



# Empathy in the Making

## Crafting the Believer's Emotions in the Late Medieval

### Low Countries<sup>1</sup>

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The article addresses affective piety as it developed in the late medieval Low Countries – the new, sentiment-laden devotion concentrating on the humanity and vulnerability of Christ, on his nativity but especially his Passion, the physical cruelty he suffered in his last days on earth. Views on the late Middle Ages, as if they still knew a ‘childlike’ universe, one in which the emotions and the senses were given free rein, have been rightly discarded by Barbara Rosenwein and other scholars, but her own cognitive approach threatens to overlook the bodily and sensory dimensions of emotions. An embodiment approach would offer a wider and more promising perspective. Discussing the numerous Netherlandish passion narratives and passion paintings, their cruel and blood-drenched imagery is situated within older medieval traditions of meditation and artificial memory. To illustrate the period’s religious ‘pathopoeia’, the shaping of the believers’ embodied emotions, part of the argument focuses on a relatively unknown Passion narrative by the fifteenth-century Franciscan Johannes Brugman.

*Empathie in de maak. Religieuze emoties en retorica in de laat-middeleeuwse Nederlanden*  
In deze bijdrage richt ik me op de affectieve vroomheid in de laat-middeleeuwse Nederlanden – de nieuwe, emotioneel geladen devotie die zich concentreerde op de menselijkheid en kwetsbaarheid van Christus, op de geboorte maar meer nog op het lijdensverhaal, alle fysieke wreedheid die hem in zijn laatste dagen werd aangedaan. Opvattingen als zouden de late Middeleeuwen nog een ‘kinderlijk’ universum hebben gekend, een universum waarin de emoties en de zintuigen nog alle ruimte kregen, zijn door Barbara Rosenwein en andere onderzoekers terecht terzijde geschoven. Maar Rosenweins cognitieve benadering verwaarloost op haar beurt de lichamelijke en zintuiglijke dimensies van emoties. Een ‘embodiment’-

benadering biedt hier een breder perspectief. Besproken worden de wijdverbreide passieteksten en passieschilderijen. Hun wrede, met bloed doordrenkte voorstellingswereld wordt gerelateerd aan oudere middeleeuwse tradities rond de meditatie en de geheugenkunst. Centraal staat de voor deze periode kenmerkende religieuze 'pathopoeia', het beroep op de geïncorporeerde emoties van de gelovigen. Ter illustratie wordt bijzondere aandacht besteed aan een redelijk onbekende passietekst van de vijftiende-eeuwse franciscaan Johannes Brugman

In a lively and famous critique medievalist Barbara Rosenwein reproached Johan Huizinga (and a number of other early cultural historians such as Marc Bloch, Lucien Febvre and Norbert Elias) for presenting a 'grand narrative' of progressive emotional restraint. Depicting the Middle Ages as a 'convenient foil for modernity', they identified its mental universe with 'the emotional life of a child: unadulterated, violent, public, unashamed'. As Rosenwein wrote, theirs was a basically 'hydraulic' model of the emotions. Now mostly associated with the names of Charles Darwin and Sigmund Freud, it already informed the Middle Ages' notion of the four humours – an understanding of the emotions as 'great liquids within each person, heaving and frothing, eager to be let out'.<sup>2</sup>

There is much to be said for Rosenwein's criticism, but her own cognitivist approach might have its limitations as well. She prefers a model that construes emotions no longer as irrational, as just 'forces striving for release', but as already argued by cognitive philosophers and psychologists since the 1970s, as acts of consciousness comparable to judgments or appraisals and thus open to historical investigation.<sup>3</sup> That is a far more nuanced approach, and Rosenwein is certainly not the only cultural historian now working in this cognitive vein. Yet in its mentalist outlook, even viewing emotional gestures as 'texts' one may read, it seems to forget Huizinga's still admirable feel for the late Middle Ages' emotional complexity, the graphic interweaving of the mental, the corporeal and the sensory.

1 The author extends his cordial thanks to Catrien Santing and Stephan Trinks, and especially, to the Kolleg-Forscherguppe, 'Bildakt und Verkörperung', directed by Horst Bredekamp and Jürgen Trabant at the Humboldt University of Berlin. Discussions with many of its members, part of an (all too short) fellowship autumn 2013, helped me refine my ideas as well informing me on the latest German research on art and embodiment.

2 Barbara Rosenwein, 'Worrying about Emotions in History', *American Historical Review* 107 (2002) 827-836.

3 *Ibid.*, 836-837.

As recent studies on the period's 'affective piety' have demonstrated, the believers' emotional lives were far from 'childlike' or uncontrolled.<sup>4</sup> Instead, preachers sought to craft the emotions of the faithful through a range of devotional practices, all oriented on the humanity of Christ, his physical agony in particular, and encompassing both the body and the senses. To truly grasp this affective complexity, it could be helpful to explore a third approach, one situating the emotions in both body and mind. As for example cultural historian Monique Scheer suggested, we might construe emotions as Bourdieuan practices and thus address not just the brain but our entire bodies. In her view, Bourdieu's habitus concept, his central insight that society is infused, even literally incorporated, in the physical body may bring the emotions' bodily and sensory dimensions back in, while also allowing for historical analysis. Scheer also notes the resemblance of such a Bourdieuan approach to a corpus of investigations often grouped together under the heading of 'situated cognition', 'extended mind theory' included. Addressing the joint operation of brain, body and environment, they are equally interested in the 'knowing' or 'mindful' body, in all 'non-conceptual cognition and automaticity'.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps Aby Warburg was already driving at this interconnectedness of the emotional, the corporeal and the sensory when many years ago he wrote of a 'Lehre vom bewegten Leben'.<sup>6</sup>

In this article I will focus on the Low Countries of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. I will look at the period's affective piety or, more precisely, at its rhetorically inspired 'pathopoeia', its conscious crafting of the believers' emotions through their daily devotional practices. In other words, if we agree with Rosenwein that theirs was not some 'childlike' universe, giving the emotions free rein, then whence came these practices with all their physical and sensory overtones as already sketched by Huizinga? I believe part of the answer might be found in joining the history of emotions more firmly to that of the senses and, no less important, to that of oratory. In studying the late medieval devotional practices we should certainly include the preachers with their rhetorical notions and techniques.

4 For some earlier comments on Huizinga's (and also Panofsky's) 'childlike' universe, see Gail McMurray Gibson, *The Theater of Devotion: East Anglian Drama and Society in the Late Middle Ages* (Chicago, London 1989) 4-5.

5 Monique Scheer, 'Are Emotions a Kind of Practice (And is That What makes Them have a History)?': A Bourdieuan Approach to Understanding Emotion', *History and Theory* 51 (2012), especially 195-204; on 'situated cognition', see Philip Robbins

and Murat Ayede (eds.), *The Cambridge Handbook of Situated Cognition* (Cambridge 2009).

6 As he wrote in a letter to Ernst Cassirer in 1924. Quoted in: John M. Krois, *Bildkörper und Körperschema*, Horst Bredekamp and Marion Lauschke (eds.) (Berlin 2011) 78; at the Kolleg-Forschergruppe 'Bildakt und Verkörperung', led by Horst Bredekamp and Jürgen Trabant, Warburg's ideas are being reinterpreted from such perspectives, Alva Noë's work in particular.

As shown by Frances Yates and Mary Carruthers, and more specifically addressing the emotional lives of the faithful, by Peter Parshall, Kimberly Rivers and Christine Göttler, the period's rhetorical traditions were still informed by the anonymous *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, written about 86 BC.<sup>7</sup> It could have that remarkable degree of influence as it was the only one of the three Roman treatises on rhetoric that was known in its entirety. Complete copies of Cicero's *De Oratore* and Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria* emerged only in the first decades of the fifteenth century. In addition, dealing with such a major rhetorical figure as *demonstratio* or 'vividness' (discussed as *evidentia* by Cicero and Quintilian) it lauded the uses of the art of memory. While Cicero did not say anything new on the subject and Quintilian deemed it irrelevant, the author of the *Rhetorica* showed a lively interest in mnemonic techniques, making his text all the more congenial to the high and late medieval traditions of preaching and meditation. It emphasises the importance to every orator of devising striking memory images. He should always connect the ideas or items he wished to recall to such particular images and then store them in a mental architecture of his own. Famous examples of such architectures are the Jesuit Matteo Ricci's 'memory palace' or a much more recent example, the 'memory chalet' devised by the late Tony Judt.<sup>8</sup>

In the following then, I will first describe how the period's affective piety addressed both the body and the full human sensorium, how its religious practitioners were urged by preachers and painters alike to develop an emotional and also highly sensory identification with all the cruel and bloody details of Christ's sufferings. I will then sketch how this particular *pathopoeia* did not only draw, directly or indirectly, on the *Rhetorica*'s understanding of *demonstratio*, of making the faithful feel present on the spot, but even more

7 [Cicero], *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, trans. H. Caplan (Cambridge 1989). The text was probably composed between 86 and 82 BC. Throughout the Middle Ages and the Renaissance it was thought to have been written by Cicero. On the *Rhetorica*'s importance to late medieval rhetoric and its engagement with the believers' emotions, see Peter Parshall, 'The Art of Memory and the Passion', *The Art Bulletin* 81 (1999) 456-472 (I'd like to thank Bret Rothstein for this reference); Christine Göttler, *Last Things: Art and the Religious Imagination in the Age of Reform* (Turnhout 2010) 64-67; Kimberly A. Rivers, *Preaching the Memory of Virtue and Vice: Memory, Images, and Preaching in the Late Middle Ages* (Turnhout 2010) 314-320.

On its general importance to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, see Mary J. Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge 1990) 70-71. James J. Murphy, 'Topos and Figura: Historical Cause and Effect?', in: G.L. Bursill-Hall et al. (eds.), *De Ortu Grammaticae: Studies in Medieval Grammar and Linguistic Theory in Memory of Jan Pinborg* (Amsterdam 1990) 241; on the senses, see also François Quiviger, *The Sensory World of Italian Renaissance Art* (London 2010) 49-50.

8 Jonathan D. Spence, *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci* (New York 1984); Tony Judt, *The Memory Chalet* (New York 2010).

so on its locational art of memory. Little of this is really new (I am not a medievalist), but I hope my argument for choosing a Bourdieuan ‘extended mind’ approach in studying affective piety is new.

### Passion narratives and passion paintings

The concept of ‘affective piety’ is still a relatively recent coinage. First introduced by medievalist Caroline Walker Bynum to describe the new, sentiment-laden devotion which she saw emerging in the twelfth century, it was eagerly adopted by her colleagues studying the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, which in their view witnessed a veritable wave of affective piety. No longer construing God as harsh judge, the new piety stressed the humanity of Christ. It developed an intense focus on the particulars of his life, especially on his Passion, all the physical violence he had to suffer from his arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane to his horrifying death on the cross. It was this highly sensory, emotion-drenched devotion to Christ that from the thirteenth century emerged in a variety of media – in Passion narratives, Passion sermons, Passion paintings and Passion plays.<sup>9</sup>

The Passion narratives, the oldest of these devotional media, already dwelt exhaustively on Christ’s ordeal, relating the cruelties done to his fragile body often in the most graphic and gory detail. Originating in the thirteenth century and strongly informed by the ideals of Cistercian and Franciscan spirituality, the narratives, mostly written in Latin, found a wide and probably largely female audience in the course of the fourteenth century when many of them were translated into the vernacular. The texts were read and copied all over Europe – from Tuscany, where the first and most influential texts came from, to Spain, France, Germany, the Low Countries, England and so on.<sup>10</sup>

9 Caroline Walker-Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley Ca. 1982) 82-109; for some other essential texts, see Thomas Bestul, *Texts of the Passion: Latin Devotional Literature and Medieval Society* (Philadelphia 1996) 35-36, 71; cf. Susan Karant-Nunn, *The Reformation of Feeling: Shaping the Religious Emotions in Early Modern Germany* (Oxford 2010) 275 note 1. In this essay I omitted the Passion plays, their role in the Low Countries was rather limited but see on Mechelen: Susie Speakman Sutch, ‘The Seven Sorrows of the Virgin Mary: Devotional Communication

and Politics in the Burgundian-Habsburg Low Countries, c. 1490-1520’, *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 61:2 (2010) 267; on Leuven see: Jennifer R. Hammerschmidt, ‘The Impact of Rogier van der Weyden’s *Descent from the Cross*’, in: W. de Boer and C. Göttler (eds.), *Religion and the Senses in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden, Boston 2013) 201-218; on France: Jean-Pierre Bordier, *Le Jeu de la Passion: Le message chrétien et le théâtre français (XIIIe-XVIe s.)* (Paris 1998).

10 Translations into Spanish were relatively late. See Elena Carrera, *Teresa of Avila’s Autobiography: Power and the Self in Mid-Sixteenth-Century Spain* (London 2005) 28-29.

Another important medium was the Passion paintings (and of course, Passion engravings and Passion sculpture) that also emerged in the thirteenth century – all these rather dismal images depicting Christ’s body covered with blood and wounds.<sup>11</sup> As art historian James Marrow concluded, such blood-soaked images were mostly produced in the north, among artists working in the Low Countries and the Lower Rhine in particular. His investigations have been innovative in more than one way. As we will see, he thoroughly investigated the many ‘inventions’, all the apocryphal passages and details introduced in all late medieval accounts of the Passion. In addition, and against his colleagues’ all too narrow interest in matters of style and iconography, he studied issues of emotional response.<sup>12</sup>

Both the Passion images and the Passion narratives served the many meditational practices of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries – practices such as the ruminative viewing of images or, more broadly, the ruminative reading, copying or hearing the narratives read aloud. These meditational practices were often supported by such bodily practices as praying, kneeling or self-castigation.<sup>13</sup> In fact, all such practices may be construed as what anthropologist Birgit Meyer has described as religion’s ‘sensational forms’ – its authorised modes for invoking and organizing access to the transcendental. Meyer understands religion as ‘a practice of mediation between the levels of humans and God’, and it is this distance between the two levels which might be bridged by particular sensational forms.<sup>14</sup> As she observes, ‘these forms are central to generating religious sensations through which what is not “there” and “present” in an ordinary way can be experienced – over and over again – as

- 11 On these origins, see Hans Belting, *Das Bild und sein Publikum im Mittelalter. Form und Funktion früher Bildtafeln der Passion* (Berlin 1981) chapter 6; cf. Anne Derbes, *Picturing the Passion in Late Medieval Italy: Narrative Painting, Franciscan Ideologies, and the Levant* (Cambridge 1996) 1-2, 13-14.
- 12 James H. Marrow, *Passion Iconography in Northern European Art of the Late Middle Ages and Early Renaissance* (Kortrijk 1979); idem, ‘“Circumdede runt me canes multi”: Christ’s Tormentors in Northern European Art of the Late Middle Ages and Early Renaissance’, *Art Bulletin* 59 (1977) 167-181; for Marrow’s comments on iconography, see his ‘Symbol and Meaning in Northern European Art of the Late Middle Ages’, *Simiolus* 16 (1985) 150-169; cf. Belting, *Das Bild und sein Publikum im Mittelalter*, 23.

- 13 See especially Thomas Lentz, ‘“As Far as the Eye can see...”: Rituals of Gazing in the Late Middle Ages’, in: Jeffrey E. Hamburger and Anne-Marie Bouché (eds.), *The Mind’s Eye: Art and Theological Argument in the Middle Ages* (Princeton 2006) 360-373.
- 14 Birgit Meyer, *Religious Sensations: Why Media, Aesthetics and Power Matter in the Study of Contemporary Religion* (Amsterdam 2006) 9, 13; cf. idem, ‘Aesthetics of Persuasion: Global Christianity and Pentecostalism’s Sensational Forms’, *South Atlantic Quarterly* 109 (2010) 741-751; see also the innovative journal *Material Religion*, co-founded by Meyer.

available and accessible'.<sup>15</sup> In other words, by creating a heightened emotional and sensory engagement with the divine they make it materialise not only in images or texts but also in things, smells, sounds or bodies.<sup>16</sup> Of course, with Protestantism professing an essentially unknowable God, the sensational forms changed.<sup>17</sup>

Another of Meyer's helpful concepts is the 'aesthetics of persuasion', responsible for what she calls the 'truth effects' of religion, for making religious practitioners sense the presence of the divine in a seemingly immediate manner. For instance, modern Pentecostal congregations (her own field of research), but also congregations in the past, whether Catholic or Protestant, might sense God's nearness in the tears shed by their preachers in the pulpit, thus making them weep themselves.<sup>18</sup> These are well-known rhetorical techniques, probably harking back to Horace's 'si vis me flere, dolendum est primum ipsi tibi' (if you want me to cry, you must first feel grief yourself). As Meyer continues, through such truth effects a religion may successfully resonate with the bodily habitus, the senses, emotions, and lived experience of the faithful. Her insights accord well with Scheer's Bourdieuan 'situated cognition' approach.<sup>19</sup>

The most popular Passion narratives, those written in the vernacular, were for the most part adaptations of Latin narratives, such as the anonymous *Meditationes Vitae Christi*, dated around 1300, or the anonymous *Vita Jesu Christi*, dated somewhat later and like the *Meditationes* of Tuscan or at least North Italian origin.<sup>20</sup> Other translated texts were the *Horologium Sapientiae* by the Dominican Heinrich Suso (c. 1295-1366) and another *Vita Christi* by the Dominican and later Carthusian Ludolph of Saxony (c. 1300-1377). Generally, these older meditations were more concise than those in the vernacular, though the *Meditationes* and especially Ludolph's *Vita Christi* were far from brief. However, as Thomas Bestul cautioned (drawing on Roger Chartier), the circulation of the narratives defies any simple transmission model from high to low or from Latinity to vernacularity. Though the translations found an eager audience among the religious, nuns in particular (the *Meditationes* were addressed to a nun), and increasingly among semi-religious women and lay persons (who

15 Idem, 'Mediating Absence – Effecting Spiritual Presence: Pictures and the Christian Imagination', *Social Research* 78 (2011) 1037.

16 Meyer's ideas may be compared to Walker Bynum's latest book, *Christian Materiality*, in which she explores how late medieval religion 'happened' in material culture, in the period's multiplication of devotional objects: Caroline Walker Bynum, *Christian Materiality: An Essay on Religion in Late Medieval Europe* (New York 2011).

17 On pictures see Hans Belting, *Image and Likeness: A History of the Image in the Era before Art* (Chicago, London 1994) 458-459.

18 Joseph Imorde, *Affektübertragung* (Berlin 2004).

19 Birgit Meyer and Jojada Verrips, 'Aesthetics', in: David Morgan (ed.), *Key Words in Religion, Media and Culture* (London 2008) 21.

20 On the relevance of this Italian provenance, see Derbes, *Picturing the Passion*.

like the vast majority of nuns did not master Latin), there were also Latin texts translated from vernacular works or borrowing extensively from them. Hence Bestul's preference for a fluid transmission model based on competition and interchange between Latin and the vernacular.<sup>21</sup> More recently scholars have drawn attention to the notable role of women in this interchange.<sup>22</sup>

Though the Passion narratives were generally included in a full 'vita Christi', in assisting the faithful in their meditational practices they undoubtedly constituted its most important, its most performative, part. Most of the emotions to be aroused centred on Christ's physical ordeal. In fact, through picturing its gruesome details as vividly as possible the texts aimed to rouse and deepen the believers' empathy, to have them experience in their imagination all the savagery done to him and thus move them to tearful compassion and contrition. Esther Cohen even speaks of the period's 'philopassionism' – an embrace of even the fiercest pain as spiritually meaningful and productive.<sup>23</sup>

The readers of the narratives (and of course all those hearing the narratives read aloud) were even incited to experience Christ's agony through the eyes and ears of his grieving mother. The texts made her a full participant in the Passion, a tradition reaching back to the genre of the so-called *planctus Mariae*, the 'Marian lament', a major influence on the *Meditationes* and many of the other narratives. The most familiar laments were the *Planctus beatae Mariae*, thought to be by Ogier de Locedio (1136-1214) and the *Dialogus beatae Mariae et Anselmi de Passione Domini*, of which the earliest manuscript seems to date from around 1300 and come from the German Rhineland. The fourteenth century also saw a distinct pictorial tradition emerge, portraying Mary weeping or swooning at the foot of the cross. Again intended to deepen the viewer's

21 Bestul, *Texts of the Passion*, 11-12; see also Charles Caspers, 'Bidden in twee talen. Een beschouwing van het bidedrag van clerici, religieuzen en leken in de laat-middeleeuwse Nederlanden', *Queeste* 15 (2008) 3-16; cf. John van Engen, 'Multiple Options: The World of the Fifteenth-Century Church', *Church History* 77 (2008) 277.

22 For instance, Sarah McNamer has argued that the most influential parts of the *Meditationes* (the Infancy and Passion meditations) were originally written in Italian by a nun from Tuscany. See Sarah McNamer, *Affective Meditation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion* (Philadelphia 2010) chapter 3. On the prominent role of women, both from the aristocracy and the urban middle class, in the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Low

Countries, see Thérèse de Hemptinne, 'Reading, Writing and Devotional Practices: Lay and Religious Women and the Written Word in the Low Countries (1350-1550)', in: Th. de Hemptinne and M.E. Góngora (eds.), *The Voice of Silence: Women's Literacy in a Men's Church* (Turnhout 2004) 111-126.

23 Esther Cohen, 'Towards a History of European Physical Sensibility: Pain in the Later Middle Ages', *Science in Context* 8 (1995) 54; for an excellent study on pain and empathy in early modern England, where Loyola's *Exercises* were still a major influence, see Jan Frans van Dijkhuizen, *Pain and Compassion in Early Modern English Literature* (Woodbridge 2012); Cohen also quoted there, 24.

immersion, the images also caused controversy. Until well into the seventeenth century priests would object to representations in which Mary displayed too much ‘clamour’, her compassionate sorrows making her collapse at the final breath of her son and lose her singular resolve and dignity. Painters like Rogier Van der Weyden and so many others depicting the descent from the cross had to find a precarious balance between their shaping of the viewers’ emotions, their *pathopoeia* and religious decorum.<sup>24</sup>

Marian laments were also composed in Middle Dutch, most of them based on a Latin original<sup>25</sup>, but most influential were the Passion texts themselves, circulating in especially the fifteenth century in numerous manuscripts in the vernacular. One of these was Suso’s *Hundert Betrachtungen und Begehrungen*, probably the most widely read and copied of all such meditation texts in the Low Countries. José van Aelst traced no less than 112 manuscripts and two printed editions of the North Netherlandish adaptation alone. Most of the manuscripts were produced in the county of Holland, especially in the town of Delft.<sup>26</sup> Another popular text was *T’Leven ons Heren Ihesu Christi*, an early fifteenth-century adaptation of the anonymous *Vita* and the *Meditationes*. So far 82 manuscripts have been traced of which at least 36 were owned by female readers. It also saw a printed edition, published in 1479, again in Delft.<sup>27</sup> Other ‘lives’ found a wide readership thanks to

24 One of the earliest authors to condemn presentations of Mary displaying excessive emotion was the Franciscan Marquard von Lindau († 1392). In his view, there were better ways to stimulate compassion. See Stephen Mossman, *Marquard von Lindau and the Challenges of Religious Life in Late Medieval Germany* (Oxford 2010) 335; Harvey E. Hamburg, ‘The Problem of *Lo Spasimo* of the Virgin in Cinquecento Paintings of the *Descent from the Cross*’, *Sixteenth Century Journal* 12 (1981) 45-75; for the Low Countries, see Reindert Falkenburg’s inspiring essay, ‘The Decorum of Grief: Notes on the Representation of Mary at the Cross in Late Medieval Netherlandish Literature and Painting’, in: M. Trettu Knapas and Å. Ringbom (eds.), *Icon to Cartoon: A Tribute to Sixten Ringbom* (Helsinki 1995) 65-89; for a seventeenth-century protest, see Johannes van Neercassel, *Verhandeling van ’t lezen der H. Schriftuure, waer in d’oeffeninge der Protestanten in de zelve te lezen wederleid, en de vastigheid van ’t lezen der catholijken getoont word* (Antwerpen 1785) 121-123.

25 K. de Vries, *De Mariaklachten* (Zwolle s.a.) 75-186.

26 José van Aelst, *Passie voor het lijden. De ‘Hundert Betrachtungen und Begehrungen’ van Henricus Suso en de oudste drie bewerkingen uit de Nederlanden* (Leuven 2005); idem, *Vruchten van de passie. De laatmiddeleeuwse passieliteratuur verkend aan de hand van Suso’s ‘Honderd artikelen’* (Hilversum 2011) 40, 264-267.

27 Geert Warnar, ‘Tleven ons heren Jesu Christi: Female Readers and Dutch Devotional Literature in the Fifteenth Century’, in: M. van Dijk and R. Nip (eds.), *Saints, Scholars and Politicians: Gender as a Tool in Medieval Studies* (Turnhout 2005) 25-42; August den Hollander, ‘Middelnederlandse Levens van Jezus’, in: A. den Hollander, E. Kwakkel and W. Scheepsmas (eds.), *Middelnederlandse bijbelvertalingen* (Hilversum 2007) 189; Anna Dlabacová, ‘Drukken en publieksgroepen. Productie en receptie van gedrukte Middelnederlandse meditatieve Levens van Jezus (ca. 1479-1540)’, *Ons Geestelijk Erf* 79:4 (2008) 323-330.

the printing press, among them *Tboeck vanden leven Jhesu Christi*, with twelve editions between 1487 and 1536, and *Dat leven ons liefs heren Jhesu Christi*, with twenty-five editions between 1497 and 1532. Remarkably, both books did not first appear in a manuscript version before they appeared in print. They also borrowed relatively little from Ludolph's *Vita Christi* or the other Latin narratives.<sup>28</sup>

As mentioned above, all such texts inspired their audiences to meditation, to practices of ruminative reading, listening or copying ('reading with the pen', as it has been called), while the increasing numbers of Passion images invited them to ruminative viewing.<sup>29</sup> Reading, writing, listening and viewing combined organically with meditation proper, often supported by corporeal practices and other 'sensational forms'. As Ludolph told the readers of his *Vita Christi*, they should

[...] excite themselves to devotion not only by inward contemplation, but also by bodily exertions, stretching of their hands, raising their eyes to the crucifix, striking their breasts, making devout genuflections, and if necessary even scourging themselves.

The texts' and images' primary function was performative, they were meant to do things. Ludolph even urged his readers 'that they should persist in these or similar exercises until they produce a plenteous stream of tears'.<sup>30</sup> He wrote this as a general advice how best to instill the contents of his *Vita*. Other *Vitae Christi* recommended their readers to weep freely at particular episodes of the Passion, and many might have done so. In one of his writings the Franciscan Johannes Brugman tells us about a nun he once knew. She would lie in bed from All Saints to Christmas, meditating on the Passion 'with heartfelt tears and ardent love'. Similarly, in one of the 'sister-books' of the Modern Devotion, a compilation of the 'lives' of the sisters, we read about Sister Liesbeth van Delft († 1423), who often burst into tears during her meditations.<sup>31</sup>

28 For this incunabular period, see Koen Goudriaan, 'Nederlandstalige meditatieve levens van Jezus op de vroege drukpers. Een terreinverkenning', *Spiegel der Letteren* 49:2 (2007) 143-164; Dlabacová, 'Drukken en publieksgroepen'.

29 Thom Mertens, 'Lezen met de pen. Ontwikkelingen in het laatmiddeleeuws geestelijk proza', in: F.P. van Oostrom and F. Willaert (eds.), *De studie van de Middelnederlandse letterkunde. Stand en toekomst* (Hilversum 1989) 187-200; cf. Wybren Scheepsma, *Medieval Religious Women*

*in the Low Countries: The Modern Devotion, the Canonesses of Windesheim, and their Writings* (Woodbridge 2004) 90-96.

30 Quotations taken from Marrow, 'Symbol and Meaning', 155.

31 Johannes Brugman, 'Devote oefeninge', in: Willem Moll (ed.), *Johannes Brugman en het godsdienstig leven onzer vaderen in de vijftiende eeuw* (Amsterdam 1854) appendix VII, 299, 241; Scheepsma, *Medieval Religious Women*, 241.



Aelbrecht Bouts, *Man of Sorrows*, sixteenth century.  
Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid.

At the same time, the period's devotional images or *Andachtsbilder* sought to enhance such tearful empathy by consciously isolating Christ, Mary or one of the other holy figures from their narrative contexts. The images functioned both in private and liturgical surroundings, their forms ranging from illustrations in books or manuscripts to such lavish altarpieces as Van der Weyden's *Deposition from the Cross*.<sup>32</sup> The most moving images were certainly those of a helpless Christ, the 'Man of Sorrows', blood from his wounds dripping down his body. Among the Netherlandish artists still famous for their *Andachtsbilder* are Hans Memling (c. 1433-1494), Aelbrecht Bouts (c. 1455-1549), Geertgen tot Sint Jans (c. 1465-1495) and, relatively late, Jan Sanders van Hemessen (c. 1500-1566). 'Set pieces of mnemonic imagery', as Parshall writes<sup>33</sup>, they are also prime examples of a haptic visuality, of how late medieval artists had learnt to arouse a viewer's tactile sensations, their pictures still make us feel the physical abuse, all the grabbing, handling, wounding and deforming done to Christ's body. Painters working in the Lower Rhine and elsewhere in contemporary Germany produced quite similar pictures. Only in Italy most painters preferred a more gentle rendering of Christ's agony, they included hardly any blood. As a contemporary sneered, the tormentors in Sebastiano del'Piombo's *Flagellation* (1516-1524) seem to handle soft cotton ropes.<sup>34</sup>

### Rhetoric and vividness

Surprisingly however, many of the cruelties depicted in the Passion narratives and Passion images were never mentioned in the Gospels. A product of the period's affective piety, they were more or less invented. For instance, in his introduction to the *Meditationes*, the anonymous author admitted that 'for the sake of greater impressiveness' he would relate things 'as they occurred or as they might have occurred according to the devout belief of the imagination and the varying interpretation of the mind'. He continued:

Thus when you find it said here, 'This was said and done by the Lord Jesus', and by others of whom we read, if it cannot be demonstrated by the Scriptures, you must consider it only as a requirement of devout contemplation.

Later, in his *Vita Christi*, Ludolph of Saxony gave a very similar explanation. Both authors knew what they were doing.<sup>35</sup>

32 Belting, *Das Bild und sein Publikum*, 69-104.

33 Parshall, 'Art of Memory', 464.

34 François Quiviger, *The Sensory World of Italian Renaissance Art* (London 2010) 67.

35 The entire passage is quoted in Bestul, *Texts of the Passion*, 17; he also refers to Ludolph's *Vita Christi*.

The things that ‘might have occurred’ were portrayed in the Passion images as well, making full use of the viewer’s tactile empathy. Many of the episodes chosen by the Netherlandish painters are easy to recognise. The flagellation, the crowning with thorns, the bearing of the cross and, of course, the crucifixion are all recorded in the New Testament, though most of the cruel details depicted are not. However, there are also scenes which look like pure invention – images of Christ’s hair and beard pulled out, Christ thrown to the ground or trodden upon, Christ tortured in an underground chamber, Christ dragged through a stinking cesspool or even Christ crushed in a winepress. In his great survey of all this haptic visuality, Marrow could just arrange his chapters in order of one such dismal story after the other.<sup>36</sup>

Though obviously included for their ‘impressiveness’, the scenes were not completely invented. Turning to the *Meditationes* and a range of other Passion narratives, Marrow could demonstrate how in these texts all kinds of imagery taken from the Old Testament (prophecies, metaphors, similes, symbols or allegories) came to be transformed into ‘realist’ details meant to strengthen the believers’ identification with Christ. Much of the imagery derived from Psalm 21 or the Book of Isaiah. For example, the whole notion of the ‘man of sorrows’ goes back to Isaiah 53:2-5, with its graphic view of the Messiah, the self-sacrificing ‘servant of the Lord’.<sup>37</sup>

Profiting from more recent studies, Bestul also stressed the role of the apocryphal gospels, among them the gospel of Nicodemus already ‘filling in’ details on the deposition from the cross, the presence of Joseph of Arimathea at the scene and Mary’s extreme grief. Other important sources were such medieval instances of biblical exegesis as the *Glossa ordinaria*, the *Historia Scholastica* of Peter Comestor († 1179) and the *Legenda Aurea* of Jacobus de Voragine († 1298).<sup>38</sup> Finally, as emphasised by Tobias Kemper, there were the instruments of Christ’s Passion, the so-called ‘arma Christi’. In the thirteenth century, in the wake of the new piety, such ‘relics’, including one of the ‘holy nails’, were taken from Constantinople to Rome, Paris and other European centres of worship.<sup>39</sup>

Both the texts and the images, then, went to great lengths to create the desired emotional and sensory immersion in the suffering of Christ, but far from revealing a ‘childlike’ emotional universe, as if the preachers and painters

36 Marrow, *Passion Iconography*, chapters 3, 4 and 5.

37 *Ibid.*, chapter 1; Marrow could build on the earlier investigations of Kurt Ruh and F.P. Pickering.

38 Bestul, *Texts of the Passion*, 26-33; on the *Legenda Aurea* and the Low Countries, see A. Berteloot et al. (eds.), ‘Een boec dat men te Latine heet Aurea Legenda’. *Beiträge zur niederländischen Übersetzung der Legenda Aurea* (Münster 2002).

39 Tobias A. Kemper, *Die Kreuzigung Christi. Motivgeschichtliche Studien zu lateinischen und deutschen Passionstraktaten des Spätmittelalters* (Tübingen 2006); cf. Robert Sukale, ‘Arma Christi: Überlegungen zur Zeichenhaftigkeit mittelalterlicher Andachtsbilder’, *Städel-Jahrbuch* n.s. 6 (1977) 177-208.

just had to adapt to the believers' unadulterated emotions, the 'childlikeness' was their doing. It was their *pathopoeia* working the emotions, and much of it must have been grafted onto the rhetorical traditions prevailing in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, the *Rhetorica's* hammering on vividness and its dwelling on the art of memory in particular. Recently Kimberly Rivers, drawing on Carruthers's work, confirmed the *Rhetorica's* central importance to the traditions of late medieval preaching. Its mnemonic techniques proved congenial to the new oratorical skills needed by Franciscan and Dominican preachers alike, explaining much of the text's revival in thirteenth-century university teaching.<sup>40</sup> In fact, as Carruthers concluded, when it was finally revived, it was within the context of another understanding of *memoria*, developed in older monastic traditions of ruminative meditation.<sup>41</sup>

### Brugman's Life of Christ

As we will see, Parshall's more detailed analysis of the *Rhetorica* confirms these connections. However, to underline the devotional practices' affective complexity, their interweaving of the mental, the corporeal and the sensory, let us first turn to one 'vita Christi' in particular, the *Devote oefeninge der kijntheit, des middels ende des eyndes ons Heren Christi*, written by the Franciscan priest Johannes Brugman (c. 1400-1473). Brugman, famed for his impassioned preaching and in close contact with the Brothers of the Common Life, probably wrote the text in the 1460s at the request of a nun or semi-religious woman ('eenre ynniger maget').<sup>42</sup> With the exception of its third and longest section, the one describing the Passion, much of the *Oefeninge* can be traced back to the *Arbor Vitae Crucifixae Jesu*, a narrative by the Italian Franciscan Ubertino de Casale (1259-1329). Brugman himself refers to Bonaventure's *Lignum Vitae* and Bridget of Sweden's *Revelations*, but the *Meditationes* and Ludolph's *Vita* might have been important as well.<sup>43</sup>

40 Rivers, *Preaching the Memory*, 1-23.

41 Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, 154-155; idem, *The Craft of Memory*, 7-14.

42 Brugman, 'Devote oefeninge', 288.

43 P. Optatus, 'De invloed van Hubertinus van Casale op Het Leven van Jezus door J.B.', *Ons Geestelijk Erf* 23 (1949) 315-334, 427-434; Brugman, *Oefeninge*, 296, 355; on Brugman, see F.A.H. van den Hombergh, *Leven en werk van Jan Brugman O.F.M.* (c. 1400-1473) (Groningen 1967).



Hans Memling, *The Virgin Showing the Man of Sorrows*,  
c. 1480.

Museo de la Capilla Real, Granada.

Like all contemporary authors on the Passion, Brugman does not so much describe Christ's mental as his bodily ordeal.<sup>44</sup> Similarly, taking his readers 'or those hearing it read' from one episode to the next, he incites them to imagine themselves as present at the events. He wants them to really hear the nails hammered into the hands and feet of Christ or, in one of the earlier episodes, to even smell the stinking gobs spat in his face. As the nineteenth-century scholar Willem Moll already concluded, 'the whole design of Brugman's little book aims to induce the reader not only to mere meditation but to a clear and almost sensory vision of what he relates'.<sup>45</sup> To Brugman, the ruminative reading or hearing of his *Oefeninge (edercawwen)*, as he calls it<sup>46</sup>) implied much more than just visualising the episodes in spirit. Like all Passion narratives, his *Oefeninge*, aiming to mould the audience's emotions as strongly as possible, asked for a deeply participatory meditation, an imaginative reconstruction of the Passion grafted onto the most vivid, most tactile identification conceivable.

Part of Brugman's striving for *demonstratio* is his affective, apostrophic and exclamatory prose. Time and again, he engages his audience's literal compassion through addressing Mary or, occasionally, also Pilate or 'sweet Jesus' himself (*apostrophe*). He also has the latter address Mary and John at the crucifixion (*sermocinatio*) and, like every good orator, he continually inserts deictic markers – phrases such as 'here', 'now', 'there' or 'see'. As Moll noted, even these are highly sensory. Brugman often starts each new episode, not with a simple 'let us note' or 'let us contemplate' but with more engaging, intersensory deictic markers as 'let us note and listen', 'let us see and note', 'let us see and hear' or 'let us listen and hear'. He also favours such kinesthetic markers as 'let us accompany Jesus', 'let us go with Jesus', 'let us stand with Mary' (stand and weep with her at the foot of the cross) or 'let us sit with those devote women' (sitting and weeping with the other holy women on Golgotha hill). At every episode, Brugman wishes his readers and listeners to develop a deeply sensory immersion, to see, hear, feel and even smell the events.

Christ's humanity, his utter tangibility, determines Brugman's *Oefeninge*. In his account of the Nativity he already urges his readers to contemplate 'the child's visible and tangible nature'.<sup>47</sup> Such passages might

44 The text was already edited in 1854 by the Dutch church historian Willem Moll and included as 'Brugmans "Leven van Jezus"' in his study on Brugman. See Willem Moll, *Johannes Brugman en het godsdienstig leven onzer vaderen in de vijftiende eeuw* (Amsterdam 1854) appendix VII.

45 Moll, *Johannes Brugman*, 58: Translation of 'De gehele vorm van Brugman's boeske is er op ingerigt, om de lezer niet slechts tot bloote overdenkingen te leiden, maar tot eene klare en bijna zinnelijke aanschouwing van wat hij verhaalt'.

46 Brugman, *Oefeninge*, 334.

47 *Ibid.*, 306: Translation of 'die sienber ende bevoelike natuer des Kindes'.

have reminded them of the many devotional images depicting Mary as she caresses the toes of the baby on her lap. In the happy phrasing of Constance Classen, this was ‘a touchable God’, all humans could touch him in the flesh.<sup>48</sup> His disciples could – Mary Magdalen anointing his feet, Judas kissing him on the cheek (or in most of the narratives, as a travesty of the kiss of peace, on the mouth) or doubting Thomas thrusting a finger into his side – but so of course, could his tormentors: they could grab, beat, kick or scourge him and ultimately hammer the nails into his hands and feet on the cross.

Let us take a look at some of the episodes in which we might get a taste of this, not only from Brugman’s sensory language but also from a few ‘borrowings’ from the Old Testament, meant to enliven the rather dry account of the Gospels. For instance, when Christ is arrested in the garden of Gethsemane, we read: ‘so they put those fierce, cruel and stinking hands to that sweet, innocent lamb Jesus’. They ‘roared like lions’, Brugman adds, thus inserting imagery adopted from Isaiah 5:29 (343). In other episodes Christ’s hair and beard are pulled out (Isaiah 50:6; 344). In the house of Annas his tormentors hit him cruelly on the chin (345), which they repeat, and then also spitting in his face, in the house of Caiaphas, making Brugman presume – ‘het is goet te vermoeden’ (it is very likely), one of his standard phrases – that his nose and mouth are bleeding. As he rounds off, ‘his forehead, mouth and cheeks and his whole blessed face are covered with ugly gobs and snot’ (Isaiah 53:1-7; 347). Relating the flagellation in the house of Pilate, Brugman relies on Brigid of Sweden’s revelations, in which she saw ‘his blessed body that wretchedly beaten, torn and scourged, that one could see his ribs and that the ropes took part of his flesh with them’. Or take the crowning with thorns, dressed in his purple cloak, when he was beaten again: ‘[...] the blood burst and sprang from his blessed head and ran down into his ears and eyes, so that with his blessed fingers he wiped the blood out of his eyes’ (Isaiah 63:1-2; 355-356).

Finally, there is Brugman’s highly tactile language when he depicts the cruelties at Golgotha. We read about Christ’s second, utterly painful unclothing, when his clothes still stuck to the wounds of the flagellation, for which he had been undressed before. Brugman exclaims: ‘Oh, how cruelly are his clothes pulled off, which, sticky as they were, still clung to that bloody, wounded body, and how wretchedly he starts bleeding again!’ No less gripping is the next episode, that of the actual crucifixion:

Let us with heavy heart, with crying eyes and with bloody tears behold how the blessed hands are nailed through with blunt nails, after which the holy feet [are] so wretchedly pierced through and cut through that his holy bones may burst.

There, Brugman inserts another of his *apostrophes*, making us see and even hear the crucifixion through the eyes and ears of Mary and the other holy women standing by:

Oh Mary, thou who saw how his clothes were pulled off and that the instruments of his passion were prepared, and heard this hammering of the nails, and might well imagine the bursting and tearing apart of the legs and veins, oh warm-hearted mother, how you must have felt, hearing this, and [you] other ardent and pious hearts!<sup>49</sup>

It is all tactility then, all grabbing, handling, wounding, deforming and finally killing the Son of God. As most of the Passion narratives describe, already in the houses of Annas, Caiaphas and Pilate his face had been beaten beyond all recognition, another reference to Isaiah. His poor mother, watching him climb the road to Golgotha, could only recognise her child by his voice. Already there his humanity had been deformed to the point of inhumanity.

Brugman's *Oefeninge* was only one of the many 'vitae Christi' produced in the Low Countries, but it was certainly not the most spectacular, the most violent or affective of its kind – earlier texts reveal a greater 'philopassionism'. Nor did Brugman advise his audience on adopting specific postures or gestures when meditating on the Passion, at least not in his *Oefeninge*.<sup>50</sup> Other authors did so. One of the other manuscripts studied by Moll was a Middle Dutch

49 'Brugmans Leven van Jezus', 363-364: Translation of: 'Och hoe wredelicken worden him sine cledere uutghetogen, die ghedroghet waren ende ghebacken waren an dat blodighe, gewonde lichaem, ende hoe yamerlick wert hi weder op nye bloedende!' [...] 'so laet ons doch mit bedructer herten, mit screyende oghen ende mit bloedighen tranen sien, hoe die ghebenedide handen mit plompen nagelen doerghenegelt worden, ende daerna die heilige voeten so yamerliken doormoerdet ende doergraven dat syn heilige beenen bersten mochten. O Maria, ghi die saget dat hem sijn cleder uut en ghetogen waren ende dat die instrumenten sijnre passien bereyt waren, ende hoerde dat incloppen der nagelen, ende wal bedenken moeghet die berstinghe ende scoringhe der benen ende der aderen, och hertelike moeder, hoe mochte u doe te moede wesen, hoe ghi dit hoerden ende anderen ynnighen, devoten herten!'

50 In his *Devotus Tractatus*, also written between 1450 and 1470 but merely for his fellow Franciscans, Brugman did include gestural and postural instructions. See the *Tractatus*' edition in: Van den Hombergh, *Leven en werk*, 221-222. Perhaps he deemed such exercising less appropriate for the religious and semi-religious women he addressed in his *Oefeninge*. On the contrast between Brugman's preserved texts and his reputation as a preacher, see Thom Mertens, 'The Sermon of Johannes Brugman OFM († 1473): Preservation and Form', in: Roger Andersson (ed.), *Constructing the Medieval Sermon* (Turnhout 2008) 253-274.

translation of the *Meditationes de Passione Christi* by the German Augustinian Jordan of Quedlinburg (c. 1300-1370/1380). As Moll disapprovingly noted, after each episode the text included an exhortation headed in red by the word *medevormicheit*. In these exhortations the author suggested how his readers might practice such ‘conformitas’, how they might literally imitate Christ in his condition or actions related in the episode. For instance, after reading or hearing how Christ, mourning in Gethsemane, bent his face down to the ground, they should do the same, ‘and from compassion and love shed as much as one can the tears of Christ’. Or, having related how Christ was hit on the chin, the text continues: ‘if someone contemplating this article wishes to conform to it, he may hit himself on the chin for the sake of Christ’.<sup>51</sup>

In fact, exhortations to a literal, bodily *conformitas* can be found in most of the Passion narratives illustrating, according to Thomas Lenten, how until the *Devotio Moderna* the body remained an essential instrument in the imaginative participation in the Passion.<sup>52</sup> Ludolph of Saxony had already suggested that his readers may box their ears when Christ is hit on his ear, that they may scourge themselves when Christ has been scourged or similarly, that, whether standing or lying down, their limbs may form a cross to articulate their inner and outer *conformitas* to Christ crucified. The readers of the narratives certainly followed such advice (Huizinga already noted various examples), even the Sisters of the Common Life adhered to the practice. As she recorded in her spiritual autobiography, Alijt Bake, prioress of the Windesheim convent in Ghent, would often stand with arms outstretched to feel the pain of Christ.<sup>53</sup> A famous pictorial example of such *medevormicheit* is again Van der Weyden’s *Descent from the Cross*. As many art historians have observed, there is a striking conformity between Mary’s swooning body and the body of her son taken down from the cross.<sup>54</sup> Of course, the *Descent* offered its fifteenth-century viewers much more than that. In all its tactility, from Mary’s tear rolling down her cheek to the weight of Christ’s lifeless body, it effectively integrated (as it might still do) the viewer’s bodily, sensory and emotional immersion.<sup>55</sup>

51 Moll, *Johannes Brugman*, 75-76.

52 Thomas Lenten, “‘Andacht’ und ‘Gebärde’”. Das religiöse Ausdrucksverhalten’, in: B. Jussen and C. Koslofsky (eds.), *Kulturelle Reformation. Sinnformationen im Umbruch 1400-1600* (Göttingen 1999) 54-59.

53 Wybren Scheepsma, *Medieval Religious Women in the Low Countries: The ‘Modern Devotion’, the Canonesses of Windesheim and their Writings* (Woodbridge 2004) 218.

54 Cf. Reindert Falkenburg, ‘The Household of the Soul: Conformity in the *Merode Triptych*’, in: Maryan Ainsworth (ed.), *Early Netherlandish Painting at the Crossroads* (New York 2001) 2-17; Peter Parshall, ‘Commentary’, in: *ibid.*, 18-25.

55 Hammerschmidt, ‘The Impact’, 211-215.

## Artificial and bodily memory

Few cultural historians today would still regard Brugman's *Oefeninge* or any of the contemporary Passion narratives as confirming Huizinga's (or one of the other early cultural historians') 'childlike' Middle Ages.<sup>56</sup> Instead, they have learned to read such texts as instances of the period's affective piety, its continual crafting of the believers' meditational practices: but does that fully explain the narratives' and images' emotional and sensory intensity? Was that intensity already constituted in contemporary rhetoric?

In an inspiring essay, Peter Parshall has argued that both the Passion paintings and the Passion narratives 'were deemed occasions for rumination and reminiscence'. Writing on the Low Countries and also profiting from Marrow's work, he quotes Carruthers approvingly that 'meditation was, in part, the act of remembering itself'. In other words, both the paintings and the narratives sought to construct successful memory images, those with the greatest affective power, while sharing a psychology of affect deriving at least partly from the revived *Rhetorica*, its art of memory in particular.<sup>57</sup>

Most importantly, the *Rhetorica* emphasised that to truly fix the images in the mind they should be clear and precise and, even more, they should always be striking, novel or idiosyncratic. To quote the central passage in full:

We ought, then, to set up images of a kind that can adhere longest in the memory. And we shall do so if we establish likenesses [similitudines] 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 singular ugliness; if we ornament some of them, as with crowns or purple cloaks, so that the likeness 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.<sup>58</sup>

As Parshall writes, when he first read the passage, with all its memory images of a crown, a purple cloak and also the disfiguration, the blood, the beauty and the ugliness, he was reminded of the figure of Christ in the house of Pilate. The similarities between the two passages seem coincidental, but what they reveal is a shared theory of affect, 'a common understanding of the authority granted to images or likenesses of a certain kind to impress themselves indelibly on the mind'. Interestingly, Parshall also refers to Marrow's analysis of all the

56 For some comments on Huizinga and Panofsky, see McMurray Gibson, *The Theater of Devotion*, 4-5; see also Rosenwein, 'Worrying about Emotions in History', 821-823.

57 Parshall, 'Art of Memory', 466.

58 Parshall follows Frances Yates' translation, but replaces her 'similitudes' (for *similitudines*) by 'likenesses'.

imagery, the prophecies, metaphors and similes, to imprint an image on the memory.<sup>59</sup>

Often the mental images suggested in this locational art of memory were more than unusual, they were positively weird. A notorious example was already given in the *Rhetorica*. To remember a legal case in which a defendant is accused of having poisoned his victim for his rich inheritance, one might imagine the victim lying ill in bed, with the defendant standing next to him. He holds a cup (to remind one of the poison), tablets (the will) and on one of his fingers he wears a ram's testicles (a verbal pun to remember the *testes*, the witnesses, but perhaps also the possibility of bribing them: Roman purses were often made from a ram's scrotum). No wonder that Puritans like the sixteenth-century clergyman William Perkins decried the whole tradition, precisely because of its insistence on mental images that are vivid, unusual and able to stir the memory emotionally. In his treatise on preaching, the *Prophetica* (1592), he called all artificial memory 'impious, because it calls up absurd thoughts, insolent, prodigious and the like which stimulate and light up depraved carnal affections'. He might have been thinking of the images of beautiful young women recommended by Peter of Ravenna, the author of one of the most comprehensive text books on the subject. Of course, a minister, speaking of holy things, should not be distracted by devilish mental images.<sup>60</sup>

Perkins also followed his own creed, of course. He and his fellow-Calvinists worshipped again a distant and righteous God. Christ had borne his sufferings for their salvation, but there was no way, not by any empathising with Christ, let alone with his mother, they could procure his intercession. As they had been taught, Christ's divinity never coincided with his physical suffering, making it pointless to strive for any empathy, any co-suffering, with him. They were merely his co-executioners, their sinful lives still crucifying Christ every day. That was a different affective piety, no less emotional but certainly of a less physical and less sensory kind.<sup>61</sup> ◀

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59 Parshall, 'Art of Memory', 459-460.

60 Yates, *Art of Memory*, 112-113, 277; behind Perkins' condemnation was also his preference for a Ramist art of memory (and preaching).

61 On these Protestant developments, see Karant-Nunn, *Reformation of Feeling*; Van Dijkhuizen, *Pain and Compassion*.