Private passions: the contemplation of suffering in medieval affective devotions.

This dissertation examines the representation of suffering in medieval affective devotional texts. Imagined suffering from Christ's life and Passion is a common theme in these materials meant for private meditation. Critical assessments of this suffering often cast it as indicative of child-like literalism and sentimentality. In 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 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 rely on a productive tension between pleasure and pain that causes the meditator to experience the act of inflicting emotional suffering on oneself.
pain upon herself as a pleasurable act of self-creation. Cha
ture of an ethical relationship with the Other to illuminate
Book of Margery Kempe. Kempe's Book demonstrates the i
his suffering "familiar" to the reader. Chapter four uses Car
argue that the Quis dabit, one of the most popular and infl. asumptions about gendered spiritual roles that affect how
Quis dabit's conversation between Bernard of Clairvaux ar
turns into his appropriation of Mary's own narrative in orde
to play for his own spiritual ends.

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