to push against the limits of language has an ethical point: "It reveals that the ethical saying is nothing that can be said propositionally and that ethics cannot be put into words. Strictly speaking, ethical discourse is nonsense,

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[63] Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, 88.

but it is serious nonsense."[64] Kempe's wailing and tears, taken by many as signs of

madness and irrationality, express her own experience of reaching the limits of

language's ability to capture her experience of God in the world and indicate that for her

God has become an Other to be met rather than an entity to be known. For example,

when Kempe sees the small boys held by their mothers in chapter 35, she does not hold

them at arm's length, as it were. That is, she does not contemplate them from a distance,

turning them into objects of intellectual curiosity that embody an idea of Christ. She does

not *discuss* them in terms of the Said; she *encounters* them in the Saying. This meeting

makes Christ present to Kempe as if she were suddenly faced with Christ himself. She

may describe the incident as best she can after the fact, but a conversion of this encounter

into the language of the Said can only capture the experience partially and obliquely.

Each similar moment of contact with Christ in the world lifts Kempe out of the restrictive

conceptual bounds of the Said and renews the on-going dialogue that she has with Christ

in an act of Saying. Taken by surprise by such encounters with an alterity that exceeds

the ability of language or the intellect to do it justice, Kempe pursues this dialogue bodily

thought the medium of her tears.

     If the Said must constantly be "unsaid" in order to disrupt the settling of

perception into the totalizing tendencies of the Same, then a response that falls outside of

language altogether, such as Kempe's tears, would seem to avoid the problems inherent

in the Said. Tears become the language through which Kempe opens up a discourse with

the divine Other and acknowledges her responsibility to him.[65] Christ in his suffering

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[64] Critchley, *Cambridge Companion to Levinas*, 19.

[65] For other discussions of Kempe's tears as a kind of discourse, see Harding, "Body into Text," Lochrie, *Translations*, chap. 5; Dhira Mahoney, "Margery Kempe's Tears and the Power Over Language," in

and vulnerability, present to Kempe in the wounded horse and nursing child, turns the

destitute face of the Other toward her, calling to her to respond, to give of herself, to

reach out and not turn away in silent self-interest. Kempe's plenteous tears signify her

attempt to express both the "vnspekabyl lofe"[66] that she feels for God and her experience

of an encounter with an alterity that can not be rendered in words. She responds with her

body, drawing on her own corporeality to acknowledge the bodily suffering of Christ.

This very corporeality is in fact necessary for achieving an ethical relationship with the

Other. The ethical subject, far from being an idealized, disembodied ego, is a being of

flesh and blood, a being whose vulnerability rests in sensibility. "Only a subject that eats

can be for-the-other," says Levinas.[67] That is, only a being who suffers hunger can

appreciate what it means to give bread from out of one's own mouth, and can truly

understand the depth of his obligation toward the Other.   To be for-the-Other entails

giving to the Other not only from one's heart but from one's very material existence—

the food from one's mouth, the clothes from one's back, the goods from one's home.

Kempe's gift of tears to the Other is likewise from her very body, signifying her

acknowledgement of the profundity of her debt to Christ for the sufferings of his body.

However, her tears do not just signal an encounter with alterity; they introduce alterity

into Kempe herself, for Kempe can not control her tears. Try as she might to restrain

herself and spare herself the criticism of her fellows, "þe mor þat sche wolde labowryn to

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Margery Kempe: A Book of Essays, ed. Sandra McEntire (New York: Garland Publishing Company, 1992), 37-50; Sandra McEntire, *The Doctrine of Compunction in Medieval England: Holy Tears* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 1990).

[66] Kempe, *Book*, 69.

[67] Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, 74.

kepe it in er to put it a-wey, mech þe mor xulde sche cryen & þe mor lowder."[68] Her

body is "Other" to herself, driven by impulses resistant to her will and beyond her

understanding. The continuity and self-presence of the Same is disrupted from within as

well as from without, making it all the more vulnerable to the approach and call of the

Other. The physicality and materiality that some of her critics use to denigrate her quest

for God in fact contributes to her ability to realize an ethical relationship with Christ in

his manhood.

In the face of this overwhelming love and mercy that can not be adequately

comprehended by mere human effort, Kempe encounters an alterity that defies being

understood within the limits of the Same. We no longer have the Kempe who once

smugly assumed that she loved God more than he loved her. Now we have the Kempe

who testifies that "þei I wer slayn an hundryd sithys on a day, ȝyf it wer possibyl, for thy

loue, ȝet cowde I neuyr ȝeldyn þe þe goodnes þat þu hast schewyd to me."[69] It is hardly

for want of signs of God's love and favor that Kempe constantly recriminates herself.

God has already told her that he has forgiven all of her sins and that she will never see

either hell or purgatory (chapter 5), and that she will sit at Christ's knee in heaven

(chapter 8). Mary has assured her, too, that she will go to heaven (chapter 73), and Christ

himself tells her that if it were possible for him to weep with her, "I wold wepyn with þe,

dowtyr, for þe compassion þat I haue of þe."[70] Kempe's repeated assertions of her

inadequacy prompt God to finally ask her point-blank, "A, dowtyr, how oftyn-tymes haue

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[68] Kempe, *Book*, 70.

[69] Kempe, *Book*, 184.

[70] Kempe, *Book*, 82.

I teld þe þat thy synnes arn forȝoue þe & þat we ben onyd to-gedyr with-owtyn ende?"[71]

Despite all the signs Kempe receives that indicate that she is in God's favor, she shows that she has also absorbed the other main lesson of affective devotion—one's efforts to repay the debt are never enough. One's responsibility for the Other can not be "paid up"; one is perpetually subject to the summons of the Other. In Levinasian terms, she doubts the adequacy of her response to the Other, the "Here I am" that establishes her own subjectivity as a Christian. She confesses to God that she wishes she "cowde louyn þe as mych as þu mythist makyn me to louyn þe. Ȝyf it wer possibyl, I wolde louyn þe as wel as alle þe seyntys in Heuyn louyn þe & as wel as alle þe creaturys in erth myth louyn þe."[72] At God's mention to her of Mary Magdalene "þe whech louyd me rith hyly," Kempe immediately reacts with an attestation of self-doubt: "A, blysful Lord, . . . I wolde I wer as worthy to ben sekyr of thy lofe as Mary Mawdelyn was," implicitly asserting that her love for God does not measure up to Mary Magdalene's.[73] Nor does she believe that all her penances mitigate her debt, for if she saw a creature being punished, "sche xulde thynkyn þat sche had ben mor worthy to be chastisyd þan þat creatur was for hir vnkyndnes a-geyns God."[74] In all of these scenes, we see Kempe experiencing Meffan and Worthington's "necessary failure of the imagination," the failure to completely grasp the Other within the conceptual (and, here, the affective) powers of the Same. The affective tradition of the *Meditations* may require her to construct an image of God as a "Said" with vivid, familiar attributes, but what ultimately

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[71] Kempe, *Book*, 50.

[72] Kempe, *Book*, 184.

[73] Kempe, *Book*, 176.

[74] Kempe, *Book*, 172.

results from Kempe's engagement with that tradition is an approach to God through a performative "Saying," a repeated exposure of herself that incessantly disrupts her attempts to rest in a secure sense of her worthiness before God. Kempe's *Book* is a chronicle of her repeated response of "here I am" to God. It is an encounter that both founds her subjectivity and unsettles it, forcing her to confront the ungraspable alterity of the transcendent which she meets in everyday guises in both her material and her imaginative worlds. The affective practice of familiarizing God has ultimately led Kempe to a place that is not the "*chez soi*" of the Same but the no-place or "utopia" where Saying occurs.[75]

However, although Kempe begins to respond to God in a manner that, in Levinasian terms, is ethical, her means of establishing this relationship ironically reduces her fellow Christians to objects absorbed into "the Same." In learning to see God as the unencompassable Other, she fails to learn to see the people around her in the same way. Throughout her *Book*, Kempe relates to her fellow townspeople, travelers, and strangers not as Others whose alterity startles her out of her own complacency—that is, not as ends in themselves—but as handy means for helping her to grow closer to God. She fails to make the turn toward the human neighbor as Other that Levinas says the desire for the transcendent divine prompts us to make. In *Of God Who Comes to Mind* Levinas argues that God is not merely another Other, but is an Other whom we approach with desire as if for a beloved. However, desire by definition can not be satisfied by the acquisition of the object of desire, especially when that desire is directed toward a divinely transcendent Other: "Affected by the Infinite," says Levinas, "Desire cannot go to an end to which it

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[75] Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being*, 45.

might be equal; in Desire the approach creates distance [*éloigne*] and enjoyment is only the increase of hunger."[76] The Infinite that we desire is not susceptible to an "absorption into immanence" and so "the Desirable, or God, must remain separated in the Desire; as desirable—near yet different—Holy. This can only be if the Desirable commands me [*m'ordonne*] to what is the nondesirable, to the undesirable *par excellence*; to another. The referring to another is awakening [*éveil*], awakening to proximity, which is responsibility for the neighbor to the point of substitution for him."[77] In other words, the Infinite, or "the Good," awakens me to my responsibility for the Others in the world with me. It "inclines the movement it calls forth to turn it away from the Good and orient it toward the other, and only thus toward the Good. . . . He [God] is Good in this very precise, eminent sense: He does not fill me with goods, but compels me to goodness, which is better than to receive goods."[78] Desire for God manifests itself through solicitude for the Other next to me, the Other whose face summons me to approach in a spirit of giving, to respond in the spirit of "*me voici*."

The idea that love of God ineluctably directs us toward love of the neighbor finds eloquent expression in the Middle Ages by Walter Hilton in his "Epistle on the Mixed Life," a text that explicitly reminds its readers that endless meditation upon Christ's manhood is no substitute for actually going out into the world and tending to those members of Christ's body—the poor, the sick, the marginalized—whom the reader is obliged to help as a fellow Christian. Hilton likens meditation on Christ's humanity as an

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[76] Emmanuel Levinas, *Of the God Who Comes to Mind*, trans. Bettina Bergo (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 68.

[77] Levinas, *Of the God Who Comes to Mind*, 68.

[78] Levinas, *Of the God Who Comes to Mind*, 69.

adornment of the "head" of the body of Christ, and argues that adorning the head at the

expense of tending to the "feet" of the body does no real honor to God: "Neuer-þe-lesse

if þou thynke . . . it ware a fayrere Offyce to wyrchipe þe heuede of hyme, as for to be

alday Ocupiede in meditacyone of his manhede, þan for to go lawere to oþer werkes and

make clene his fete, as for to be besy bathe in thoghte and dede aboute þe helpe of thyne

euencristene in tyme: me thynke noghte so as vnto þe."[79] Every member of the body of

Christ is obliged to assist those who need his or her help, and to do so in a spirit of

humility and generosity:

> Bot his fete and his oþer membris, that ere thi sugetts and thyne euencristyne, ere
> sumtyme euyll arrayede and had nede for to be lukede to and holpyne by þe, &
> namely sene *þou erte bowndene þare-to*; and for thaym will he cun the mekill
> thanke, if þou meekly and tenderly luke þame. For þe mare lawe seruyce þat þou
> duse to þi lorde, for lufe of hyme, vn-to any of his membris whene need and
> rightwysnes askes, *with a glade meke herte*, the mare pleseȝ þou hyme.[80]
> (emphasis added)

The suffering of others places an ethical demand on those who are in a position to assist

them through acts of charity that entail no payment in return. Responding to the suffering

of others should be motivated purely by the recognition of the pre-existing obligations

that bind together all the members of Christ's body.

But when we closely consider those scenes in which Kempe witnesses the

suffering of her fellow Christians, it is hard to avoid the impression that Kempe's

reactions to that suffering are persistently self-serving and self-absorbed. When faced

with the poverty or illness of another person, Kempe consistently reads that suffering as

saying something not about the suffering person, but about her own sanctity. In other

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[79] Walter Hilton, "Epistle on the Mixed Life," in *Yorkshire Writers: Richard Rolle of Hampole and His Followers*, vol. 1, ed. C. Horstmann (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1999), 272-273.

[80] Hilton, "Epistle on the Mixed Life," 273.

words, she consistently reduces the suffering of the human Other to "the Same." For example, Kempe visits the home of a poor woman in Rome, and sees this woman nursing her son while "syttyng ful of sorwe & sadness."[81] As so often happens to Kempe, she is instantly transported into a scene from Christ's life: "Þan þis creatur brast al in-to wepyng, as þei sche had seyn owr Lady & hir sone in tyme of hys Passyon, & had so many of holy thowtys þat sche myth neuyr tellyn þe haluendel, but euyr sat & wept plentyvowsly a long tyme. . . ." But what of the sorrow and sadness *of the poor mother*? It is as if Kempe looks straight through the actual, material suffering before her in order to gaze upon the echoes of Christ's life that she perceives behind it. The mother and son lose their specificity. They become for Kempe just another metaphor for Christ and Mary, a sign of something other than themselves. When Kempe leaves the woman's home and steps out into the street, she "sey meche pouerte a-mong þe pepyl," but instead of seeing this poverty as contributing to a suffering that she, as a fellow Christian, is bound to alleviate as best she can, Kempe "thankyd God hyly of þe pouerte þat sche was in, trostyng þerthorw to be partynyr wyth hem in meryte."[82] It is as if Kempe sees the suffering, but not the suffering human Other. She reads the poverty as a means for her to enhance her own spiritual "merit," not as a condition that calls her to responsibility for her neighbor. Rather than turning outward toward the human Other, Kempe keeps turning inward toward her own spiritual state and her personal relationship with Christ. Other people and their suffering exist as signs of this state and this relationship, but not as suffering beings in and of themselves that awaken in Kempe her responsibility toward the human Other.

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[81] Kempe, *Book*, 94.

[82] Kempe, *Book*, 94.

This same erasure of the human Other occurs in even more dramatic fashion in the scene in which Kempe cures a new mother of post-partum madness. This nameless mother's suffering closely copies Kempe's own mental and emotional breakdown after the birth of her first child. Shortly after becoming a new mother, Kempe suffered from a secret, unspoken sin that gnawed at her conscience until "þis creatur went owt of hir mende & was wondyrlye vexed & labowryd wyth spyritys." She had visions of devils with gaping mouths "al inflaumyd wyth brennyng lowys of fyr as þei schuld a swalwyd hyr in." She "slawndred hir husband, hir frendys, and her owyn self; sche spak many a repreuows worde and many a schrewyd worde" and injured herself so badly that she was "bowndyn & kept wyth strength boþe day & nyght þat sche myght not haue hir wylle." Kempe's madness is relieved only when Christ visits her for the first time, appearing at her bedside as a young, handsome man who assures her that although she has forsaken him, he has never forsaken her. As a result of this visitation, "þe creature was stabelyd in hir wyttys & in hir reson as wel as euyr sche was be-forn . . ."[83] Years later, Kempe finds herself in the same situation, but with the roles reversed. The woman's husband tells Kempe that his wife has gone "owt hir mende": "[S]che knowyth not me ne non of hir neyborwys. Sche roryth & cryith so þat sche makith folk euyl a-feerd. Sche wyl boþe smytyn & bityn, & þerfor is sche manykyld on hir wristys."[84] He beseeches Kempe to do something to bring his wife back to her senses. As soon as Kempe appears at the woman's bedside, the new mother "spak to hir sadly & goodly & seyd sche was ryth welcome to hir," although she still lashes out at anyone else who tries to approach her. After many visits and prayers by Kempe, "God ʒaf hir hir

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[83] This quote and all preceeding quotes in this paragraph are from Kempe, *Book*, 7-8.

[84] Kempe, *Book*, 177-178.

witte & hir mende a-ʒen. . . . It was, as hem thowt þat knewyn it, a ryth gret myrakyl."[85]

In contrast to the earlier scene of the poor nursing mother in Rome, here Kempe actually does intervene in order to alleviate the suffering of another. But the consciously crafted parallels between Kempe's own story of madness and the young mother's temporary insanity insist on our seeing in this latter scene a role reversal meant to highlight Kempe's own Christ-like sanctity. The young mother, like the poor woman in Rome, loses any particularity she might have had, and is made to play the role of a young Kempe. She is Kempe's double, not her own person. There is no evidence that Kempe sees in the woman an alterity that calls Kempe out of herself and interrupts her desire to interpret everything around her as a sign of her own special relationship with God. The suffering Other here is absorbed into Kempe's narrative about her own path to holiness; she is used as a means to a larger end not of her own making. Kempe can hardly be said to enact an "ethical" response to her suffering.

Even the suffering of Kempe's aged husband is recast as being not about him but all about Kempe herself. When her husband injures himself in a fall and is no longer able to look after himself, Kempe moves in with him again to be his caretaker. It is not an easy task, for "in hys last days he turnyd childisch a-ʒen and lakkyd reson."[86] Her nursing duties "lettyd [Kempe] ful meche fro hir contemplacyon þat many tymys sche xuld an yrkyd hir labowr," but she finds the motivation to continue caring for him when "sche bethowt hir how sche in hir yong age had ful many delectabyl thowtys, fleschly lustys, & inordinat louys to hys persone. & þerfor sche was glad to be ponischyd wyth þe

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[85] This quote and the preceeding are from Kempe, *Book*, 178.

[86] Kempe, *Book*, 181.

same persone & toke it mech þe mor esily & seruyd hym & helpyd hym, as hir thowt, as sche wolde a don Crist hym-self."[87] Faced with the reality of her husband's senility, Kempe feels frustration with her caretaker's duties; she does not perform her actions with the "glade meke herte" enjoined by Hilton until after she interprets her situation as a punishment directed specifically at her for the lustful thoughts she entertained about her husband in their youth. Once the situation is all about her perceived need to be chastised for her own sins, she endures it "mech þe mor esily." It seems as if Kempe can not find it in herself to help her husband purely as a suffering fellow human being, and can accept her responsibilities only when she can imagine tending to Christ instead of her husband. Kempe's relationship with Christ and his sufferings has so completely captured her heart and imagination that it interferes with her ability to recognize anyone else as an Other who can not be reduced to a sign of her own spiritual aspirations. Ironically, Kempe's desire to maintain an "ethical" relationship with Christ causes her to absorb everyone and everything else into that single goal. Her fellow human beings and their particular sufferings are all homogenized, so to speak, and made to signify nothing more than the nature of Kempe's relationship with Christ. Although Kempe can open herself up to the alterity of the divine and acknowledge her inability to ever truly comprehend it, she fails to apply that lesson to the human community that she inhabits with its multitude of suffering Others who also call out to Kempe to bear her share of responsibility for them. She succeeds at balancing the "knowable" God of affective devotions with the God who is an ungraspable alterity, but in the process neglects to cultivate an ethical relationship with humanity. The people around her remain invisible as particular suffering Others and

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[87] Kempe, *Book*, 181.

exist for Kempe as little more than signs of the divine Other, the only Other Kempe

seems able to relate to ethically.

Kempe's reformation of herself through devotional practice is thus incomplete.

The affective meditations in which she wholeheartedly engages are meant to instill self-

reflection, not solipsism. But by the end of her *Book*, Kempe seems no closer to

regarding her fellow Christians any more ethically, in a Levinasian sense, than she did at

the beginning. She has achieved only one of the goals of meditative practice—learning

to perceive God-the-transcendent-Other through Christ-the-man. In perceiving both

Christ's divinity and his humanity she has opened herself up to God as she had not been

able to do before. She has broken the egotistical self that thought it could comprehend

God and replaced it with a reformed self that responds to God as to the Levinasian Other.

But meditation is meant to make one a better Christian all around, not just in relation to

God. The effects of the spiritual exercises that take place in the privacy of the

imagination ought to be visible in one's social relations as well. The compassion that one

cultivates in meditations upon Christ is not an exclusive gift to God; one's

"euencristene," as Hilton argues, deserve as much compassion as does Christ in his

manhood. Kempe's failure lies in her inability to make this leap from compassion for

Christ to compassion for her neighbor *as her neighbor*—that is, as an Other in his or her

own right. Her relationship with God ought to direct her outward into her community of

Others, but she can not seem to break free of the pull of the cozy dyadic relationship that

she has forged between herself and Christ, and so everything and everyone around her

becomes in her eyes nothing more than a way of thinking about that relationship. Kempe

certainly perceives herself as exhibiting compassion for her neighbors, but considered in

the light of Levinas's ideas about what constitutes an ethical relationship with the Other, her acts seem more like self-affirmations of her own spiritual worth than responses to an Other who summons her out of her complacency. Had Kempe managed to experience the "necessary failure of the imagination" when faced with her fellow Christians, perhaps she might have avoided the ethical failing that she exhibits toward them. Nevertheless, both Kempe's failures and her successes illuminate for us the complex ethical demands that medieval meditations place upon their readers—demands that challenge the assumption that such meditations were little more than emotionally indulgent narratives, and that give meaning to the affective devotional project.

Chapter 4

Compassion Envy: The Desire for Mary's Tears in the *Quis dabit*

The salvific suffering of Christ's beaten and crucified body provided the

emotional and imaginative core of medieval affective devotional practices that were so

popular among both lay and cleric in Latin and the vernaculars. Meditation upon Christ's

bloody wounds is intended to stir the soul to new heights of compassion for Christ as

man, and to new depths and love for Christ as God who would choose to make such a

sacrifice on our behalf. Meditations, sermons, and prayers by writers such as Anselm of

Canterbury, Bernard of Clairvaux, Aelred of Rievaulx, and Bonaventure promoted the

twelfth-century flowering of these devotions, which later shaped the visions of female

mystics such as Bridget of Sweden, Margery Kempe, and Julian of Norwich, and found

expression in female devotion to the eucharist, especially among the Beguines. Christ's

body, presented in all its exquisite suffering to the meditative reader in devotional works

of prose and verse, in drama, and in the visual arts solicits the meditator's love by first

soliciting his tears. However, there is frequently a second locus of human suffering in the

Passion narratives—the *Mater dolorosa*, the weeping Virgin Mary at the foot of the

cross. Her emotional anguish at witnessing the torture and death of her son parallels

Christ's physical torments and functions as both a model of exemplary compassion for

Christ's Passion, and as a figure worthy of compassion herself. Despite the perceived

equivalencies between the suffering of the mother and of the son (to the point that in the

twelfth century Mary herself was elevated to co-redemptrix of humankind), medieval

readers tended to respond differently to Christ and to Mary depending on their gender.

The work of scholars such as Thomas Bestul, Caroline Bynum, and Elizabeth Robertson

lays out the broad outlines of these differences which derive from medieval assumptions

about women and their spiritual abilities and roles. In this chapter, I draw on their ideas

to examine in detail the complex and shifting gender dynamics in one of the most

influential texts in the *planctus Mariae* genre, the *Quis dabit*. The text, composed by the

Cistercian monk Ogier of Locedio in the late twelfth or early thirteenth century, begins as

a dialogue between Mary and Bernard of Clairvaux about Mary's sorrow at the Passion,

and delineates Bernard's attempts to acquire from Mary, the maternal plentitude of

sorrow, some of her tears to compensate for his own insufficient compassion for Christ.

However, Mary is now glorified in heaven and no longer weeps; the ideal of the

"masculine" glorified body awaiting holy women in the afterlife presents a conflicting

vision of female spiritual perfection that thwarts Bernard's attempt to spiritually perfect

himself by learning to suffer like a woman. The *Quis dabit* maps out Bernard's

resolution of this conflict. It requires the narrative displacement of Mary's own voice

and her reduction to a woman defined entirely by her tearful, overwrought compassion

for her son. In the end, Mary must be recast in exclusively "female," bodily terms in

order to be spiritually useful to men like Bernard. This chapter considers the *Quis dabit*

and its appropriation of typically feminine spiritual markers of sanctity. I begin with

some general differences between the affective practices of men and women when they

meditate upon the sufferings of Christ and Mary.

  The commonplace that in the Middle Ages "man" is to "spirit" as "woman" is to

"flesh" informs much of the gender symbolism in medieval religious practices.

Scholastic debates about the nature of men and women drew upon a variety of medical

and natural philosophy texts from the classical period that were introduced to the Latin

West as part of a wave of translations of Greek and Arabic works during the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth centuries. Two of the most influential of these were Aristotle's *Historia animalium* and *De generatione animalium* which set the terms for much of the thinking about male and female natures during the Middle Ages. Unlike Galen, who proposed that both men and women contribute an active seed in the process of reproduction, Aristotle postulated that only men provide the "principle of soul" to the developing child while women supply the matter for the child's body: "The female always provides the material, the male that which fashions it, for this is the power that we say they each possess, and this is what it is for them to be male and female."[1] Although the child obviously requires a body and therefore the mother can be said to make a necessary contribution to reproduction, the nature of her contribution associates her with matter and passivity in contrast to the father's more perfect spirit and activity. The female, in other words, is an imperfect version of the male: ". . . for just as the young of mutilated parents are sometimes born mutilated and sometimes not, so also the young born of a female are sometimes female and sometimes a male instead. For the female, is, as it were, a mutilated male. . . ."[2] Woman's deficiencies carried over to the qualities of her character as well:

> With all other animals, the female is softer in disposition [than the male], is more mischievous, less simple, more impulsive and more attentive to the nurture of the young; the male, on the other hand, is more spirited than the female, more savage, more simple and less cunning. The traces of these characteristics are more or less visible everywhere, but they are especially visible where characters is the more developed, and most of all in man. The fact is, the nature of man is the most rounded off and complete and consequently in man the qualities above referred to

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[1] Aristotle, "The Generation of Animals," in *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, vol. 1, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), II.4.737a29, 738b20-22.

[2] Aristotle, "The Generation of Animals," II.3.737a25-28.

are found most clearly. Hence woman is more compassionate than man, more easily moved to tears, at the same time is more jealous, more querulous, more apt to scold and to strike. She is, furthermore, more prone to despondency and less hopeful than the man, more void of shame, more false of speech, more deceptive, and of more retentive memory.[3]

Such arguments produced the familiar medieval dichotomies that described men's and women's natures: active/passive, spirit/matter, and completeness/imperfection.

We see these beliefs reflected in medieval devotional texts written for female audiences. For example, Robertson notes that the *Ancrene Wisse* and the Katherine Group, written in the early thirteenth century with a readership of anchoresses in mind, make some basic assumptions about female physiology and spirituality that determine the nature of the devotional practices they recommend. Given their soft, compassionate natures and propensity for tears, women were thought to be well-suited to engage in emotional, tearful meditation on Christ's Passion. Women's psychological constitution was also perceived as suiting (or relegating) them to meditation on concrete, bodily images since, being more closely allied with matter and less rational than men, they had less capacity for abstract contemplation of God and needed to focus instead on Christ's human form. It was no great stretch to tie these Aristotelian views into Paul's assertion in I Corinthians 11:3 ("But I would have you know that the head of every man is Christ: and the head of the woman is the man: and the head of Christ is God") to thereby develop the argument that since man, created in God's image, desires God, and woman, created from man's rib, desires man, that woman's desire for God should be directed toward Christ in the form of a man.[4] These ways of thinking about women's natures produced

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[3] Aristotle, "The History of Animals," IX.1.608b1-12.

[4] Elizabeth Robertson, *Early English Devotional Prose and the Female Audience* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990), chap. 1 and 3.

the generally accepted assumption that women would and should grow spiritually through the affective devotional practices that arose in the eleventh and twelfth centuries in the writings of Benedictines such as Anselm of Canterbury and Cistercians such as Bernard of Clairvaux, and reached its fullest flowering under the Franciscans during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

Women were clearly avid participants in these devotions. Records of medieval book ownership demonstrate that devotional texts were read and circulated quite widely among women, and that the multiplication of vernacular religious texts during the later Middle Ages coincides with "the growth in lay piety among an increasingly literate and leisured middle class, with especially sharp gains among the women of this class."[5] The fact that these female readers were regularly presented with the misogynistic assumptions described above does not, of course, mean that they always unquestioningly accepted them; Anne Clark Bartlett makes the case in her book *Male Authors, Female Readers* that devotional texts offered a variety of less damning "counterdiscourses" which the reader could draw upon for images through which to construct her religious identity. However, those readers who did accept their "fleshly" status as it is implicitly presented in the texts did not necessarily see it as a liability. Caroline Bynum notes that although medieval women internalized the idea that to be woman is to be "of the body" as opposed to the spirit, this did not hinder them from seeing themselves as being very much "in God's image" and therefore as able as any man to imitate Christ.[6] The bodily

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[5] Thomas Bestul, *Texts of the Passion: Latin Devotional Literature and Medieval Society* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 67. See also Anne Clark Bartlett, *Male Authors, Female Readers: Representation and Subjectivity in Middle English Devotional Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), chap. 1.

[6] Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 261. See also Bynum, *Fragmentation and*

illnesses and ascetic practices endured by female mystics, often construed by modern readers as efforts to punish or deny the body, argues Bynum, "were rather *imitatio Christi*, an effort to plumb the depths of Christ's humanity at the moment of his most insistent and terrifying humanness-the moment of his dying."[7] (This conceptual link between the female body and the body of Christ also helps to explain why more medieval women than men were attracted to devotion to the eucharist—a disparity so wide that "the eucharistic miracle almost seems a female genre"[8]—for in the communion wafer women could touch and taste the very flesh and blood of Christ with which they so fervently identified.) If "woman" is intrinsically associated with the body, and Christ assumed human flesh in order to redeem humanity, then by this logic "woman" comes to represent "humanity" itself in its broadest, non-gendered sense, encompassing the fallen, corporal, human nature of both men and women. In their flesh, they embody that physical nature that all humans share and which, in the Incarnation, was indissolubly joined with divinity in Christ. Women's very "lowliness"—their suffering, bleeding carnality—makes them supremely fit to embody the Passion and sacrifice of Christ, and to represent the humanity which that sacrifice redeemed.

This analogy worked both ways for medieval writers: if women's bodies were Christ-like, then Christ's body could, in a sense, be seen as female. Images of a maternal, nursing Christ appear during the Middle Ages not only in writings by women mystics such as Julian of Norwich, well-known for the maternal Christ of her *Showings*, but

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Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion (New York: Zone Books, 1992), 155.

[7] Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, 131.

[8] Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, 122.

especially in the writings of men, notably Cistercians such as Bernard of Clairvaux and

Aelred of Rievaulx, and of Benedictines such as William of St. Thierry and Anselm of

Canterbury. In these texts, a nurturing Christ gathers souls like a hen gathers chicks

under her wing (as in Anselm's prayer to St. Paul) and nurses them from his breast-like

wounds (Bernard's sermons on the *Song of Songs* and Aelred's *De institutione*

inclusarum) which also serve as openings into Christ's "womb" where the soul can flee

for spiritual refuge (William's *Meditativae orationes*).   Whereas female mystics

imagined themselves becoming the dying Christ on the cross without making themselves

"male" in the process, male devotional writers often drew on feminine imagery to

characterize themselves in relation to this nursing, birthing, nurturing Christ. This variety

of *imitatio Christi* might be expressed in mild metaphorical terms—as when an abbot

imagines himself as a "mother" who spiritually nurtures the monks in his charge, or it

might appear in more arresting imagery, such as the priest described by Caesarius of

Heisterbach who "swelled in mystical pregnancy" as he consecrated the host.[9] Certainly,

women could also identify with a maternal Christ whose Passion metaphorically mirrored

the pains of childbirth, but for men to see themselves in these feminine terms required

them to imagine themselves as something they were not. That is, in order to express their

relationship with Christ, they needed to "supplement" their male, rational, spiritual status

with female, corporeal, maternal imagery. Bynum describes this as a "symbolic

reversal"[10] through which men renounce their male power and status in order to assume

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[9] Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 268. For a detailed treatment of the medieval attraction to a maternal
Jesus, see Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley:
University of California Press, 1982), 110-169.

[10] Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, chap. 10.

the spiritual virtues associated with the meek and lowly who, Christ promised, shall inherit the earth. Therefore, men symbolically "lower" themselves in order to spiritually rise towards God. Hence, while women maintain their status as women even when they imitate a male Christ, men in their *imitatio Christi* frequently imagine themselves as the female "other" who embodies the "natural," physical, flawed humanity that counters their own male, "cultural," rational selves.

What happens to such gender imagery, however, when the suffering body encountered in meditation is not Christ's on the cross, but Mary's at the foot of the cross? Mary's emotional anguish commands nearly as much attention in devotional writings of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries as does Christ's physical torment. Marian devotions and meditations on Mary's grief multiplied in prose, poetry, drama, and the visual arts as part of the larger flowering of affective devotional practices of the high Middle Ages. Devotions to Mary flourished in a myriad of artistic forms, including literature (lyrics, carols, and legends), drama, and the visual arts (painting, altarpieces, woodcuts, and sculpture). Meditations and poems reverently dwell on biblical events such as the Annunciation, Nativity, and Passion, on apocryphal events such as the Assumption, and on Mary's role as maiden, mother, mediator, and queen of heaven. Much of this material derives from non-biblical sources since Mary actually receives little attention in the scriptures. Aside from a handful of passing references, her most prominent roles are in the Annunciation (Luke 1:26-38), Visitation (Luke 1:39-56), Nativity (Luke 2:1-7, Matthew 1:18-2:23 including the Flight into Egypt), and her conversation with the young Jesus in the temple (Luke 2:41-51). Only John mentions her presence at the Crucifixion (John 19:25-27), but he merely places her at the foot of the cross without ascribing to her

any of the fervent maternal sorrow for which this scene became so well-known during the high and later medieval period. Apocryphal accounts of Mary's life filled in many of the blanks left by the biblical record. Early version of these texts such as the *Gospel of James* (c. 150) and the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew* (eighth or ninth century) provided details of Mary's birth, childhood, and marriage to Joseph; the appearance of such stories much later in the *Golden Legend* (c. 1260) and the *Cursor Mundi* (c.1300) attests to their enduring popularity and to the abiding curiosity about Mary's life that inspired the production and circulation of these legends over several centuries.[11]

One might expect women to identify with Mary as mother more than men would—if women could so closely join themselves with a metaphorically maternal Jesus, how much more intimately could they realize a spiritual kinship with Mary, an actual woman? In practice, however, women found little in Mary's experiences that could relate to their own as real, embodied women. According to the richly detailed accounts of her life in the apocrypha, Mary conceived without sex, gave birth without losing her virginity or suffering any pain, did not share in original sin, and was spared the trauma of physical death. Her exaltation above the labors and sufferings of real women left female religious little with which to identify except by contrast. Mary was the paragon of chastity, humility, obedience, and motherly compassion. As Marina Warner notes, Mary "was feminine perfection personified, and no other woman was in her league."[12] Rather than relate to Mary as the exemplum of ideal womanhood—an ideal which no woman

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[11] For more on the variety of forms which Marian devotion took in the Middle Ages, see Hilda Graef, *Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1985) and Karen Saupe, ed., *Middle English Marian Lyrics*, TEAMS (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1998), 1-31.

[12] Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1976), 159.

could hope to realize—women generally honored Mary for being the physical conduit

through which Christ attained his humanity . Hildegard of Bingen, Mechtild of

Magdeburg, Catherine of Siena, and Margaret of Oingt all regarded Mary as the

necessary source of Christ's physical nature; she is the *tunica humanitatis*, the tunic of

humanity, that clothes Christ's divinity and makes possible Christ's bodily sacrifice on

the cross.[13] This understanding of Mary derives partly from Aristotelian theories of

human reproduction that regard women as merely providing the "matter" for the fetus,

but also has theological roots that stretch back to the second and third centuries. In the

face of Docetic arguments of the time that Christ's humanity was not real but only

apparent, Church Fathers, such as Tertullian in book three of his *Against Marcion,*

emphasized that Christ's birth from a fully human Virgin Mary guaranteed that he, too,

shared in that humanity without which the Incarnation and the salvation of humankind

can not truly have occurred.[14] Mary as the provider of Christ's body, therefore, performs

a crucial role in the scheme of salvation, and for female mystics devotion to her is

frequently a prelude to devotion to the suffering humanity of her son. In fact, Bynum

notes that

> the humanity of Christ was a more prominent emphasis in women's piety than
> was devotion to the Virgin. This is not to say that Mary was unimportant to
> women. . . . Some women saints do, it is true, see themselves in visions swooning
> with Mary before the cross. But *all* women saints swoon on the cross with Christ
> himself. The reverence for Mary that we find in women mystics is less a
> reverence for a "representative woman" than a reverence for body, for the bearer
> and conduit of the Incarnation.[15]

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[13] Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 265.

[14] For more on the Docetic arguments and their influence on Marian doctrines, see Jaroslav Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries: Her Place in the History of Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), chap. 3.

[15] Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 269.

In this regard, female mystics may be said to imitate Mary by being the literal embodiment of the female flesh that both stands for all humanity and enabled the Passion to occur. They revere Mary for making it possible for them to contemplate and imitate the incarnated Christ.

Male writers, too, regard Mary as the source of Christ's humanity for the same physiological and theological reasons described above, and share with women a reverence for Mary as the medium through which the Christ came into the world. However, Mary plays a more varied role in the devotions of men than in those of women, typically as the personification of a variety of feminine ideals and spiritual functions associated with women. In contrast to female mystics who thought of their own female bodies as representing humanity as a whole, and unlike Christ who could be regarded as standing in for all humankind in his sacrifice on the cross, Mary herself functions as a narrower symbol of "the feminine" rather than "the human." As Jaroslav Pelikan notes, Mary "has provided the content of the definition of the feminine in a way that [Christ] has not done for the masculine; for . . . it was 'man' as humanity rather than merely 'man' as male that he was chiefly said to have defined. . . ."[16] Mary, on the other hand, does define "woman" for many medieval writers, typically as a kind of Platonic ideal. For example, she often serves as a model of exemplary "feminine" virtues such as humility, piety, and obedience in both secular and religious contexts. The author of *The Book of the Knight of La Tour Landry* exhorts his daughters to imitate Mary, who is an example "to euery good lady that is yonge, and to euery good woman to be devoute in the

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[16] Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries*, 1.

praier, and in the seruice of God, and to loue clennesse, & to be humble and charitable."[17]

These same virtues that make a young woman into a proper lady and wife also elevate a

religious woman in the eyes of God. Nicholas Love, in his *Mirror of the Blessed Life of*

Jesus Christ, advises his reader to "take ensaumple of Marie" and imitate her habit of

withdrawing from the company of men and engaging in solitary prayer "þat þou mowe be

worþi angeles presence."[18] Interestingly, it is not only when men write *to* women that

they advise them to imitate Mary. When they write *about* women they often characterize

their subjects as consciously modeling themselves on Mary, even though women who

write about their own religious lives usually do not present themselves in that way.

Bynum notes the "rather curious fact" that "Mary is not really as important as one might

expect in women's spirituality," yet "we frequently find that it is male biographers of

women who stress the theme of woman's imitation of Mary (and of other women)."[19]

Catherine Mooney provides an example of this phenomenon in her analysis of the

biographies of Francis of Assisi and his follower Clare. Both Francis and Clare make

clear in their own writings that each one sought to follow Christ. Both revered Mary

primarily as "mother, God-birther, and Christ-carrier,"[20] but always placed her in a

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[17] Geoffroy de la Tour de Landry, *The Book of the Knight of La Tour Landry*, ed. Thomas Wright, rev. ed., EETS o.s. 33 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1868; repr. New York: Greenwood Press, 1969), 148. Chapters 109-111 are devoted to Mary's appropriateness as a model for women's behavior; see also the end of chap. 85.

[18] Nicholas Love, *Nicholas Love's Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ: A Critical Edition Based on Cambridge University Library Additional MSS 6578 and 6686*, ed. Michael G. Sargent (New York: Garland Publishing, 1992), chap. 3, lines 26-28. See also chap. 2 for a discussion of Mary's virtues as a woman of God.

[19] Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 269.

[20] Catherine M. Mooney, "Imitatio Christi or Imitatio Mariae?: Clare of Assisi and Her Interpreters," *Gendered Voices: Medieval Saints and Their Interpreters*, ed. Catherine M. Mooney (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 66.

subordinate position to Christ himself. They each held that one may imitate Mary best by also being a "Christ-carrier" by bearing Christ within one's heart. Yet hagiographic and iconographic representations of Francis emphasize his likeness to Christ, while those of Clare emphasize her imitation of Mary's virtue and humility and downplay her own *imitatio Christi*. To some extent, Mooney argues, this may be accounted for by the Franciscans' growing desire to disassociate themselves from the Poor Clares; by aligning Clare and her female followers with Mary, they rhetorically separated her from Francis and his male followers. But the internal politics of the Franciscan order does not by itself entirely account for this rhetorical move, for Mooney notes that both Hildegard of Bingen and Elisabeth of Schönau met with similar treatment at the hands of hagiographers who played up the saints' likeness to biblical women, while the women in their own writings tended to compare themselves to biblical men.[21] Although typical Marian virtues such as humility, piety, and chastity are Christian virtues that happen to be embodied by Mary (as well as by Christ), Mary's womanhood renders her virtues especially "feminine" and therefore makes her, in the eyes of many male writers, a particularly suitable model for other women to follow.

Paradoxically, it seems that women were expected to model themselves on holy women in this life so they could "become men" in the next life. Although women tended to speak of themselves as female or as androgynous in relation to a male God, male writers, who engaged in symbolic reversals of their own, imagined women undergoing

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[21] Mooney, "Imitatio Christi or Imitatio Mariae?" 71. See Barbara Newman, "Hildegard and Her Hagiographers: The Remaking of Female Sainthood" (16-34) and Anne L. Clark, "Holy Woman or Unworthy Vessel? The Representations of Elisabeth of Schönau" (35-51), both in Mooney, *Gendered Voices*.

their own more literal reversals in the afterlife. As a reward for their piety, women could

expect to shed their deficient female bodies and spend eternity in more perfect male form.

Robertson notes that "the resurrected body was viewed essentially as 'complete,' as one

that neither cries or bleeds. Such a view implies that the body is, in an Aristotelian sense,

essentially male."[22] Even Mary is promised such a transformation in the apocryphal

Gospel of Thomas:

> Simon Peter said to them, "Let Mary leave us, for women are not worthy of life."
> Jesus said, "I myself shall lead her in order to make her male, so that she too may
> become a living spirit resembling you males. For every woman who will make
> herself male will enter the kingdom of heaven."[23]

The problem with this promise, though, from the perspective of affective devotional

practice is that Mary's power as a religious figure depends on her being a *woman*,

especially a loving, weeping mother. A "masculine," glorified Mary who sheds no tears

hearkens back to the early Ambrosian image of the stoic Virgin standing at the foot of the

cross, her foreknowledge of and faith in the Resurrection preventing her from dissolving

into the vociferous lamentations and copious tears which become the defining features of

the later *Mater dolorosa*. As meditative devotions come to rely ever more on affective

means of cultivating love for God, representations of Mary become increasingly

emotional in turn. But, as we will see when we turn to the *Quis dabit*, the belief in the

masculinization of the virtuous female soul after death as expressed in the glorification of

Mary in heaven co-exists uneasily with the affective need for Mary to be a well of tears.

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[22] Robertson, *Early English Devotional Prose*, 194. For more on women spiritually becoming men, see
Bynum *Fragmentation and Redemption*, 166-167 and Bartlett 37.

[23] *Gospel of Thomas* v.114, in *The Nag Hammadi Library*, ed. James M. Robinson (New York: Harper
Collins, 1990), 138.

This will particularly be a problem for Bernard, as the speaker in the *Quis dabit*, when he seeks to engage in his own symbolic reversal with the mother of God.

When male authors write about their own relationship to Mary, the tenor is quite different from texts in which they describe women's relationship to her. In her role as a pure maiden, Mary often appears not as a template of exemplary behaviors, but rather as a courtly lady whose unparalleled beauty and worthiness evokes the passionate devotion of a writer whose language echoes the longing in secular love poetry. We see an example of this in Carleton Brown's collection of thirteenth century lyrics. The speaker, who thanks Mary for her part in bringing Christ into the world and prays for her protection, closes the poem with a stanza of tender yearning reminiscent of the pleas of secular lovers:

> Moder, loke one me
> wid þine suete eyen,
> reste & blisse gef þu me,
> mi lehedi, þen ic deyen.[24]

One look of favor from his "lehedi," whose "suete eyen" can grant him the "blisse" that he desires, is all the speaker requires before he dies. Save for the reference to Mary as mother in the first line, this stanza could easily have come from any number of secular love lyrics. The same language appears in Anselm's "Prayer to St. Mary (3)":

> Desiring to be always with you, my heart is sick of love,
> my soul melts in me, my flesh fails.
> If only my inmost being might be on fire
> with the sweet fervour of your love,
> so that my outer being of flesh might wither away.
> If only the spirit within me

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[24] Carleton Brown, ed., *English Lyrics of the XIIIth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1932), 42 (lyric #27). For more on Mary as courtly lady, see Douglas Gray, *Themes and Images in the Medieval English Religious Lyric* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1972), chap. 5; and Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex*, chap. 9.

> might come close to the sweetness of your love,
> so that the marrow of my body might be dried up.

> Vestro continuo amore langueat cor meum, liquefiat anima mea, deficiat caro mea. Utinam sic viscera animae meae dulci fervore vestrae dilectionis exardescant, ut viscera carnis meae exarescant! Utinam sic intima spiritus mei dulcedine versti affectus impinguentur, ut medullae corporis mei exsiccentur! [25]

What we see in these two examples are instances of three of the major elements of courtly love outlined by R. Howard Bloch: "the nostalgia of the lover for a distant ideal," "the glorification of suffering," and "the woman as a source of redemption."[26] The fact that Marian lyrics echo secular courtly conventions is nothing new to scholars of medieval religion or literature, but in the case of the *Quis dabit* this elevation of Mary to a glorified, redemptive ideal is more than just an unproblematic adaptation of secular forms to religious ends. When combined with other commonly held assumptions about women's nature and religious capacities, the courtly paradigm for the relationship between a man and his lady produces in the *Quis dabit* a shifting power relationship between Bernard and Mary whose tensions derive in part from the conflict between imagining Mary as a distant ideal and seeing her in one of her most prominent roles as a loving and generous mother.

Mary as mother embodies all the ideals of maternal behavior as male writers imagined them. Bynum notes that for writers such as Bernard of Clairvaux, Aelred of Rievaulx, Francis of Assisi, and Henry Suso, "*mothering* meant not only nurturing but

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[25] Anselm of Canterbury, "Prayer to St. Mary (3)," in *The Prayers and Meditations of Saint Anselm with the Proslogion*, trans. Sister Benedicta Ward (New York: Penguin, 1973), lines 297-304. The Latin text is from Anselm of Canterbury, "Oratio ad sanctam Mariam pro impetrando eius et Christi amore," in *S. Anselmi Cantuariensis Archiepiscopi Opera Omnia*, ed. F. S. Schmitt (Edinburgi: Thomam Nelson et Filios, 1946), 3:24, lines 158-162.

[26] R. Howard Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 176-177.

also an affectivity that was needed to complement authority," as well as "union,

tenderness, nurture and nourishment." Motherhood in these texts implies "security,

compassion, nurture, whereas fathering or fatherhood meant authority, instruction and

discipline."[27] Women writers, on the other hand, generally represented motherhood and

fatherhood in less stereotypically gendered and mutually exclusive terms. Both mother

and father show tenderness and nurture their children, and both exercise authority and

administer discipline as necessary.[28] However, in written and visual depictions of Mary

as mother, we typically see a Mary who fulfills the male writers' ideal of a merciful,

forgiving, compassionate woman who loves all mankind as her own children. Anselm

proclaims in his "Prayer to St. Mary (3)" that

> the mother of God is our mother.
> The mother of him in whom alone we have hope,
> whom alone we fear,
> is our mother.
> The mother of him who alone saves and condemns
> is our mother.

> O beata fiducia, o tutum refugium! Mater dei est mater nostra. Mater eius, in quo
> solo speramus et quem solum timemus, est mater nostra. Mater, inquam, eius qui
> solus salvat, solus damnat, est mater nostra.[29]

As a merciful and indulgent mother, Mary will not turn away a true penitent who seeks

her intercession with Christ. Painted representations of the Madonna of Mercy visually

dramatize Mary's willingness to take sinners under her cloak to shelter them from God's

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[27] Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, 158-159.

[28] Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption*, 160-161.

[29] Anselm of Canterbury, "Prayer to Mary (3)," lines 241-246; "Oratio ad sanctam Mariam," lines 127-129.

stern judgment, making her a refuge for the sinner too terrified of God's justice to appeal to him directly.[30]

Bernard, for example, emphasizes that although Christ is the true mediator between God and humankind, we need Mary's intercession because of our fear of Christ the Judge. Mary is kind, approachable, and non-judgmental, making her the ideal "mediator with that Mediator" ("mediatore ad Mediatorem iustum").[31] (The fact that male writers at times interpreted this unstinting mercy through the uncharitable framework of traditional beliefs about women's deficient rational faculties, seeing "somewhat sentimentally . . . as an apotheosis of female weakness and un-reason Mary's love for souls and her mercy toward even the wicked who superstitiously revered her,"[32] demonstrates that even the mother of God, despite her sanctity, is first and foremost a *woman* and can not escape being perceived through the arguments about gender that color the textual discourse about all women.) Elsewhere, Bernard likens Mary to an aqueduct through which the living waters of Christ flow to the Church on earth, and describes her as the first rung of the ladder on which the sinner's plea is raised to God: "Hasten to Mary. . . . Certainly the Son will heed the Mother, and the Father will heed

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[30] For an example of such an image, see Elizabeth A. Johnson, "Marian Devotion in the Western Church," in *Christian Spirituality: High Middle Ages and Reformation*, ed. Jill Raitt (New York: Crossroad, 1988), 407. Rosemary Woolf argues that "in the new devotional temper an appeal to Mary was a sign of sincere remorse, for, once the idea of a hierarchy of appeal had been accepted, a direct and immediate invocation of Christ might suggest a presumptuous unawareness of one's own sinfulness rather than a theologically correct recourse to the only and ultimate source of forgiveness. The idea of a proper fear, preventing a direct plea to Christ, underlies all the Marian penitential lyrics. . . ." Rosemary Woolf, *The English Religious Lyric in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968), 119.

[31] *Dominica infra octavam Assumptionis B. V. Mariae sermo*, PL 183:429-430. Cited in Sandro Sticca, *The Planctus Mariae in the Dramatic Tradition of the Middle Ages*, trans. Joseph R. Berrigan (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1988), 56.

[32] Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 262.

the Son."[33] These images of Mary's intercessory activity find their justification not only

in theological arguments about Mary's role in the salvation of humankind, but also in

beliefs regarding women's ability to mediate between the mundane and transcendent

realms. Mooney points out that in saints' lives we find women bridging these two worlds

far more often than men do, and that while men's sanctity derives from their "'this-

worldly' offices and achievements, such as preacher, priest, or learned theologian, holy

women's sanctity derived more from their relatively easy access to the other world

through visions, locutions, and divinely infused forms of knowledge." Because women

were thought of as being particularly blessed with this special shaman-like ability, "Mary,

biological mothers, and other women often played pivotal roles in men's conversions"

among the saints that Mooney studies; women, on the other hand, tend to rely on their

own intercessory abilities and do not turn to other women, including Mary, to provide

them this connection to the divine.[34]

Mary's most emotionally evocative role, however—that of the *Mater dolorosa*—

is grounded in a different belief about the nature of women: that their bodies, being more

cool and moist than men's, predisposed them to tearful responses to Christ's passion.

Aristotelian definitions of woman that connect her to matter, sense perception, and the

emotions provide the language and imagery for representing women's spiritual

experiences and, in the age of affective meditations on the Passion, for imagining Mary's

experience, as a woman, at the foot of the cross. Just as Mary is the epitome of female

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[33] "Ad Mariam recurre. . . . Exaudiet utique Matrem Filius, et exaudiet Filium Pater." Bernard of Clairvaux, *In Nativitate Beatae Mariae*, in *Sancti Bernardi Opera* vol. 5, ed. J. Leclercq and H. Rochais (Rome: Editiones Cistercienses, 1968), 276-277, 279. The translation is my own.

[34] Mooney, "Imitatio Christi or Imitatio Mariae?" 69.

virtues and motherly love, so she is the paragon of tearful compassion and anguish

memorialized in the genre of the *planctus Mariae*. The *planctus* appears in a variety of

forms, usually as a lyric poem, but sometimes as part of a larger prose narrative or drama

of the Passion. Sometimes Mary delivers her lament as a monologue, sometimes as a

dialogue between herself and Christ, the cross, or St. Bernard. Regardless of the

rhetorical shape it takes, the purpose of the *planctus*, as George Keiser notes, is "to

inspire a meditator to share in the sorrows of Mary and thereby to achieve a pathetic

union with both Mary and her Son."[35] Like other affective devotional texts, it brings the

reader closer to God through intense feelings of compassion and pity, except that in the

planctus Mary's emotional suffering rather than Christ's bodily torments provokes the

reader's compassion. Indeed, in his gloss on Luke 2:35 Albert the Great regarded the

suffering of Christ and Mary as distinct yet equivalent: "And the sword will pass through

your very own soul. Indeed, the Passion which the Son suffered in the body, the mother

sustained within the soul, while maternal passion is stirred during the torture of the Son's

body."[36] But in the end, of course, Mary is not Christ, and the male writers who were

particularly attracted to meditation on Mary's suffering did not simply dwell on her

sorrows in order to cultivate their own compassion as they might if they were

contemplating Christ's torments. Instead, they participate in a variety of relationships

with her in her roles as remote courtly lady, generous maternal mediator, and tearfully

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[35] George R. Keiser, "The Middle English *Planctus Mariae* and the Rhetoric of Pathos," in *The Popular Literature of Medieval England*, ed. Thomas J. Heffernan, vol. 28, Tennessee Studies in Literature (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985), 168.

[36] "Et tuam ipsius aminam pertransibit gladius. Passionem enim quam Filius in corpore pertulit, intus in anima sustinuit mater, dum in cruciatu corporis Filii maternus affectus contorquetur." Latin text cited in Sticca, *Planctus Mariae,* 25 from M. M. Desmarais, *S. Albert le Grand: Docteur de la médiation mariale* (Paris and Ottawa, 1935), 71. The translation is my own.

distraught woman—relationships that play out through Mary some of the conflicting

feminine ideals considered above. Underlying these shifting relationships is a

recognition of Mary as an incarnate plentitude of feminine sorrow and tears that men both

lack and desire to acquire from her so that they can in turn offer them to God on their

own spiritual behalf.

Meditations upon Mary's suffering, like the other ways of writing about Mary that

we have considered so far, appealed more to men than to women in the Middle Ages.

Bestul observes that when women such as Angela of Foligno, Bridget of Sweden, Julian

of Norwich, and Margery Kempe compose Passion narratives, Mary is either not present

at all, or assumes only a minor part in the scene. Male writers, such as Anselm of

Canterbury, Bernard of Clairvaux, and Bonaventure, on the other hand, often dwell at

length on the nature and intensity of the sorrows of the *Mater dolorosa*.[37] Anselm's

"Prayer to Christ" is one of the earliest instances of this detailed attention to Mary's

sufferings, and although its elaboration of her sorrows is understated by the standards of

later medieval devotions, it exemplifies the speaker's desire to appropriate Mary's

sorrows for himself so that he may compensate for his own deficiency of tearful

compassion. As Anselm meditates on the Passion, he expresses deep regret that, unlike

Mary, he was not personally present at the crucifixion:

> Why, O my soul, were you not there
> to be pierced by a sword of bitter sorrow
> when you could not bear
> the piercing of the side of your Saviour with a lance?
> . . .
> Why were you not drunk with bitter tears
> when they gave him bitter gall to drink?
> Why did you not share

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[37] Bestul , Texts of the Passion, 119.

<blockquote>
the sufferings of the most pure virgin,
his worthy mother and your gentle lady?
</blockquote>

<blockquote>
Cur, o anima mea, te praesentem non transfixit gladius doloris acutissimi, cum ferre non posses vulnerari lancea latus tui salvatoris? . . . Cur non es inebriata lacrimarum amaritudine, cum ille potaretur amaritudine fellis? Cur non es compassa castissimae virgini, dignissimae matri eius, benignissimae dominae tuae? [38]
</blockquote>

What Anselm wishes for is to experience not his own sorrow, but *Mary's* sorrow. He

wants, like Mary, to feel a "sword of bitter sorrow" pierce his soul, recalling the passage

in Luke commented on by Albert ("Et tuam ipsius aminam pertransibit gladius"). He

desires to share in her unique anguish, even though he can not begin to comprehend the

extent of it:

<blockquote>
My most merciful Lady,
what can I say about the fountains
that flowed from your most pure eyes
when you saw your only Son before you,
bound, beaten, and hurt?
What do I know of the flood
that drenched your matchless face,
when you beheld your Son, your Lord, and your God,
stretched on the cross without guilt,
when the flesh of your flesh
was cruelly butchered by wicked men?
How can I judge what sobs troubled your most pure breast
when you heard, "Woman, behold your son,"
and the disciple, "Behold your mother,"
when you received as a son
the disciple in place of the master,
the servant for the Lord?
</blockquote>

<blockquote>
Domina mea misericordissima, quos fontes dicam erupisse de pudicissimis oculis, cum attenderes unicum filium tuum innocentem coram te ligari, flagellari, mactari? Quos fluctus credam perfudisse piissimum vultum, cum suspiceres
</blockquote>

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[38] Anselm of Canterbury, "Prayer to Christ," in *The Prayers and Meditations of Saint Anselm with the Proslogion*, trans. Sister Benedicta Ward (New York: Penguin, 1973), lines 79-82, 87-91. The Latin text is from Anselm of Canterbury, "Oratio ad Christum, cum mens vult eius amore fervere," in *S. Anselmi Cantuariensis Archiepiscopi Opera Omnia*, ed. F. S. Schmitt (Edinburgi: Thomam Nelson et Filios, 1946), 3:7-8, lines 42-43, 45-47.

eundem filium et deum et dominum tuum in cruce sine culpa extendi et carnem de carne tua ab impiis crudeliter dissecari? Quibus singultibus aestimabo purissimum pectus vexatum esse, cum tu audires: "Mulier, ecce filius tuus," et discipulus: "Ecce mater tua"? Cum acciperes in filium discipulum pro magistro, servum pro domino? [39]

In the closing lines of the poem, Anselm returns to the language of this passage to describe himself as someone who hopes to bring God into his soul through the penance of his tears:

> Lord, meanwhile, let my tears be my meat day and night,
>   until they say to me, "Behold your God,"
> until I hear, "Soul, behold your bridegroom."
>   Meanwhile, let me be fed with griefs,
>   and let my tears be my drink;
>   comfort me with sorrows.
> Perhaps then my Redeemer will come to me,
>   for he is good;
>   he is kind, he will not tarry,
>   to whom be glory for ever.

Sint mihi, domine, interim lacrimae meae panes die ac nocte, donec dicatur mihi: "ecce deus tuus"; donec audiam: "anima ecce sponsus tuus." Pasce me interim singultibusmeis, pota me interim fletibus meis, refolica me doloribus meis. Veniet interea fortasse redemptor meus, quoniambonus est; nec tardabit, quia pius est; "ipsi gloria in saecula" saeculorum, amen. [40]

In these lines, Anselm appropriates a feminized language of religious devotion—the language of tears, especially Mary's tears—but reverses their significance from sorrow to sustenance. Christ's words to John, "Behold your mother," and to Mary, "Woman, behold your son," become for Anselm the hopeful injunctions, "Behold your God," and "Soul, behold your bridegroom." But he can only imagine attaining this redemption by feminizing himself and experiencing the Passion as Christ's mother would. He does not just desire her tears; he implicitly envies her first-hand witnessing of the Passion. We see

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[39] Anselm of Canterbury, "Prayer to Christ," lines 92-108; "Oratio ad Christum," lines 48-55.

[40] Anselm of Canterbury, "Prayer to Christ," lines 182-191; "Oratio ad Christum," lines 93-97.

the same fascination with Mary's first-hand experience in the *Lignum vitae* when

Bonaventure considers Mary at the cross:

> You were present at all these events, standing close by and participating in them in every way. This blessed and most holy flesh—which you so chastely conceived, so sweetly nourished and fed with your milk, which you so often held on your lap, and kissed with your lips—you actually gazed upon with your bodily eyes now torn by the blows of the scourges . . .

> Quae praemissis omnibus praesens assistens et particeps per omnem modum effecta, benedictam illam et sanctissimam carnem, quam tam caste concepisti, tam dulciter aluisti et lacte potasti, tam crebro in tuo reclinasti sinu et labia labiis impressisti, carneo contemplata es visu, nunc ictibus flagellorum divelli, . . . [41]

Not only is Mary right there, "standing close by" and taking part in the Passion "in every

way," but she also has intimate contact with Christ's body which she carried, fed, held,

kissed, and "actually gazed upon / with [her] bodily eyes." As Christ's mother, Mary has

a level of access to Christ's body that rivals that attained by any male priest during

Communion. Her immediate physical relationship with Christ elevates the intensity and

therefore the desirability of her interior suffering. When Mary is spiritually crucified

along with Christ, she too becomes an object of religious desire, but not as a body to be

incorporated into one's own like Christ's in the eucharist. It is instead her anguish and

compassion that offer the hope of redemption to men like Anselm, if only they can find a

way to adequately feminize themselves in order to properly experience what she did.

In his study of Latin texts on the Passion, Bestul argues that the expanded role of

Mary in Passion narratives and the elaborate representation of her sorrowing "can only be

fully understood . . . if it is regarded from a gendered perspective, the product of the male

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[41] Bonaventure, *The Tree of Life*, in *Bonaventure: The Soul's Journey into God, the Tree of Life, the Life of St. Francis*, ed. and trans. Ewert Cousins (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1978), 152. The Latin text is from Bonaventure, *Lignum vitae*, in *Doctoris Seraphici S. Bonaventurae Opera Omnia*, ed. Studio et Cura PP. Collegii a S. Bonaventura (Ad Claras Aquas [Quaracchi]: Collegii S. Bonaventurae, 1898), 8:79 (sec. 28).

imagination." One of the traits of this male imagination evident in such narratives is "a certain curiosity about and fascination with the idea of female suffering . . .; one senses that here is unknown terrain to be explored, understood, and consequently, perhaps, managed if not controlled."[42] Perhaps also a terrain to be inhabited, for the particularly female suffering represented by Mary is, as we have seen, something that male writers apparently desire to endure themselves. It is a suffering not so much of the body as of the soul. "The specifically interior quality of female suffering," says Bestul, "together with that projection onto the female of a special capacity for suffering . . . , may be positively understood as the feminization of suffering, a project that should be associated with the feminized body of Christ in the later medieval devotional tradition." Passages in which the narrator wonders on the depth of Mary's suffering and wishes to share in it seem to Bestul to "express implicitly a wistful and not very deeply submerged longing for feminization."[43] I argue that this longing for feminization is an example of Bynum's "symbolic reversal," that is, of a man symbolically assuming feminine qualities in order to appropriate for himself some of the virtues and spiritual abilities typically associated with women, such as humility, maternal compassion, the ability to mediate between the mundane and divine realms, and the authority that comes from having first-hand encounters with God (enjoyed by visionaries such as Julian of Norwich and Bridget of Sweden, and, of course, by Mary at the foot of the cross). When a man describes himself in feminine terms, says Bynum, he does so "to express his renunciation or loss of 'male' power, authority, and status. He [becomes] woman, as Eckhart said, in order to express

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[42] Bestul, *Texts of the Passion*, 121.

[43] Bestul, *Texts of the Passion,* 124-125.

his fecundity, his ability to conceive God within."[44] When men like Anselm describe

themselves as if they were Mary, I argue, they are seeking to adopt the "female" traits

associated with her to symbolically reverse their own status and draw closer to God.

Mary is not so much a person as a bundle of potent, gendered, religious symbols. She is

especially an embodied abundance of tears that male writers seek to appropriate in order

to amend their own lack of the same. However, acquiring those tears is not a matter of

simply imagining oneself in Mary's place, for like Anselm in his "Prayer to Christ," male

writers express frustration at the fact that they were *not* actually present at the Passion,

and that they do *not* share Mary's tears. The *Quis dabit* opens with the speaker attesting

to these same frustrations. As the work unfolds, the speaker's role evolves from that of a

humble supplicant in dialogue with Mary to the sole voice that appropriates Mary's

narrative in lieu of the tears that, to the speaker's disappointment, she can not give to

him. The work demonstrates how the multiple rhetorics of Mary—as mother, courtly

lady, intermediary, and tearful woman—complicate the male speaker's relationship with

the mother of God as an object of devotion, ultimately causing her voice to be driven out

of her own narrative as the speaker negotiates these complications in his effort to claim

for himself a portion of the sorrow that defines Mary's primary value to him.

The *Quis dabit*, so called from its opening line ("Quis dabit capiti meo et oculis

meis imbrem lacrimarum . . ."), is a Latin prose meditation on Christ's Passion delivered

in a dialogue between Mary and Bernard. It is sometimes referred to as the *Liber de

passione Christi et doloribus et planctibus matris eius* and was likely written in the late

twelfth or very early thirteenth century by Ogier of Locedio (1136-1214), a Cistercian

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[44] Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*, 284.

abbot from northern Italy, although it was frequently attributed in the Middle Ages to

Bernard of Clairvaux. What became known as the *Quis dabit* began as an extract of a

larger work by Ogier, the *Tractatus in laudibus Sancte Dei Genitricis*, which elaborates

upon many details of Mary's life, including her conception and birth, her life in the

Temple, her marriage to Joseph, the Annunciation, and her death and Assumption. The

extract consisting of the Passion and lament achieved a life of its own in an age given to

deeply emotional contemplation of Christ's and Mary's sufferings. Ogier, greatly

influenced by the affective writings of Bernard, composed in the *Quis dabit* what came to

be "one of the central and most influential Latin meditative texts of the thirteenth

century."[45] Its textual history is uncertain at best, but it clearly became a major influence

on devotional writers of the time and remained popular past the end of the Middle Ages.

Bestul, who has counted thirty-five Latin manuscripts of the *Quis dabit* from the

thirteenth through the fifteenth centuries in English libraries, plus twenty-nine printed

editions appearing between 1467-1568, places it "among the most popular religious

works of the entire later Middle Ages," matching or rivaling the *Meditations on the Life*

of Christ in its spread and influence. Its echoes appear in such texts as the *Vita Christi* of

Ludolphus of Saxony, the *Horologium sapentiae* of Henry Suso, the *Passio domini*

Christi of Jan Hus, and the *Vita beatae virginis Mariae et salvatoris rhythmica*, an

anonymous early thirteenth century narrative poem on the lives of Christ and Mary. In

addition, the fourteenth-century *Cursor Mundi* contains a Marian lament on the Passion

that closely follows the one in the *Quis dabit*, and *The Tretyse of Love*, translated from

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[45] C. W. Marx, "The Middle English Verse *Lamentation of Mary to Saint Bernard* and the *Quis Dabit*," in *Studies in the Vernon Manuscript*, ed. Derek Pearsall (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1990), 137-157.

French to English in 1493, similarly models its Passion scene on this earlier Latin work.[46]

Rosemary Woolf attributes some of its wide diffusion to the inclusion of a large part of it

in the *Stimulus amoris*, and credits it with influencing the tone and style of fifteenth

century English complaints of the Virgin.[47] The text, particularly popular in England and

France, survives in versions in Provençal, French, Anglo-Norman, Italian, Dutch, as well

as a number of Middle English adaptations such as *St. Mary's Lamentation to St. Bernard*

on the Passion of Christ (MS Tiber E VII, c.1350), and *The Lamentation that was*

Between Our Lady and Saint Bernard (MS Vernon, late 14th century).[48]

Unlike its medieval readers, modern scholars of medieval devotional literature

have not paid a great deal of attention to the *Quis dabit*. Although there are, as C. W.

Marx observes, "numerous references in modern scholarship to the *Quis dabit* and its

influence,"[49] these references only occasionally achieve article-length and more

frequently, especially in scholarship in English, amount to little more than passing

references within larger discussions of Marian devotions.[50] The most extensive

treatments of the text in English are those of Marx, who has edited the Latin text and

written an article about the relationship between faith and grief in the work, and Thomas

Bestul, who provides a reading of gender in the *Quis dabit* in his *Texts of the Passion:*

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[46] Bestul, *Texts of the Passion*, 52-53, 57-66; see also 210n127.

[47] Woolf, *English Religious Lyric*, 247.

[48] For a modern printing of "St. Mary's Lamentation to St. Bernard," see C. Horstmann, ed., *Yorkshire Writers: Richard Rolle of Hampole and His Followers*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1976), 274-282. "The Lamentation that was Between Our Lady and St. Bernard" is in C. Horstmann, ed., *The Minor Poems of the Vernon Manuscript*, EETS o.s. 98 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1892), 297-328.

[49] C. W. Marx, "The *Quis dabit* of Oglerius de Tridino, Monk and Abbot of Locedio," *Journal of Medieval Latin* 4 (1994): 118n2.

[50] See, for instance, Sticca, *Planctus Mariae*, 102-105, Woolf, *English Religious Lyric*, 247-248.

Latin Devotional Literature and Medieval Society. Marx points out that "little attempt

has been made to document the extent of [the *Quis dabit*'s] influence through a census of

the surviving manuscripts or references in medieval texts," and suggests that the reasons

for such neglect "are no doubt the enormity of the work involved and the lack of printings

of medieval witnesses to the text—the potential researcher has no basis for

comparison."[51] Reliable editions of either the Latin text or a modern English translation

have also been unavailable until the mid-1990s. Until fairly recently the modern reader

had three Latin printed versions to choose from, all of which, Marx notes, are flawed in

one way or another: *Patrologia Latina* 182:1133-42, a version by G. Kribel in 1884, and

a version by W. Mushacke in 1890. Marx published a new Latin edition of the *Quis*

dabit in 1994, based on a thirteenth-century manuscript of the *Tractatus*.   Bestul

provided the first modern English translation of the *Quis dabit* as an appendix to his *Texts*

of the Passion in 1996; this is the version of the text that I use in this chapter.

The *Quis dabit* follows the conventions of the Marian lament in its attentive

concern with the nature and extent of Mary's suffering at Christ's passion.   Indeed, for

some critics the text's value lies entirely in its presentation of "the fathomless amplitude

and intimacy of [Mary's] affliction"; the work otherwise "is characterized by a perception

of the compassion of the Virgin that is devoid of all theological, doctrinal, and

intellectual content."[52] But other critics have discerned in the *Quis dabit* the working out

of various tensions in medieval Christianity. Marx sees in the text an exploration of the

relationship between grief and faith: Mary's extravagant sorrow is, on the one hand, a

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[51] C. W. Marx, "The *Quis dabit* of Oglerius de Tridino," 118.

[52] Sticca, *Planctus Mariae*, 104.

sign of a very human compassion and spiritual grace, but on the other hand it conflicts with a more stoic, faithful acceptance of the crucifixion as a necessary step in the salvation of humankind, as Christ points out to his mother from the cross.[53] Bestul argues that the tension at the heart of the text is not one between grief and faith but between male and female access to and control over Christ's body. Women's visions of the eucharist and of handling Christ's body accorded them a measure of authority over that body that complemented the analogous authority of male clerics. The *Quis dabit* responds to clerical anxiety about women's access to the body of Christ in its depiction of the struggle between Mary and her male companions Joseph and Nicodemus over the disposition of Christ's body after he is taken down from the cross: their struggle over what to do with the body "may be taken as symbolic of the clerical battle between male and female over control of the eucharist, a battle with a narrative outcome that sustains the prevailing arrangements ordained by the male clerisy." In the end, "the excessive female devotion to Christ's crucified body is illustrated, but carefully restrained and finally terminated." [54] My reading of the *Quis dabit* attends to yet another tension, one that arises among the various ways of conceiving Mary's role relative to the male speaker, Bernard, in the text. Mary is the epitome of tearful compassion, one whose sorrow so exceeds that of any other person that she was crucified in spirit along with her son; she is also the generous mother who bridges earth and heaven—will she not share some of her tears with her supplicant? But Mary has been glorified—her body once wracked with anguish no longer cries, and the supplicant's request is necessarily denied.

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[53] C. W. Marx, "The Middle English Verse *Lamentation of Mary to Saint Bernard* and the *Quis Dabit*," 141.

[54] Bestul, *Texts of the Passion*, 137.

The *Quis dabit* works through this conflict by granting Bernard, in exchange for the

bodily language of tears that he is denied, control over the language of Mary's narrative

in which Mary's active roles of mother and mediator are supplanted by her role as

passive sufferer. Mary as transcendent participant in the salvation of humankind

becomes, by the end of the text, Mary the very human woman whose story, like those of

many other holy women, gets told through channels of male clerical authority.

The *Quis dabit* takes the form of a dialogue between Mary and Bernard in which

Mary relates the events of the Passion as an eyewitness. The text opens with Bernard

rhetorically asking,

> Who will give a stream of tears to my head and eyes so I might weep night and
> day until the lord appears to his servant in a vision or a dream to comfort my
> soul? O you daughters of Jerusalem, beloved brides of God, pour out your tears
> together with me until our bridegroom appears to us or meets us, sweet and kind
> in his beauty. . . . Run, daughters; run, holy virgins; run, you mothers pledged in
> chastity to Christ: everyone run to the Virgin who bore him.
>
> Quis dabit capiti meo et oculis meis imbrem lacrimarum, vt possim flere per diem
> et noctem, donec seruo suo dominus appareat visu vel sompno consolans animam
> meam? O vos filie Ierusalem, sponse dilecte dei, vna mecum lacrimas fundite
> donec nobis noster sponsus in sua speciositate benignus et suauis appareat vel
> occurat. . . . Currite, filie, currite virgines sacre, currite matres Christo castitatem
> vouentes: omnes ad virginem currite que genuit ipsum.[55]

Two things are immediately apparent from this opening: first, that the *Quis dabit* is

directed to a female readership that has taken holy orders—the "beloved brides of God"

and "holy virgins" who have "pledged [themselves] in chastity to Christ." The second is

that Bernard desires to experience with them a particularly feminine devotion to God.

Through the shedding of bounteous tears, those quintessentially feminine markers of

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[55] Ogier of Locedio, *Quis dabit*, in Bestul, *Texts of the Passion*, 166-167. The Latin text is from British
Library MS Cotton Vespasian E.i, s. xiv and is provided in Bestul's text (Appendix I). The English
translation is Bestul's.

sanctity, Bernard wishes to receive "a vision or a dream to comfort [his] soul," that is, a

direct, personal experience of God of the kind from which female visionaries derived

their spiritual authority. Bernard, in other words, wants to experience God as a woman

would. By performing such a symbolic reversal, he both humbles himself by feminizing

himself, and reinforces for his audience two common conceptions of appropriate

feminine piety: the shedding of devout tears to elicit a vision of Christ the bridegroom,

and the exemplarity of Mary's behavior which merits the holy virgins' running to her, for

she devotedly nursed and protected the Christ-child and "was among those women who

followed Christ, serving him."[56] After briefly describing Christ's torments on the cross,

Bernard turns to Mary herself and asks her to corroborate what he has said. But before

she can answer, Bernard interjects a lengthy and somewhat peculiar speech in which he

expresses a desire for more than just Mary's confirmation of his account of the Passion.

Throughout this passage, Bernard seems to wrestle with himself over how to

induce Mary to open up to him. After describing the horror of Christ's torture, Bernard

tells Mary, "Nevertheless, forget, I ask, the pain; for I do not doubt that you suffered

then. O would that that sorrow might cleave to my innards every day as it clung to

yours!"[57] In a plea reminiscent of Anselm's prayers to Mary, Bernard wishes to suffer

Mary's sorrow himself, mirroring Mary's affective state—to "suffer like a woman," so to

speak. In order to attain this feminized state, Bernard requires Mary's tears: "Would that

on the day in which you were taken up into heaven to rejoice forever with your son," he

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[56] "[F]uit inter mulieres illas que Christum sequebantur ministrants ei." Ogier of Locedio, *Quis dabit*, in Bestul, *Texts of the Passion*, 166-167.

[57] "Obliuiscere tamen doloris, rogo, quia tunc te passam fuisse non dubito. O vtinam dolor ille sic cotidie inheret visceribus meis, sicut inhesit tunc tuis." Ogier of Locedio, *Quis dabit*, in Bestul, *Texts of the Passion*, 166-167.

declares, "you would show me your tears, so that through them I might know how much bitterness you had when you saw your beloved (alas, alas, too little my beloved!) fixed to the tree with nails, giving up his most holy spirit with his head bowed."[58] A subtle shift has occurred here, as Mary now plays two overlapping roles for Bernard. She is simultaneously the M*ater dolorosa*, the peerless source of holy tears of compassion which Bernard desires in order to compensate for his own lack of the same ("alas, alas, too little my beloved!"), and the perfect, distant lady (already "taken up into heaven") courted by an abject male suitor beseeching her for a token of her favor, her tears. The role of mother—tender, emotional, physical—and that of courtly lady—remote, regal, silent—are not as mutually exclusive as they might at first appear. Julia Kristeva notes that "at the very dawn of a 'courtliness' that was still very carnal, Mary and the Lady shared one common trait: they are the focal point of men's desires and aspirations." In the mid-thirteenth century, "the Virgin explicitly became the focus of courtly love, thus gathering the attributes of the desired woman and of the holy mother into a totality as accomplished as it was inaccessible. Enough to make any woman suffer, any man dream."[59] Indeed, Bernard's dream of the courtly Virgin is enhanced by her simultaneous role of generous mother, for she is then the lady who hears her lover's lament and is presumably guaranteed to fulfill it.

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[58] "Vtinam die quo assumpta fuisti in celum, vt in eternum cum tuo gauderes filio, michi lacrimas tuas indicasses, quo per illas cognoscerem quantum tibi amaritudinis fuit, cum Iesum dilectum tibi—heu, heu, parum dilectum michi—clauis in lingo confixum, capite inclinato suum exalare spiritum uideres sanctissimum." Ogier of Locedio, *Quis dabit*, in Bestul, *Texts of the Passion*, 166-167.

[59] Julia Kristeva, "Stabat Mater," in *Tales of Love*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 245.

But Bernard's dream is troubled by the implications of another quality that defines Mary—she is now glorified in heaven, emotionally removed from this vale of tears. He continues:

> But I ask that the words that I say might not move you, although even rocks ought to be sundered by them. Whoever, whether reigning above or wandering on earth below, could restrain his tears, when he heard or considered in his mind, how he was made the reproach of men, the very lord of angels (wretched me, why do I not weep?), and the son of God the father is made a thing to be despised by the people [Ps 23.6]? Nevertheless, may you rejoice greatly with great joy, now that you are glorified by him in heaven, who was fixed in your mind most bitterly by nails of a most holy death.

> Sed peto ne te moueant verba que dico, cum tamen saxa deberent scindi ad illa. Quis vncquam, regnans in celo sursum, vel peregrinans in terra deorsum, audiens uel mente pertractans, quomodo est factus obprobrium hominum, ipse dominus angelorum—miser ego, quare non ploro?—et abiecto plebes factus est filius dei patris, quis poterit lacrimas continere? Verumtamen tu gaude gaudio magno valde, ab ipso nunc glorificata in celis, que in mente clauis amarissime fuisti confixa piissime mortis.[60]

On the one hand, Bernard does not wish for Mary to suffer from hearing his description of Christ's torments; she has suffered enough and deserves to rejoice in her glorified state, spared the sheer affective weight of the events of the Passion that would make even the very rocks weep. No one, "whether reigning above or wandering on earth below," can help but shed tears at the thought of Christ's anguish, except for the emotionally empty Bernard. This realization of the profundity of his affective failure compels him to rethink his earlier wish that Mary be spared any further sorrow, for he immediately calls out:

> Yet, I beseech you, pour out for me those tears which you had at his passion, and, so they might flow more copiously, let us exchange words with each other concerning the passion of your son, my lord and God. Tell me, I beg, the true sequence of events, you who are virgin and mother of the highest trinity.

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[60] Ogier of Locedio, *Quis dabit*, in Bestul, *Texts of the Passion*, 166-169.

> Michi tamen obsecro lacrimas illas infunde, quas ipsa habuisti in sua passione, et, vt id affluat larguis, de passione filii tui dei et domini mei ad inuicem conferaramus. Narra michi, te flagito, seriem veritatis, que mater es et virgo tocius summe trinitatis.[61]

Suddenly it is Mary's turn to speak of the Passion, and specifically for the purpose of producing tears that will enhance Bernard's spiritual well-being. The back-and-forth movement of the speaker's mind can be loosely paraphrased as, "I do not want you to relive your pain, but if only I could have your tears! But do not let my words move you to renewed sorrow. You should rejoice in heaven—but I still want your tears. So let us discuss the Passion in order to make them flow all the more freely." The speaker's dilemma arises out of his specific need to acquire tokens of womanly compassion—Mary's tears—while acknowledging that Mary is now glorified and therefore "masculinized" as in Jesus' promise from the *Gospel of Thomas* cited earlier. Mary breaks the bad news to him in the next lines:

> She responded: "What you seek inspires compunction and is very sorrowful; but because I have been glorified, I cannot weep. You, however, write with tears those things which I have pondered with great pain."
> To whom I said: "I greatly wish to weep, for nothing would please me more; but I am a wretch with a stony heart, and I cannot weep."
>
> Illa respondet: "Illud quod queris conpungitiuum est et magni doloris; sed quia iam glorificata sum, flere non possum. Tu tamen cum lacrimis scribe ea, que cum magnis doloribus ipsa perpensi."
> Cui inquam, "Flere peropto, sed quia nichil aliud libet, sed miser ego: cor lapideum habens, flere non possum."[62]

In his quest for tears the speaker comes up empty all around—neither Mary nor he have the ability to cry, Mary because of her glorification, the speaker because of his emotional barrenness.

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[61] Ogier of Locedio, *Quis dabit*, in Bestul, *Texts of the Passion*, 168-169.

[62] Ogier of Locedio, *Quis dabit*, in Bestul, *Texts of the Passion*, 168-169.

Like every desire for an ideal plenitude that erases all sense of incompleteness,

this desire for Mary's tears is bound to be ultimately unrealizable. The crux of the

problem is that Bernard desires tears to complete his spiritual experience of feminine

suffering, yet Mary, the paragon of femininity, can not provide them. Mary's perfection

in heaven has made her an "imperfect" or "unnatural" woman who can not offer Bernard

that sign of sanctity so intimately associated with holy women. Her glorification has

stripped her of the womanly tears for which the *Mater dolorosa* is known and which

align the maternal Mary with "the unnameable that one imagines as femininity,

nonlanguage, or body." Milk and tears, argues Kristeva, are "the privileged signs of the

Mater dolorosa" and function as "metaphors of nonspeech, of a 'semiotics' that linguistic

communication does not account for." Mary, who in both the Bible and in devotional

literature is often more spoken about or spoken to than speaking in her own voice,

communicates most forcefully through Kristeva's nonlinguistic semiotics of the body.

Even when Bernard invites her to "exchange words" about the Passion with him, the

point of the verbal discourse is "so [her tears] might flow more copiously." But now the

Virgin Mother who "occupied the tremendous territory on this and that side of the

parenthesis of language"[63] can only talk about her tears, not shed them. By living up to

the ideal of the glorified body, she loses the tears that made her the ideal of maternal and

womanly compassion.

When Bernard realizes that Mary can not fulfill his desire, he abandons his quest

for this feminine nonspeech of the body and instead requests Mary's words about the

Passion: "Queen of heaven, mother of the crucified, my lady, grant what you command

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[63] Kristeva, "Stabat Mater," 235, 249, 250.

and provide what I desire: *let my lady speak*, for your servant hears. *Tell me*, mother of

the angels, if you were in Jerusalem when your son was captured and bound, then

dragged and led to Annas?"[64] At this point, Mary's narrative begins and immediately

focuses on that which Bernard wished to acquire—Mary's "language" of tears. Mary

affirms that she was in Jerusalem when Jesus was captured: "When I heard these things,

I came weeping to my lord, my son, by whatever course I could. . . ." When she looked

upon his beaten, bloodied body, "[her] spirit failed, and there was in [her] neither sense,

nor voice, nor sound." Other women accompanied her, "weeping over him as though

their only child. Among these was Mary Magdalene, who wept more than all the rest,

except for me. . . ."[65] This is the Mary outside of the parenthesis of language, a woman

who "was tormented by such great sorrow and sadness in death that it could not be

expressed in speech," only non-verbally through her body. Tears become this Mary's

voice: "My voice had nearly gone, but I uttered sighs of sorrow and moans of grief. I

wanted to speak, but sorrow broke off the words. . . . I wept while speaking, and I spoke

while weeping."[66] The narrative process of narrowing Mary's role to just that of a tearful

woman whose inarticulate wailing displaces any other public voice she might have begins

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[64] "Regina celi, mater crucifixi, domina mea, da quod iubes et prebe quod cupio; quia audit seruus tuus, dicat domina mea. Dic, mater angelorum, si in Ierusalem fuisti, quando captus fuit filius tuus et vinctus, et ad Annam tractus et ductus?" Ogier of Locedio, *Quis dabit*, in Bestul, *Texts of the Passion*, 168-169. Emphasis is mine.

[65] "Quando hec audiui, gressu qualicumque potui, et vix potui, ad dominum meum, filium meum, veni plorans. . . . [D]efecit spiritus meus, et non erat michi sensus, neque vox, neque sonus. Erant mecum et mee sorores et alie femine multe pangentes eum, quasi vnigenitum. Inter quas erat Maria Magdalene, que super omnes, excepta me, plorabat. . . ." Ogier of Locedio, *Quis dabit*, in Bestul, *Texts of the Passion*, 168-169.

[66] "Tanto dolore et tristicia uexabar in morte, quantus non posset explicari sermone. . . . Vox mea fere pertransierat omnis, sed dabam pro gemitibus suspira doloris. Volebam loqui, sed dolor verba rumpebat. . . . Flebam dicendo, et dicebam plorando." Ogier of Locedio, *Quis dabit*, in Bestul, *Texts of the Passion*, 170-171.

here, ironically, with her own words. When Mary does muster the strength to speak to

her son, all she can do is beg him to take her onto the cross with him or, if he wishes her

to live, to give her guidance for her now rudderless life. The counsel he offers is

probably not what Mary expected, for he provides a very doctrinal answer to a very

human question. He discounts her emotional anguish and even implicitly chides her for

it. His death is necessary for salvation to occur, he tells her, and therefore is nothing to

be sad about: "How can what pleases the father be displeasing to you, o sweetest mother?

. . . You know very well whence I have proceeded and where I have come from. Why,

therefore, are you saddened if I ascend to the place whence I descended?"[67] Jesus shifts

the focus from the mother–son relationship and his role in Mary's life to the father-son

relationship and his larger role in the salvation of humankind. Mary's all-too-human

grief is out of place in this larger scheme of things and so needs to be circumscribed by a

male voice of spiritual authority who has the last word on the significance and value of

female tears.

     Unlike Marian lyrics in which Mary and Christ sustain a dialogue about the

emotional and spiritual implications of the crucifixion,[68] the *Quis dabit* gives us no

insight into Mary's response to Christ's advice, for her voice disappears from the text

altogether. The narrator does not remark on this disappearance. Rather, he continues

Mary's story in his own voice as if Mary had never been there at all. We learn that "the

lord looked at John and said: 'Behold your mother'. . . . He said few more words. Those

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[67] "Quod placet patri, quomodo displicet tibi, o dulcissima mater?. . . Bene scis vnde processi et ueni. Quare igitur tristaris, si ascendo vnde descendi?" Ogier of Locedio, *Quis dabit*, in Bestul, *Texts of the Passion*, 174-175.

[68] See, for instance, lyrics #33, 36, and 48 in Saupe, *Middle English Marian Lyrics*.

two beloved ones [i.e. Mary and John] did not stop pouring out tears. Those two martyrs were silent, and could not even speak for sorrow."[69] Mary's first-person story of the Passion has suddenly become Bernard's third-person story about Mary at the Passion. Once Mary's own lamenting, tearful discourse is short-circuited by Christ's stoic reply from the cross, we never hear from her again; the narrative now belongs to male speakers—first Christ, then Bernard. Rhetorically, the *Quis dabit* begins to resemble the compositions known as *De compassione Beatae Mariae*, which Sandro Sticca distinguishes from the *planctus Mariae* proper as "a different means of poetical probing of the Virgin's lament." The *planctus*, Sticca asserts, presents the reader with "an imaginative vision of the *Virgo moerens*" that makes an effort "to capture the inward movements of the soul of the Virgin and to express them sorrowfully and tragically by the mournful lyricism of her own words." Mary "expresses in her own voice the immediacy of her agony, so that from an artistic representation we reach an instantaneous perception of her lament." A work of the *De compassione* type, on the other hand, tends to be more informative and didactic, and displays "a certain detachment, a certain distance from the incomparable and unique reality of a direct contemplation of [the] scene by means of the words of the Virgin." Mary's lament is "controlled by the omnipresent devout author" who "diminishes the profound power that a presentation in the first person would have emphasized." The theme of such a work is less Mary's own sorrow than it is the reader's compassion for Mary, and could well be defined the *Compassio animae devotae super contritione et dolore Beatae Mariae Virginis*, which,

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[69] "Inde Iohannem intuitus dominus ait: 'Ecce mater tua'. . . . Ipse ad hec pauca dixit. Illi duo dilecti semper lacrimas fundere non cessabant. Tacebant isti martires ambo, et pre dolore immo loqui non pterant." Ogier of Locedio, *Quis dabit*, in Bestul, *Texts of the Passion*, 174-175.

Sticca notes, is the title of a lyric of this very genre from the fifteenth century.[70] At the

moment that Mary's voice is silently supplanted by Bernard's, when the narrative

displaces Mary from an "I" to a "she," the *Quis dabit* takes on some of the features of this

variant of the traditional *planctus*. Bernard, the "omnipresent devout author" from this

point onwards, assumes control of Mary's story and thereby distances the reader from

both Mary and the events in which she participated. Mary, stripped of her speaking role,

becomes an object of devout consideration to be pondered and spoken about from the

perspective of one with clerical authority. Bernard no longer seems interested in

feminizing himself as he did at the outset. The ideal source of the feminine tears that

would have spiritually made him a "woman" has failed him. Since he can not claim the

feminine authority of holy tears, he will claim for himself the masculine authority of the

clerical voice that shapes and validates the story of a holy woman's encounters with God.

If he can not acquire sufficient compassion through being a woman in spirit, he will

acquire it as best he can by restoring Mary to the weeping mother that he needs her to be

by means of the narrative that he tells about her. Bernard's goal at the beginning of the

Quis dabit was to weep for Christ as Mary did; now, in the fashion of the *De*

compassione, his goal is to cultivate his compassion for Mary's sorrows instead.

     After describing the sorrows of John and Mary, Bernard focuses his attention

solely on Mary's anguish in an extended monologue by the end of which Mary's inner

turmoil has been thoroughly foregrounded and repeatedly emphasized:

> The mother felt and feels the pains of Christ. That virgin who gave birth suffered
> the sword of sorrow. The wounds of the dying Christ were the wounds of the
> mother; the pains of Christ were cruel torturers in the soul of the mother. The
> mother was torn to pieces by the death of her loved one. The mother was struck
> down in her mind with the point of a weapon with which the wicked slaves had

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[70] All quotes are from Sticca, *Planctus Mariae*, 85-86.

pierced the limbs of Christ. She was one whom great sorrow held. Great sorrows grew in her mind; raging cruelly within, they could not be poured outside. The sorrow of the offspring put to the sword the soul of the mother. In the flesh of Christ she paid the debt of death, which was heavier for the soul of the mother than to die herself.

Mater senciebat, et sentit Christi dolores. Que virgo peperit, gladium est passa doloris. Christi morientis vulnera matris erant; Christi dolores aeui fuere tortores in anima matris. Mater erat laniata pignoris morte. Mente mater erat percussa cuspide teli quo membra Chrsti serui foderunt iniqui. Ipsa enim erat, quam dolor magnus tenebat. In mente eius creuerant magni dolores, nec poterant extra refundi, intus atrociter seuientes. Dolor nati matris animam gladiabat. In carne Christi soluebat debitum mortis, quod grauius erat quam mori anime matris.[71]

In this passage Bernard recreates the desired *Mater dolorosa*, a woman defined by—

indeed, one who personifies—emotional pain. Through his narrative, she is again the

incarnation of the perfect feminine sorrow that Bernard seeks. She is the mute Mary

whose story must be related by others, for "she who had conceived by the holy spirit had

no voice. Sorrow truly had carried off her strength."[72] This pre-glorified Mary is

likewise a very physical Mary whose bodily torment is on display just as much as her

emotional anguish is. The weakness of her voice mirrors the feebleness of her body as

she attempts to touch her dead son still on the cross: "She raised herself from the ground

to touch her beloved, so that she might in this way soften the sting of her sorrow, at least

to some extent. And because she could not touch, the virgin limbs were thrown down to

the ground and dashed together." Impelled by love, she tries to rise to her feet, but,

"overwhelmed by martyrdom, she was forced back and fell to the ground."[73] This entire

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[71] Ogier of Locedio, *Quis dabit*, in Bestul, *Texts of the Passion*, 174-177.

[72] "Et que sancto <spiritu> conceperat, vox illi non erat. Dolor enim vires abstulit." Ogier of Locedio, *Quis dabit*, in Bestul, *Texts of the Passion*, 176-177.

[73] "[S]e eleuat a terra tangere dilectum, vt sic saltem doloris sui aliquatenus demulceat aculeum. Et quia tangere nequibat, membra virginea ad terram collisa iaciuntur. . . . [S]ed dolore sauciata, martirioque defossa, terram relisa petebat." Ogier of Locedio, *Quis dabit*, in Bestul, *Texts of the Passion*, 178-179.

section narrated by Bernard exemplifies "the consistent working out of the story of a tortured and victimized woman as seen from the dominant male point of view" that Bestul describes as a common feature of Passion narratives in which Mary's sorrow is "relentlessly anatomized and probed" through "voyeuristic and invasive strategies, which taken to their extreme can be humiliating and degrading." Such narratives express a "male fascination with a woman tormented, passive, and frequently . . . literally immobilized by suffering," and "irretrievably reduce, limit, and therefore confine the female role by defining it solely in terms of a single dimension or characteristic, the capacity to endure suffering." [74] By thus limiting Mary, Bernard restores to her the "natural," feminine capacities of holy women—anguished compassion and tears—which thus make such women useful to men who, through symbolic reversal, seek to symbolically appropriate for themselves those spiritual strengths and virtues that those feminine capacities signify.

Christ dies, and Mary laments in a scene that echoes her earlier address to Christ when she asked him for advice on what to do once he is dead. Now that he is gone and Mary holds his corpse in her arms, she implores him: "Say, dearest son, say, my only love, life of my soul, my love, my singular joy, my only solace, why do you allow me to sorrow so? Why are you so distant from me? My God, comfort my soul, have mercy on me and look on me."[75] Christ in that earlier scene replied by discounting Mary's sorrow as unjustified in the larger plan of salvation that his death would advance. Now Christ is

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[74] Bestul, *Texts of the Passion*, 123-124.

[75] "Dic, fili karissime, dic, amor vnice, vita mee anime, amor meus, singulare gaudium, vnicum solacium, quare sic me dolere permittis? Cur tam longe factus es a me? Deus meus, consolare animam meam, et miserere et respice in me." Ogier of Locedio, *Quis dabit*, in Bestul, *Texts of the Passion*, 180-181.

dead, but the other voice of male authority in the text, Bernard, intervenes to address the

reader regarding Mary's sorrow:

> Let him say who dares, but I do not believe that the sorrow of the Virgin can be fully told, although it was proper, keeping due limits of love and sorrow. She did not despair, but piously and rightfully sorrowed, hoping bravely and firmly believing that he would rise on the third day according to his promise, when he had conquered death.

> Dicat qui dicere audet, virginis dolorem plene posse enarrari non credo, cum rectum erat amoris et meroris continens modum. Non desperabat, sed pie et iuste dolebat, sperans tamenque fortiter, firmiterquecredens, ipsum secundum promissum tercio die, moret deuicta, resurgere.[76]

By emphasizing the propriety of Mary's sorrow, its harmonious synthesis with faith, and

its difference from sinful despair, Bernard circumscribes that sorrow and assigns it its

rightful significance in relation to Church doctrine as Christ did earlier when he

addressed Mary from the cross. The implied female audience of the *Quis dabit* is

therefore presented with a model of appropriate female compassion worthy of emulation

precisely because it is carefully modulated to stay within the limits imposed by church

authorities. As Christ defined the meaning of Mary's sorrow for her, so Bernard defines

for his female readers the meaning of their own tearful compassion for Christ. Bernard's

failure to "become" a woman at the beginning of the *Quis dabit* has led him to return to

the more familiar masculine role of a cleric who assesses women's expression of their

devotional experiences and composes the narratives by which they are validated and

made public.

    After this, the narrative moves quickly to its close. Joseph and Nicodemus try to

prepare Christ's body for burial, but Mary refuses to let them take the body away from

her: "They wished to bury him. She drew him to herself and sought to keep him; they

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[76] Ogier of Locedio, *Quis dabit*, in Bestul, *Texts of the Passion*, 180-181.

attempted to bury him. And so a pious dispute and a pitiful struggle broke out among

them."[77] Although the two men feel compassion for Mary and weep for her, they prevail,

and Christ is laid in the tomb. After this last, futile attempt by Mary to assert agency over

Christ's body, she "went toward Jerusalem helped by holy women, all of them weeping."

The last image that the text leaves its audience of Mary is of a woman so "enfeebled by

great weakness in her limbs" that she can not go to the tomb when word of Christ's

resurrection comes to her. All she can do is ask the "Daughters of Jerusalem" to "'tell

my beloved that I am sick for love' [Ct 5:8]."[78] Thus by the end of the text, Bernard's

and Mary's roles have reversed. Bernard opens the text asking Mary for the gift of her

tears as a courtly lover might beseech his beloved lady for a sign of her favor; now Mary

herself assumes the voice of the lover appealing to the distant beloved, Christ, who is also

the voice of male ecclesiastical authority that Bernard harmonizes with his own voice as

the text unfolds. The *Quis dabit* closes with Bernard praising John for the love he

showed Mary, for which he is "blessed by Christ, and blessed by his mother whom [he]

loved with a pure heart," and wishing that "all who love her be blessed by her."[79]

Whether or not Bernard ever achieved his original goal of compassionate tears for Christ

is left unsaid, and seems by the end of the text to be almost beside the point, which now

is the cultivation of the reader's compassion for Mary. The implied relationship of the

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[77] "Illi tumulare volebant. Hec ad se trahebat, hec retinere studet; illi sepelire conantur. Sicque vertitur inter eos pia lis et miseranda contencio." Ogier of Locedio, *Quis dabit*, in Bestul, *Texts of the Passion*, 182-183.

[78] "Tamen, sicut potuit, mulieribus sanctis adiuta, cunctis plorantibus, simul Ierusalem ingreditur. . . . Denique resurgente filio, pre nimia debilitate membrorum deficiens, ad sepulcrum ire nequibat. . . . 'Filie Ierusalem, nunciate dilecto quia amore langueo.'" Ogier of Locedio, *Quis dabit*, in Bestul, *Texts of the Passion*, 182-185.

[79] "Benedictus tu a Christo, et benedictus a matre ipsius, quam puro corde dilexisit. Benedicti <sunt> omnes ab ea qui diligunt eam." Ogier of Locedio, *Quis dabit*, in Bestul, *Texts of the Passion*, 184-185.

female audience to Mary has not really changed since the opening lines that called for them to shed tears of compassion for Christ—Mary was their model of appropriate female suffering for him then, and she still is now. However, Mary herself has changed from a woman in a position to deny Bernard the tears he wants to a woman under male authority both within the narrative of the Passion (she now is under the care of John) and in the framing dialogue that becomes Bernard's monologue (her narrative voice is supplanted by Bernard's as she is reduced her to physical impotence and tears). Bynum's concept of symbolic reversal goes far to explain Bernard's relationship with Mary in the *Quis dabit*, but the shifts in voice and authority in the text go beyond mere symbolic imitation by a man who wishes to suffer like a woman. They are driven by conflicts within medieval Christian concepts of "feminine" and "masculine" spiritual ideals.

Medieval assumptions about the meaning of femininity and masculinity, as we have seen, deeply influence the nature of men's and women's responses to Passion narratives, especially those that foreground the grieving Mary. Given that Latin Passion narratives such as the *Quis dabit* were largely composed by men, it should be little surprise that their views about women and their roles is are, as Bestul says, "a deeply masculine one, even in the many cases when their intended audience is female,"[80] and that they often present an image of Mary that tends to embody male assumptions about women's nature, behavior, and character. This perspective would naturally value Mary, the paragon of femininity, for those qualities most closely associated with women and their capacities—tears, compassion, maternal love and generosity, and mediation between the earthly and the divine. When men symbolically assume these feminine qualities, they seek not only to ally themselves with weakness and humility, those antitheses of the

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[80] Bestul, *Texts of the Passion*, 119.

worldly pride and power that divert a soul from its journey to God, but also to symbolically acquire the intimate, personal, physical contact with God associated with female mystics. Mary would seem to be the perfect woman to symbolically "become" in order to accomplish this. Yet in the *Quis dabit*, Mary loses some of her symbolic usefulness to Bernard because she is living up to a different gendered ideal, that of the glorified, masculinzed body in heaven. As a result of her glorified state, she is, in a sense, less of a woman and therefore less conducive to the male desire for symbolic reversal. Woman as symbol may affirm the subordination of the feminine to the masculine by "becoming male" after death, or she may affirm the spiritual values of humility and compassion by her tearful meditation on the Passion. But she can not do both simultaneously, as Bernard discovers. The *Quis dabit* resolves this tension by letting Bernard take over the narrative and, by focusing not on Mary's current glorified state but as she was at the Passion, reduce her to the tearful mother that men like Bernard need her to be. Mary, as the embodiment of a set of religious and feminine ideals, may be, in Kristeva's words, "[e]nough to make any woman suffer, any man dream," but in the *Quis dabit* Mary herself is the woman who must suffer so that men like Bernard may dream of their own spiritual perfection.

Conclusion

This project has endeavored to open up new ways of thinking about the function of suffering in medieval affective meditations, especially the suffering of Christ and his mother Mary in the kinds of fervent Passion meditations for which the Middle Ages is well known. My interest has not been to read their agonies and sorrows as contested symbols within larger social, political, or economic debates of the time—that is, I am not interested in how medieval people used the images of Christ's or Mary's suffering to stake out their own claims in such debates. Other scholars have already admirably broken ground in that area, and their work has borne much valuable fruit for the study of the intersections of medieval religion, culture, and politics. Rather, my goal has been to study meditation upon suffering from a more intimate, psychological perspective, to analyze the effects that such meditation had upon the devout individual's sense of self, and to explore the mechanisms by which meditation upon suffering produced the effects that it did.

To take affective texts at face value—that is, to assume that the full extent of the reader's engagement with the text amounts to no more than simply "feeling compassion" for the suffering of others—is to ignore the nature of the mental and emotional demands placed upon the reader by affective meditations, as well as the various ways that a meditator might respond to those demands. Far from being a rather unseemly indulgence in sentimentality, deep meditation upon stories of Christ and Mary forced the meditator to become aware of her own inner life, her affects and dispositions, and how they measure up to the Christian ideals exemplified by various persons in the narratives in which she mentally participated. This inner life itself became an object of meditation as the person

who dwelled lovingly on the wounded body of Christ on the cross simultaneously stood

apart from herself and judged her own actions in and reactions to the imagined scenes.

The essentially performative nature of affective meditation allowed for this "double

vision," as it were, by making the meditator both the "director" of her own mental drama

as well as a supporting actor in that drama. Despite the explicit "stage directions" of

many meditations that tell the reader what to see, where to go, and what to do, meditation

was far from a passive activity. Meditators enjoyed a degree of poetic license to use

legendary material and to add, remove, and modify details to best suit their own spiritual

needs. Meditation thus required of its practitioners a degree of creativity in how they

crafted their private performances, and a measure of personal responsibility to work

within the bounds of orthodoxy.

But regardless of the free rein given to the practitioner to customize the narrative,

the theme of suffering caused by poverty, emotional anguish, or physical pain was non-

negotiable. The Christian identity that meditation aimed to cultivate was constructed in

response to the suffering of the other within a mental space defined by the violent and

emotionally compelling principles of mnemotechnical practice. Speaking of the legend

of Simonides, the Roman poet credited with the creation of the art of memory, Jody

Enders muses upon the intersection of life and death in the event that marked the

founding of mnemotechnics:

> Mnemonics is the art form that emerged from the rubble, and its apocryphal
> origins are played out in a tale of dismemberment, corporeal order, reconstruction,
> reconstitution, and re-creation. It is founded upon a crypt or *conditorium*. . . . It
> is neither insignificant nor accidental that this word is derived from *condo*, "to
> build" or "to found." What is crucial, however, in an art that gives voice to the
> absent or dead is that, at its own inception, *memoria* can only reanimate what has

first been crushed and mutilated. It can only re-member what has first been dis-membered.[1]

Memory deals in fragments of lives and stories salvaged from the violence of time and circumstance. It collects the dead not for burial, but for resurrection into a new life within both personal and public memory. This project has demonstrated in its individual chapters how the dual investment of memory in pain and suffering on one hand and in re-creation and rebirth on the other defines the process by which a person fashions a new character for herself out of an imagined performance within a scene of suffering. The chapters on the art of memory and the *Mediations on the Life of Christ* introduced the idea that this character arises from the "dis-membering" and "re-membering" of narratives within one's memory. Dwelling on Christ's life in meditation entails choosing the most arresting episodes from Christ's life, either from the gospel or from legend, and creating a meditative mash-up, a personalized narrative fashioned out of the pieces of this canonical and apocryphal material with the meditator as a part of the action. The meditator, in remembering Christ, at the same time "re-members" those stories into a whole that speaks to her particular spiritual condition. She puts the pieces of Christ's life and death back together into a personal spectacle-turned-performance out of which she creates her character. By this same process of "re-membering" Christ, she "re-members" herself out of the textual fragments that she elaborates and recombines in her own way. The process is very like that of the monks described by Carruthers who internalize sacred texts by extracting the *dicta et facta memorabilia* and treating them as metaphorical building blocks with which they construct personalized memory spaces that organize

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[1] Jody Enders, *The Medieval Theater of Cruelty: Rhetoric, Memory, Violence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 73.

what they have read and embody the unique connections they each make among these deeds and sayings. Acts of "dis-membering" and "re-membering" also lie behind the more organic metaphor of meditative reading as "ruminating" and "chewing the cud." In order for food to nourish, it must be broken down and digested; in order for a text to serve as spiritual food, one must break it down and "digest" its fragments in order to constitute a new character for oneself. Simonides could not re-member the dead until they had been dis-membered. Just so, one can not re-member oneself through meditative practice without first dis-membering the narrative elements out of which that self is made.

This project has also explored some factors that limit the free-play of the meditator's creative performance and constrain the individual's response to the suffering witnessed in the imagined scenes. The concern to remain safely within the bounds of orthodoxy was not the only limitation that practitioners of affective meditation faced. The chapter on Margery Kempe suggested that the ability of shared suffering to make the divine other knowable is limited even within meditations that indulge most unabashedly in Gibson's "incarnational aesthetic" and render the divine in very human, embodied terms. Although suffering can foster bonds of compassion between humans and God, there are limits to how knowable the divine other is through its suffering. The suffering of the other offers the opportunity to partially understand that other through shared experiences of emotional and physical pain, but our desire to fully comprehend that suffering and the other who experiences it is ultimately unrealizable. The other can not be reduced to its knowable suffering, nor can its suffering necessarily be completely comprehended. The chapter on the *Quis dabit* demonstrated, however, that when the

suffering other is less-than-divine and female, then cultural assumptions about gender may color the witness's response to that suffering and influence what the meaning of that suffering is interpreted to be. Whereas the female Margery bumps up against the limits of shared suffering's ability to make the male Christ fully knowable to her, Bernard as a character in the *Quis dabit* has no problem co-opting Mary's story of her own suffering and recasting it within the terms of a more traditional style of "feminine suffering" that can be domesticated for his own narrative purposes. In affective meditations, to suffer is to be embodied, as suffering finds expression through blood and tears, gesticulations and cries. The gender of that suffering body will, of course, be read through a given culture's understanding of what it means to be male or female. In the process, suffering itself, in a sense, becomes gendered. One can be said to suffer "like a woman," for example, as the *Quis dabit* chapter shows. How one responds to the suffering of the other, how one "dis-members" it and uses it to think through who one is in relation to it, depends in part on how one understands what it means to be a man or a woman. In terms of the architectural metaphor, the stonework already laid out in one's mental edifice will affect the contours of any new levels constructed upon it. Of course, one might use the new texts added to the edifice to reassess the meaning of the older ones rather than letting the older ones determine the meaning of the newer. If there is a flaw in the architectural metaphor, it is the implication that the perceptions and beliefs that it facilitates are, so to speak, "written in stone." I do not mean to foster this impression with my reading of the *Quis dabit*. My intent has not been to argue that specific assumptions about gender always lead to certain understandings of suffering in affective texts, but to demonstrate that how one perceives,

performs, and understands suffering in such texts can not be separated from how one interprets the bodies that suffer.

The questions about suffering, memory, performance, and self-fashioning raised in these chapters suggest further avenues of investigation that I have not had space to cover in this project. One aspect of suffering that deserves further exploration and that builds upon my work on the role of Mary in the *Quis dabit* is the way that suffering is not just felt but exchanged in an economy of pain, compassion, and redemption exemplified in Richard Rolle's "Meditatio de Passione Domini." In his meditation, Rolle imagines himself present at the crucifixion where he considers both Christ on the cross and his grieving mother Mary. As the conventions of affective meditations would lead us to expect, Rolle reproves himself for what he perceives as the insufficiency of his compassion that he ought to feel for Christ's agonies ("[M]y sory herte, þat is of þe deuelys kynde, hardere þan þe stonys þat clouyn at þi deth, it may not at þi passyoun a lytel point fele. . . .").[2] Rolle himself takes some responsibility for Christ's torments since, as a sinner, his transgressions have contributed to the necessity for Christ's sacrifice. Christ's suffering therefore establishes a debt owed by Rolle—Rolle's compassion (in the sense of *com-passio*, "suffering-with") in exchange for Christ's passion. If Rolle's sins have directly led to Christ's suffering, then they have also indirectly contributed to Mary's grief at the foot of the cross, yet Mary's suffering does not establish any debt to be repaid. Instead, like Bernard in the *Quis dabit*, Rolle feels free to request of Mary some of her tears to compensate for his own lack. However,

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[2] Richard Rolle, "Meditations on the Passion," in *Yorkshire Writers: Richard Rolle of Hampole and His Followers*, vol. 1, ed. C. Horstmann (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1999), 90.

Rolle does not just ask for Mary to share her tears because she is merciful to sinners like him; he argues that the tears, as a kind of spiritual wealth, are his by right:

> A, lady, for þat sorewe þat þou soffryd of þi sonys passyoun—for þat schulde haue bien myn owne, for I it hadde deseruyd and manye werse, I was the cause þere-offe and he gylteles: os þe dere woundes were myn owne ryȝt, gete me for þi mercy on of hem alle. . . . Ȝyf al þat wo is my ryȝt, gete me of myn owne, ne be þou not so wrongful to with-holde al. Þow al þi wo be þe leef, ne art þou nouȝt swythe large? Parte with þe poore þat lytel hath or non . . . . I aske not, dere lady, kastelys no towrys ne oþer worldys wele . . . but woundys of reuthe is al my desyr. . . .[3]

This conclusion is no place to engage in a detailed close reading of this passage, but the language of economic value, poverty, wealth, and obligation suggests that suffering circulates in a spiritual economy in which the debt of Christ's suffering is repaid by appropriating to oneself the wealth of Mary's suffering—a wealth demanded but, as in the *Quis dabit*, never explicitly bestowed on the petitioner. The language of this passage complicates the idea that the word "gift" truly applies to Mary's tears, since Rolle places Mary in the position of one who is obliged to provide them to him—they are an "extorted gift," so to speak, that Mary is obliged to pay to "þe poore þat lytel hath or non." The Jews who inflict suffering on Christ but feel no compassion in return remain outside of the circulation of tears and pain; their lack of willingness to engage in this affective exchange excludes them from the economy of suffering that leads to redemption. Further exploration of this topic may, like he *Quis dabit* chapter, enhance our understanding of the role of gender in affective meditations and expand our repertoire of metaphors (suffering as economic circulation) with which to interpret such texts.

The economic metaphor described above provides one model for thinking about the nature of the relationships established between the meditator, Christ, and Mary within

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[3] Rolle, "Meditations on the Passion," 86.

the private, interior, mental space of meditation, but can the way that suffering is valued

and interpreted within these meditations tell us anything about the way it is valued and

interpreted among people in the flesh-and-blood world as well? Caruthers's notion of a

public memory has already suggested that even private acts of reading and meditation are

grounded in a larger community that gives meaning to the "citations" one makes of the

texts one internalizes.   Community bonds could be forged not just around internalized

images of suffering gleaned from meditative texts, but from public spectacles of suffering

as well. Mitchell Merback's study of late medieval paintings of the Passion argues that

the suffering on display in public executions of criminals "fashioned a kind of living

devotional image of pain for pious, contemplative immersion" in which the condemned

person's suffering could mean one of two things: if he showed no remorse or contrition,

then his suffering was a foreshadowing of his torments in hell and a sign of his alienation

from God. If he showed remorse, admitted guilt, and accepted penance, then his pain

"signaled purgation and expiation" and "revealed the inner beauty of a soul that had made

its peace with God." Thus the experience and public spectacle of pain could become "a

form of what anthropologists call *communitas*" and foster bonds of empathy between

spectator and spectacle.[4] Merback's study invites us to delve further into the question of

how the emotional training engaged in by the practitioner of affective meditation

influences and is influenced by the meaning given to the real-life suffering of the poor,

the sick, and the condemned. Were people expected to interpret suffering the same way

across various contexts (religious and secular, divine and human)? If not, what different

meanings could suffering have, and how did these meanings conflict with or reinforce

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[4] Mitchell B. Merback, *The Thief, The Cross, and The Wheel: Pain and the Spectacle of Punishment in Medieval and Renaissance Europe* (London: Reaktion Books, 1999), 20.

each other? Was there an "economy of suffering" in the material world as there was in

the mental world of meditation? Persons who engaged in affective meditation were

explicitly warned not to become so enamored of devotion to Christ's passion that they

failed to respond with compassion to the suffering of their fellow Christians. Walter

Hilton makes this case in his *Epistle on the Mixed Life*:

> Than if þou be besy with all þi myghte for to arraye his heuede, þat es, for to
> wirchipe hyme-selfe by mynde of his passione or of his oþer werkes in his
> manhede by deuocyone and meditacione of hyme, and forgetis his fete, þat ere thi
> childire, thi seruanteȝ, thi tenantes and all thyne euencristyne, and latis þame spill
> for defaute of kepynge, . . . thow pleses hyme noghte, ffor þou duse no wirchipe
> to hyme.[5]

The fact that Hilton felt the need to remind his readers of this point suggests that

compassion in one context did not necessarily translate into compassion in other contexts.

A fuller study of the significance of different types of suffering in late medieval cultures

would require a much broader, more anthropological approach than the focus of this

project can allow. However, since the complex connections between medieval religious

and social life can not be easily disengaged from each other, an exploration of the

meaning and function of suffering in medieval social life would naturally build upon the

groundwork done in these chapters on the meaning and function of suffering in medieval

religious life.

My goal in this project has been to introduce ways of looking at medieval

affective meditations that make possible more in-depth explorations of the role of

suffering in medieval devotions. If I have left my readers with an expanded sense of how

we can productively talk about suffering, the kinds of relationships that can be built

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[5] Walter Hilton, "Epistle on the Mixed Life," in *Yorkshire Writers: Richard Rolle of Hampole and His Followers*, vol. 1, ed. C. Horstmann (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1999), 272.

around suffering, and the role of suffering in the self-fashioning of a Christian subject,

then my labors have achieved their end.

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