
The German Dominican Henry Suso’s (c. 1297–1366) *Hundert Betrachtungen und Begehrungen* was the medieval version of a bestseller. In the Low Countries alone over a hundred manuscripts survive in Latin, Middle Dutch, and Ripuarian, in addition to several printed versions from the end of the Middle Ages. The *Hundert Betrachtungen* belonged to a most beloved genre: treatises on the passion of Jesus Christ, which were written as sources of inspiration for meditation. These were popular because of the rising interest in the suffering of Christ in the Late Middle Ages. In addition to well-known texts such as Suso’s, hundreds, if not thousands, of such treatises survive. In view of this, it is odd that treatises on the passion have incited so little interest in medievalists, a fate which they share with many other important genres in devotional literature of the Late Middle Ages. Probably, this is a consequence of the traditional focus on aesthetically sound literature (i.e. as perceived by literary scholars from the nineteenth century onwards) rather than on texts that are interesting from a cultural-historical point of view.

As far as the *Hundert Betrachtungen* are concerned, over the past years the Dutch medievalist José van Aelst has started to amend this situation through an assessment of its transmission in the Low Countries. The current study is to be regarded as a Part Two. Part One is her PhD thesis, *Passie voor het lijden. De ‘Hundert Betrachtungen und Begehrungen’ en de oudste drie bewerkingen in de Nederlanden* (Leuven, 2005), in which she discussed Suso’s original work and the three oldest versions from the Low Countries. In *Vruchten van de Passie* Van Aelst focuses on six later versions, either in Latin or Middle Dutch. As far as their owners or writers are known, these were all from religious milieus.

As she did in her previous work, Van Aelst intends to show here how various users of the *Hundert Betrachtungen* adapted the text to their own or their audience’s needs. However, *Vruchten van de Passie* has an additional focus: she also wants to chart the theology behind the different versions of Suso’s text and its connection to religious practices within the contexts in which they were written and used.

By way of introduction, she first discusses the centrality of Christ’s passion in the liturgy, as practiced in late medieval religious communities, on the level of the year, the week, and the day. In the liturgical year, Good Friday was among the most important days. Its solemnity was enhanced by various ritual actions such as the so-called Dark Matins, which started with 24 candles burning, which were extinguished before each new responsorium. As far as the week was concerned, religious people were supposed to fast or to meditate on Christ’s passion.
every Friday. The daily Mass, particularly the ritual of the Eucharist, was another instance of remembrance of His suffering. Passion texts such as the *Hundert Betrachtungen* were used as a preparation for Mass. Subsequently, in this first chapter, Van Aelst discusses the various kinds of theology as defined by medievalists, that is, in as far as it is relevant to her study: mystical, monastic, vernacular, and imaginative theology. As far as the mystical is concerned, she distinguishes between speculative and historical-event-mystical theology; the latter focuses on making oneself a part of the historical event of the passion, for instance, by being present at the crucifixion. Imaginative theology, a phrase coined by the American medievalist Barbara Newman, happens when one thinks using images rather than, for instance, scriptural passages or inner experiences that are connected with monastic and mystical theology, respectively. Van Aelst stresses that these theological strategies are not mutually exclusive.

Chapters Two to Five discuss six versions of the *Hundert Betrachtungen*, which all rely on the oldest Middle Dutch version, the so-called “Zuid-Nederlandse bewerking” (Southern Middle Dutch version); the “Noord-Nederlandse vertaling” (Northern Dutch translation), which was a Latin translation known as the “Anonymous Latin Translation”; and the four Middle Dutch translations which rely on the latter text. The author follows the same route in each chapter. She starts with an assessment of the structure of each text and continues by charting translation and copying strategies, as in how a certain writer translated certain words or edited the text by changing the structure, for instance, from loosely-knitted aphorisms to a narration, by inserting rhyme, or by enhancing the emotional impact of the text by coupling synonyms such as “weeping and crying.” Next, the author discusses the context of the manuscripts, in which the extant version survived, and she attempts to find the milieu in which a certain version originated, using data like the dates of the manuscripts, or the information that the makers of certain texts met with each other at a certain time. Usually, this does not lead to a conclusive identification of the maker but to a convincing probability regarding the writer’s identity. These probable or certain identifications lead her to connect the subject matter of the current version of the *Hundert Betrachtungen* to theology and spirituality as was current in the supposed milieu of origin. In addition to the extant version, she studies signature passion texts from these particular contexts, for instance, the *Vita Christi* by the Carthusian Ludolph of Saxony (c. 1300–1378), when referring to versions of Suso, which were probably from a Carthusian context. Here, she shows what a detailed examination of contents brings. She connects, for example, the very strong concentration on the cross as the central element in the passion, as the trigger to humankind’s salvation, with the Crosiers. Probably, these were the translators of the first translation in Middle Dutch of the Anonymous Latin Translation. Moreover, throughout Chapters Two to Five, she provides an insight into