

Prelude: Hadewijch and the Beguine Movement

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1. Hadewijch

‘Ein grosse heilige in dem ewigen lebende, von der lere sonderlich alle gottes frunde in Brabant von hundert iaren zû dem aller vollekomenesten lebende komen sint unde von der gnaden gottes durch sû erlûhtet.’ This is how ‘sante Adelwip’, or Hadewijch, is described in a High German mystical miscellany from the Strasbourg region dating from the second half of the 14th century and containing, apart from Hadewijch’s Letter 10, sermons by Eckhart and other mystical lore.¹ The portrayal of Hadewijch as ‘a great saint through whose teaching the friends of God in Brabant have achieved the most perfect life and have been enlightened by the grace of God’ forms a striking parallel to the only other medieval reference to Hadewijch that is extant. In his mystical treatise *Seven Signs of the Zodiac* (1356) Jan van Leeuwen, lay brother in the Augustinian priory of Groenendaal near Brussels in the Duchy of Brabant when the Middle Dutch mystic writer Jan van Ruusbroec was prior, quotes Hadewijch as an authority on ‘minne’ and declares her to be ‘a holy woman, a true teacher whose books [...] are truly born of God’ and whose teachings are ‘as true as the teachings of Saint Paul’.²

The books to which Jan van Leeuwen refers are Hadewijch’s collected works, of which the canons regular of Groenendaal must have owned at least one copy.³ The three extant fourteenth-century manuscripts with her *opera omnia*, as well as surviving book catalogues, reveal that her work was copied and distributed within a Brabantine network of Augustinian canons and Carthusian monks who considered her Visions, her Letters, her Songs and her rhymed letters to be sacred texts.⁴ From a book catalogue from the same monastic network it can be inferred that her visions circulated not

¹ Ms. Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, Germ. 8,12, fol. 38r. Description of the manuscript: Hermann Degering, *Kurzes Verzeichnis der germanischen Handschriften der Preußischen Staatsbibliothek III. Die Handschriften in Oktavformat und Register zu Band I-III*, Leipzig 1932, Graz, 1970, 5-6. Wybren Scheepsma, *The Limburg Sermons. Preaching in the Medieval Low Countries at the Turn of the Fourteenth Century*, Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2008), xxx. Gregor Wünsche, ‘Hadewijch am Oberrhein. Niederländische Mystik in den Händen der sogenannten ‘Gottesfreunde’’, in Barbara Feith and René Wetzels (ed.), *Kulturtopographie des deutschsprachigen Südwestens im späteren Mittelalter*, Berlin/New York: De Gruyter, 2009, 83-97 (esp. pp. 84-88). [cf. full text in appendix](#).

² Jan van Leeuwen, *Vanden VII teeken der sonnen*, c. 13, ed. S. Axters (ed.), *Jan van Leeuwen. Een bloemlezing uit zijn werken*, Antwerpen: xxx, 1943, 41-42. [cf. full text in appendix](#)

³ Hadewijch is the first Middle Dutch author whose works have been collected in an *opera omnia*-volume, see Frank Willaert, ‘Les *Opera omnia* d’une mystique brabançonne. Réflexions sur la mise en recueil et la traduction manuscrite des oeuvres de Hadewijch (d’Anvers?)’, in *Le recueil au Moyen Âge. La fin du Moyen Âge*, eds. Tania Van Hemelryck, Stefania Marzano, *Texte, Codex & Contexte* 9 (Turnhout, 2010), 333-344.

⁴ Ms A: Brussel, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, 2879-80, provenance: Carthusians of Herne; Ms B: Brussel, KB 2877-78, ca. 1380, provenance: copy of ms. A undertaken by the Carthusians of Herne for the Brussels bookseller Godevaert de Bloc; addition of pseudo-Hadewijch’s *Tweevormich tractaetken* and *Mengeldichten* 17-29; Ms C: Gent, Universiteitsbibliotheek, 941; ca. 1375-1400, possessed in the early 15th century by the canons regular of Bethlehem near Leuven; with pseudo-Hadewichiana. For a full description of the Hadewijch manuscripts see Erik Kwakkel, ‘Ouderdom en genese van de veertiende-eeuwse Hadewijch-handschriften’, *Queeste: Journal of Medieval Literature in the Low Countries* 6 (1999), 23-40.

only in Middle Dutch but also in a Latin translation.⁵ No copy of this Latin translation has come down to us, but its existence would match the veneration with which her vernacular texts were viewed by these monks with mystical aspirations. The translation may have been undertaken in an attempt to lift Hadewijch's teachings over the linguistic barriers of vernacular Middle Dutch and promote her thought throughout Christendom.

Yet in no way do the texts themselves testify to any ambition to reach such a wide public. In contrast to the works of the few other female religious authors of her era and region whose writings we know today, Hadewijch does not seem to have undertaken any attempt to publish her work during her lifetime. She seems to not have trespassed against the limits set on women: they could assume the role of religious leader within their community but could not preach and so spread their thoughts in the public domain without explicit authorization from the Church.⁶ When the rhinelandish Benedictine abbess Hildegard of Bingen (d. 1179) acted on her God-given vocation to publish her Visions, she sought support from influential advocates in the field of religion such as Bernard of Clairvaux; and requested and received the pope's permission to preach and publish. Elisabeth of Schönau (d. 1165), benedictine nun as well, was promoted by her brother Egbert, who edited her visions in Latin. Mechthild of Magdeburg (d. ca.1285) was stimulated by her Dominican confessor Heinrich of Halle to make her spiritual writings public and he facilitated their publication. Hadewijch seems not to have found, and probably has not even sought the clerical support needed for promotion in the public sphere as a spiritual authority who had produced 'a book' in the sense of an authoritative sacred text.

This is corroborated by the fact that, while the two other beguine mystical authors, Mechthild and Marguerite Porete (d. 1310), consistently and therefore consciously use the term 'book' throughout their discourse to refer to their own text, the term 'book' – and with it the conception of her writings as 'book(s)' – is entirely absent in Hadewijch.⁷ She refers to her own speech-act with terms that

⁵ Ms C (Gent, UB 941) has at the inside of the cover, by a later hand, an excerpt of the library catalogue, now lost, made in 1487 in Augustinian priory St. Maartensconvent near Leuven: "De B. Hadewige de Antverpia. [...] Visiones Latine et Epistolas. Proverbia (quae hic desunt) Rythmos et easdem Visiones lingue Brabanto-Belgica exstare in Carthusia Zelemensi prope Diestemium." That the charterhouse in Zelem near Diest had a Latin version of Hadewijch's visions, is confirmed by the 'Rooklooster Register' (Ms. Vienna, ÖNB 12694), a list composed between 1532 and 1540 in the Augustinian priory Rooklooster near Brussels ÖNB 1269, which figures more than 1850 authors with their writings and a reference to which monastery possessed a copy of them. The Hadewijch entry is on f. 156v., see <http://rrkl.cartusiana.org/?q=node/390> (consulted 16/07/2012).

⁶ Blamires, Alcuin, 'Women and preaching Medieval Orthodoxy, Heresy and Saint's Lives', in *Viator. Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 26 (1995), pp. 135-152; Minnis, Alastair, 'Religious Roles: Public and Private', in Alastair Minnis and Rosalynn Voaden (red.), *Medieval Holy Women in the Christian Tradition c. 1100-1500*, Turnhout: Brepols, 2010, 47-81.

⁷ Sara S. Poor, *Mechthild of Magdeburg and Her Book. Gender and the Making of Textual Authority*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004. Imke De Gier, 'Ce livre monstrera a tous vraye lumiere de verité. Marguerite Porete and her Book', in Idem, *Write unto annihilation. The performative power of 'Le Miroir des simples âmes anéanties' of Marguerite Porete as mystatogic tool* [dissertation University of Antwerp, forthcoming]. Seminal comparative presentations of the three beguine mystics, Hadewijch, Mechthild and Marguerite Porete: Kurt Ruh, 'Beginnenmystik. Hadewijch, Mechthild von Magdeburg, Marguerite Porete', in *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur* 106 (1977), 265-277; Bernard McGinn, 'Three Great Beguine Mystics', in Idem, *The flowering of mysticism: men and women in the new mysticism (1200-1350)* (New York: Crossroad, 1996), 199-265.

imply direct, situational and oral communication, like ‘segghen’ (say), ‘spreken’ (speak) and ‘singhen’.⁸ While Mechthild’s and Marguerite’s writings were conceived as books revealing God’s message to the Church, Hadewijch’s were primarily addressed to specific like-minded souls for whom she exercised a particular role as spiritual mistress. For her, writing text was purely a means for bringing her voice to friends from her network who were in need of her instructive, exhortative word and for exchanging thoughts on *minne* with like-minded souls. This limited, well-defined public explains a striking difference between Hadewijch’s text and those of other female religious writers of the time: the standard *humilitas topos* with which a woman writer explains that the message in the book is God’s, not hers, and that it was God’s will, not hers, that the text be written, is absent.⁹ In a text addressed exclusively to like-minded souls who acknowledge her status as spiritual mistress, there was no need for moderating the assertive sense of self and the authoritative voice that accompanies the status of ‘holy woman’.

2. Holy women

The term ‘holy woman’ in the two fourteenth-century references indicates that Hadewijch was seen as one of the *mulieres religiosae vulgariter beghinae dictae* who constituted, in the early- and mid-thirteenth century, a new and marked phenomenon in the religious landscape of an area that on the whole corresponds to what in the Carolingian era was Lower Lorraine, stretching from Hainaut in the West to Cologne in the East, with the upcoming cities at its centre – such as Nivelles, Liège, Loon and Zoutleeuw – functioning as focal points.¹⁰ From the Latin Lives composed about the mostcharismatic of these religious women by their contemporary clerical supporters we can glean information about the way of life and spirituality of these ‘living saints’ which allows us to contextualise Hadewijch.¹¹ Apart from the two small fourteenth-century references cited above, no historical information is known about Hadewijch whatsoever; her writings, at least in the fourteenth-century collected works in which we know them, are void of explicit biographical data.¹²

⁸ Anikó Daróczi, *Groet gheruchte van dien wondere. Spreken, zwijgen en zingen bij Hadewijch*, Leuven: Peeters, 2007.

⁹ On the *topoi*, in women’s texts, of humility and of invoking God as true author, see e.g. the seminal article by Rosalynn Voaden, ‘God’s Almighty Hand. Women Co-Writing the Book’, in Lesley Smith and Jane Taylor (eds.), *Women, the Book and the Holy* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), 55-66.

¹⁰ Walter Simons, *Cities of Ladies: Beguine Communities in the Medieval Low Countries, 1200-1565* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003); Bernard McGinn, ‘Mulieres Religiosae: Experiments in Female Mysticism’, in Idem, *The Flowering of Mysticism: Men and Women in the New Mysticism (1200-1350)* (New York: Crossroad, 1996), 153-198.

¹¹ ‘Living saints’ are seen by the community as a sacred medium having a privileged direct contact with God and they hold within that community the officious role as spiritual counsellor, see Anneke Mulder-Bakker, ‘General Introduction: Holy Lay Women and their Biographers in the Thirteenth Century’, in Idem (ed.), *Living Saints of the Thirteenth century. The Lives of Yvette, anchoress of Huy; Juliana of Cornillon, Author of the Corpus Christi Feast; and Margaret the Lame, anchoress of Magdeburg* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012), xxx. For a list of the Lives of the *mulieres sanctae*, see Simons, *Cities of Ladies*, xxx, and Barbara Newman and Anneke Mulder-Bakker, ‘Canon of Thirteenth-Century Southern Netherlandish Saints’ Lives’, in Idem (ed.), *Living Saints of the Thirteenth century. The Lives of Yvette, anchoress of Huy; Juliana of Cornillon, Author of the Corpus Christi Feast; and Margaret the Lame, anchoress of Magdeburg* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012), xxx.

¹² Despite, or due to, the absence of clear-cut historical data, scholars have tried to identify her with one out of several namesakes that are mentioned in archival sources. Two of the more recent identifications are that by Wybren Scheepsma who suggests Hadewijch may be identical with Heilwich Bloemardinne, a Brussels beguine active in the early fourteenth century: “Hadewijch und die ‘Limburgse sermoenen’. Überlegungen zu Datierung,

The early Beguines alternated between different states of life: in an anchorage, as a lay woman at the parental home, in an informal community with like-minded souls.¹³ The Cistercian abbey of Villers in the south of the Duchy of Brabant, founded in 1146 by monks sent from Clairvaux, assumed responsibility for the pastoral care of these spiritual lay women. Consequently, at a certain point in their lives a good number of them joined one of the many new female Cistercian convents that sprang up in the 1220s in the region between the rivers Scheldt and Meuse.¹⁴ Most women belonged to the higher social strata (nobility and urban patriciate) and were, therefore, linked by family ties to influential secular and Church networks. Some were literate, not only in their mother tongue but also – to a certain extent, at least – in Latin, and were well-versed, not only in liturgical texts but also in the non-biblical religious tradition. Beatrice of Nazareth wrote at least one mystical treatise in Middle Dutch and Juliana of Cornillon composed a Latin liturgy for the new liturgical feast of Corpus Christi, which she promoted and which she, through her acquaintance with Jacques de Pantaleon, Archdeacon of Liège and later Pope Urbanus IV, succeeded in adding to the liturgical calendar.¹⁵

The Lives testify to profound spiritual friendships between like-minded souls, not only within but also across gender boundaries.¹⁶ Jacques de Vitry (d. 1240) left the University of Paris for the diocese of Liège in order to be near Marie d'Oignies, a charismatic lay woman venerated as a living saint and spiritual counsellor.¹⁷ Under her influence he became an Augustinian canon. From 1211 to 1213 he preached the Albigensian Crusade and wrote Marie's Life for Fulco, Bishop of Toulouse, as an exemplary alternative to Cathar spirituality. His account helped to gain papal approval for the Beguines of the diocese of Liège in 1215. The Dominican Thomas of Cantimpré (d. 1272), born near Brussels and educated in Paris and Cologne, considered Lutgart of Tongres his 'spiritual mother'. After her death he wrote her Life as a gift for Hawidis, Abbess of the Cistercian convent of Aywières south of Brussels, where Lutgart had lived, in order to obtain the little finger of Lutgart's right hand as a personal relic. He was an admirer and advocate of Beguine spirituality and apart from Lutgart's life he also wrote a

Identität und Authentizität," in *Deutsche Mystik im abendländischen Zusammenhang*, ed. Walter Haug (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2000), 653–682; and by Rob Faesen, who suggests she may be Aleydis/Helwich, first abbess of the Cistercian convent Valduc, founded by Hendrik II of Brabant in 1230: 'Was Hadewijch a Beguine or a Cistercian? An Annotated Hypothesis', *Cîteaux. Commentarii Cistercienses* 55 (2004), pp. 47-63. These hypothetical identifications cannot be substantiated.

¹³ On the beguine movement: Walter Simons, *Cities of Ladies: Beguine Communities in the Medieval Low Countries, 1200-1565* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003). See also: Walter Simons, 'Holy Women of the Low Countries': A Survey', in Alastair Minnis and Rosalynn Voaden (red.), *Medieval Holy Women in the Christian Tradition c. 1100 – c. 1500*, Turnhout: Brepols, 2010, 625-662.

¹⁴ Roger de Ganck, 'The Cistercian Nuns of Belgium in the Thirteenth Century seen against the Background of the second Wave of Cistercian Spirituality', in Guido Hendrix (red.), Roger de Ganck O.C.S.O., *Historicus van Cîteaux in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden, gebundeld*, Leuven: Peeters, 1999, 15-32.

¹⁵ Beatrice of Nazareth, *Seven Manners of Loving* (trans. By Eric Colledge), in Elizabeth Avilda Petroff, *Medieval Women's Visionary Literature*, New York: xxx, 1986, 200-206; see also: *The Life of Beatrice of Nazareth, 1200-1268*, trans. by Roger de Ganck, Cistercian Publications, 1991, 288-331: 'cap. XIII: The Love of God and its Seven Degrees'. On Julian's liturgy for the Feast of Corpus Christi, see: Anneke Mulder-Bakker, 'Juliana of Cornillon: Church Reform and the Corpus Christi Feast', in Idem, *Lives of the Anchoresses: The Rise of the Urban Recluse in Medieval Europe*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005, xxx.

¹⁶ Barbara Newman, 'Preface', in *Send me God. The Lives of Ida the Compassionate of Nivelles, Nun of la Ramnillers; and Abundus, Monik of Villers by Goswin of Bossut*, trans. by Martinus Cawley O.C.S.O and with a preface by Barbara Newman, Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006, xxix-xxviii, esp. xxxiv-xxxvi.

¹⁷ *Two Lives of Marie d'Oignies, by Jacques de Vitry and Thomas de Cantimpré*, trans. Hugh Feiss, Margot H. King, Toronto : Peregrina Pub., 2003.

continuation of Jacques de Vitry's *Life of Marie d'Oignies*; a hagiography of Christina Mirabilis of Saint Trond, a lay woman with shamanistic allure; and one of the Beguine-turned-Dominican, Margaret of Ypres in Flanders (d. 1237).¹⁸

The spirituality of the *mulieres religiosae* as expressed in the *vitae* is Eucharistic and Christ-centric in nature. Several devotional and theological themes in the Lives converge with topics discussed at the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215: the importance of communion and confession, the dogma of transubstantiation, the Trinity. The women are portrayed as engaged in highly affective devotional practices which appropriated meditational practices developed in twelfth-century Cistercian and Victorine monastic milieu. They are endowed with charismatic gifts such as vision, prophecy, glossolalia and jubilation. The mystical aspect of their spirituality is rooted in twelfth-century bridal mysticism: the passionate love between the human soul and Christ is cultivated and considered the perfect impetus for attaining spiritual perfection and mystical union. Hadewijch's writings convey this spirituality and express it in a Middle Dutch mystical idiom closely related to that used by Beatrice of Nazareth (1200-1268) in her treatise *Seven Manners of Love*.

The fact that, unlike the holy women mentioned above, including Beatrice, no hagiography was written of Hadewijch is informative in itself. It suggests that in her own time she must have been a contested figure. The motif of the *vremden* in her writings, referring to those who are strangers to (her conception of) *minne* and in opposition to the true 'lovers', seems to allude to a precarious situation. That assumption is corroborated by the *List of the Perfect*, an appendix to Hadewijch's Visions in which 107 seraphic souls are listed whom Hadewijch, in her visionary ecstasy, has seen to have lived *minne* perfectly.¹⁹ The list, which is in roughly chronological order, begins with biblical Saints – Mary, John the Baptist, John the Evangelist, Mary Magdalene, the Apostles James and Peter; and continues with great Church Fathers such as Augustine and Bernard, local saints like Amelberga of Temse (between Brussels and Antwerp) and unknown figures such as 'a certain Constans'. Among the recently deceased perfect souls are 'a converted Jewish woman', 'Hildegard who saw all those visions' and 'a Beguine who was killed by Mister Robert because of her perfect love'. Between 1233 and 1239 the Inquisitor Robert le Bougre had many heretics burned at the stake in Northern France and the Low Countries. Stating that this Beguine was killed 'because of her perfect minne' implicates a repudiation of Inquisition norms.

The *perfecti* still living, summed up by region and not by name, also seem to be situated on the margins of the Church: 'a forgotten *magister* alone in a cell', 'a repudiated priest who is very enlightened', 'a woman who was a whore and became a recluse'. Contemporary perfect souls included more women than men and of those women only a few are nuns, the others being lay women such as recluses, Beguines, young noblewomen and widows. Hadewijch's spiritual network spanned quite a wide geographical area, stretching from England in the West via Saxony to Jerusalem in the East; and from Bohemia in the South to Denmark in the North. Brabant boasted the largest number of perfect souls; and contacts with other regions within the Holy Roman Empire – to which the Duchy of Brabant belonged – must have been intense. 'Hildegard who saw all those visions' is listed as a recently deceased perfect soul, as are two women in Cologne, Lady Lana and Oda. The *perfecti* still living in-

¹⁸ Thomas of Cantimpré, *The Collected Saints' Lives: Abbot John of Cantimpré, Christina the Astonishing, Margaret of Ypres, and Lutgard of Aywières*, ed. by Barbara Newman, Turnhout: Brepols, 2008.

¹⁹ Some scholars regard the *List* as a pseudepigraphic addition to Hadewijch's visions, reason why it was not included in Hadewijch, *The Complete Works*, trans. by Columba Hart, Nahwah, N.J., 1980 (*Classics of Western Spirituality Series*). It was later published as 'These are the Perfect, Clad as Love. Hadewijch Saw Each of Them With His/Her Seraphim', trans. by Helen Rolfsen, in *Vox benedictina* 5 (1988) 201-209. Even if Hadewijch would not have written the list herself, a view to which I do not subscribe, it still reveals her spiritual network.

clude a recluse in Saxony, three women and two men in Thuringia, one in Bohemia and two more anonymous women on the Rhine.

3. Writing on *Minne*

Paradoxically, while Hadewijch, unlike her fellow Beguine authors Mechthild of Magdeburg and Marguerite Porete, seems neither to have profiled herself as a 'writer' during her lifetime nor to have sought or found clerical support for publishing her work, today she enjoys an unequivocal reputation as the greatest writer of the three.²⁰ Whilst Mechthild and Marguerite have each left us only one book, works which do not stand out for their "literary" qualities, Hadewijch's oeuvre contains distinct genres – letters, visions, songs – and she seems to have been able to express herself with equal ease in prose, rhymed couplets and stanzaic verse. She had the creative skills to use different literary traditions, written as well as oral ones, so as reach the intended addressee or circle in the most fruitful way and pass her teaching on *Minne*.

The Visions, distributed over thirteen chapters, consist of twelve visionary raptures experienced by Hadewijch during the Hours, mostly Matins, on or around important liturgical feasts such as Pentecost, the Birth of the Virgin and Epiphany, amongst others. Unlike the visionary collections by women who lived in a monastic context, such as Elisabeth of Schönau and the Helfta nuns, Hadewijch's visions do not neatly follow the order of the liturgical year and the imagery is less literally rooted in the liturgical theme of the day.²¹ The design of her collection is more elliptic and at the same time more purposeful. From the concluding fourteenth chapter, it becomes clear that her visions were written at the request of one particular friend. In this chapter she directly addresses this friend who had asked her to share her as much as possible of her contemplative encounters with God, and expresses her regrets that she was not able to fulfill this wish and write down everything.²² The twelve visions selected by her, reflect her personal growth to spiritual perfection.²³ In the first vision her visionary "I" contemplates the face of Christ from the choir of the throne angels, which occupy the lowest rank of the highest contemplative triad of the nine angelic choirs and Christ confronts her with what she lacks in order to be perfectly like Him and fully know *minne*. In the last vision, she contemplates Christ's face from the choir of the seraphim, the highest angel-choir which enjoys closest proximity to God, and she is shown and told that her soul has become perfect *minne*. Whilst the revelations hidden in these visions primarily concern Hadewijch's own growth to perfect seraphic soul, an important sub-theme is her salvatory vocation for specific souls meant to reach spiritual perfection through her. The addressee of the visions is thus assured that Hadewijch will guide him or her on the way to spiritual perfection; and recording her contemplative vision is an act by which she undertakes this task, since the collection provides an exemplary mirror for becoming *minne*.

²⁰ See e.g. Bernard McGinn, 'The Four Female Evangelists of the Thirteenth Century. The Invention of Authority', in Walter Haug e.a. (red.), *Deutsche Mystik im abendländischen Zusammenhang*, Tübingen, 2000, p. 175-194, esp. Xxx; Kurt Ruh, 'Hadewijch', in Idem, *Geschichte der abendländischen Mystik. Band II: Frauenmystik und Franziskanische Mystik der Frühzeit*, München: Verlag C.H.Beck, 1993, 159-xxx; esp. p. 162.

²¹ Veerle Fraeters, 'Gender and Genre. The Design of Hadewijch's Book of Visions', in Therese de Hemptinne en Maria Eugenia Gongora (red.), *The Voice of Silence. Women, Literacy and Gender in the Low Countries and Rhineland (12th-15th Century)*, Turnhout: Brepols, 2004, p. 57-81.

²² Hadewijch, Vision 14, ll. 110-124; Hadewijch, *The Complete Works*, trans. Columba Hart, Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1980, 304.

²³ On the mystagogic function of the Visions see: Veerle Fraeters, 'Handing on Experience and Knowledge in Hadewijch's Book of Visions', in Anneke-Mulder Bakker, Liz Herbert McAvoy (ed.), *Women and Experiences in Later Medieval Writing. Reading the Book of Life*, Palgrave MacMillan, 2009, 149-168. References to older literature on this theme can be found in this chapter.

Hadewijch also composed mystical love songs, of which a collection of 45 have come down to us.²⁴ Thematically and formally they are modelled upon profane *trouvère* chansons: a lover-knight sings out the pain and joy, the fears and hopes he experiences due to his passionate, ennobling love for the distant Lady he serves, the Lady being in Hadewijch's lyrics *Minne* personified. Yet Hadewijch appropriates this lyrical model in a creative way and adapts it to her purpose. The courtly register is profoundly imbued with biblical allusions and motifs. Similarly, the lyrical model is infused with narrative elements from the *roman courtois* – such as the motif of the quest – as well as from didactic allegory, as she sometimes brings into play allegorical characters that act as helpers to or adversaries of the main character, the lover, on his quest for *Minne*. In addition, she inserts an exhortative voice that directly addresses the intended public, issuing firm warnings and expressing enthusiastic support, a technique which gives the songs an epistolary or sermon-like quality. She thus creates a unique, hybrid genre intended to be sung for, or by – we do not know the concrete details of the performance practice – a circle which she addresses in the first song: 'You (plural) who want to serve *Minne* and are willing to undertake adventures for her'.²⁵ The songs are contrafacts, which means they were written to fit the format of an existing melody. The manuscripts themselves do not provide any indication as to which melodies, but the method of 'stanzaic heuristics', which focuses on formal aspects such as rhyme scheme and rhythm, allows for identification of the song type and in some cases for identification of the specific melodic source.²⁶ Hadewijch composed most of her songs on the melodies of *trouvère* chansons from Northern France. She also wrote 6 *rondelli* (Latin religious dance songs) and two hymns; and the closing song in the collection of 45 songs is based on a Marian sequence.

Song 40 (See Appendix) is, most probably, a contrafact of *Ne me donne pas talent* by the anonymous *trouvère* known as Moniot d' Arras (active 1213-19). The song has a very distinct rhyme scheme: the last verse is an orphan. It must have been quite a popular tune for not only Hadewijch but others as well used it for religious contrafacture. Hadewijch has filled the orphan verse with her favourite word, *minne*, thus expressing, by purely formal means, the absolute sovereignty and unity of divine love. Song 40, which lacks the lyrical "I" so typical of *trouvère* lyric, is a narrative in stanzaic form; and the closing lines of the stanzas, i.e. the lines ending in rhymeless *minne*, succinctly relate the basic structure of the mystical quest. First the lover is to catch up with *minne* who is far ahead (*stanza's* 1-2); as soon as he meets her, he is to conquer her in a duel (*stanza's* 3-4); **when he conquers *minne* by being conquered by her**, they fuse and enjoy each other in fruition (*stanza's* 5-6); only those who have experienced such mystical union, know what it means to to run the course of *minne* (strofen 7-8). The quest for *Minne* is, in this specific song, represented as a course that has to be run, an image which is uncommon in courtly literature but has strong biblical overtones. It is used particularly by Saint Paul, for example, in his Second Epistle to Timothy 4:7: 'I have fought a good fight: I have finished my course: I have kept the faith.'. It is not improbable, therefore, that Hadewijch composed Song 40 as a meditation on this biblical text. This is but one illustration of how Hadewijch

²⁴ Hadewijch's Songs were formerly called 'Stanzaic Poems'. I call them 'songs', following the new practice set by the newest edition: Hadewijch, *Lieder*, uitgegeven, ingeleid, vertaald en toegelicht door Veerle Fraeters and Frank Willaert, met een reconstructie van de melodieën door Louis Peter Grijp, Groningen: Historische Uitgeverij Lieder, 2009.

²⁵ Song 1, stanza 1 and 2; Hadewijch, *The Complete Works*, trans. Columba Hart, Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1980, 127.

²⁶ The method of 'stanzaic heuristics' is explained by musicologist Louis Grijp, 'Reconstructie van de melodieën', in Hadewijch, *Lieder*, ed. by Veerle Fraeters and Frank Willaert, Groningen: Historische Uitgeverij, 2009, 325-240.

conflates the courtly register with biblical inter-text, however concealed the latter may seem at first sight.

Apart from 45 stanzaic poems (now known as songs), Hadewijch's oeuvre contains sixteen mixed poems the greater part of which is written in rhyming couplets, the form used for vernacular didactic and sapiential literature intended for oral recitation. A "you" is addressed and the mystical message is conveyed in a rather unsophisticated manner. Hadewijch may well have written these rhymed letters in the context of the spiritual education of one of her disciples. By contrast, the collection of 31 prose letters displays a far less homogeneous outlook. It contains heartfelt notes to a 'sweet love'; strict instructions to a 'dear child'; impersonal but no less passionate treatises on mystical theological themes such as the Trinity and the Intra-Trinitarian love; and the true meaning of the simultaneously divine and human nature of Christ. The collection may very well consist of copies kept by Hadewijch of her correspondence with friends and disciples from her circle; and may also include text that she received from and through others.²⁷ As is often the case with medieval letters kept for the message they contained, names and dates that refer to the concrete context are edited away. Some letters do have passages in which an "I" expresses itself, mostly in the voice of an exhortative spiritual mistress; but once in a while a more personal "I" reveals itself and in these cases a sense of precariousness shimmers through: 'I cannot say much more to you now, because many things oppress me, some that you know well and some that you cannot know.' (Letter 8, r. 73-78) '[...] grieve for my sake as little as you can. What happens to me, whether I am wandering through the country or put in prison – however it turns out, it is the work of *Minne*.' (Letter 29, r. 5-13).²⁸

Letter 10 (see Appendix) is a treatise without a personal voice. The authenticity of this text is uncertain. Except for lines 1-4 and 19-51, the text runs parallel to Chapter 6 of the *Explicatio in Canticum canticorum* by pseudo-Richard of Saint-Victor, a text the earliest codicological evidence of which dates from the early fifteenth century but which must originally have been written in the second half of the thirteenth. A passage from Letter 10 is also found in the Middle Dutch *Limburg Sermons*, which are also to be dated to the second half of the thirteenth century.²⁹ Whether Letter 10 was originally conceived by Hadewijch and later copied by others, or whether Hadewijch copied or translated and amended a text she obtained from elsewhere, remains unclear. The mere fact that it forms part of her letter collection illustrates that she belonged to a network of friends amongst whom texts containing mystical lore in the vernacular were exchanged. The topic dealt with in Letter 10 is 'the sweetness in feeling God', a key element in affective female mysticism. The text takes a nuanced stand, stating clearly that 'virtues are the proof of *Minne*, not sweetness', a conviction which Hadewijch repeats in various formulations throughout her work.

Letter 10 travelled up the Rhine and was taken up, with some other phrase coined by Hadewijch, in the High German mystical miscellany mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. Another fourteenth-century manuscript from the Southern Rhineland contains passages from Hadewijch's Letters 5 and 6 and rhymed letters 5 and 6 as fillers on the last-but-one leaf of the manuscript, which also contains Eckhart sermons and Mechthild of Magdeburg's *Das fliessende Licht der Gottheit* (*The Flowing Light of the Godhead*).³⁰ The excerpts are introduced with: *Dis sprichet sant Adel ein gros heilig.*

²⁷ The authorship of Letter 28 is by some scholars disputed.

²⁸ Transl. Hart, 66 and 114.

²⁹ On the parallels between Limburg Sermon 41 and Hadewijch Letter 10 see, most recently: Wybren Scheepma, *The Limburg Sermons: Preaching in the Medieval Low Countries at the Turn of the Fourteenth Century*, Leiden: Brill, 2008, xxx; Jo Reynaert, 'Sources', in Patricia Dailey and Veerle Fraeters (red.), *Companion to Hadewijch*, Leiden: Brill, forthcoming.

³⁰ Ms. Einsiedeln, Stiftsbibliothek, cod. 277, f. 220rb-vb. On this ms. see most recently: Gregor Wunsche, 'Hadewijch am Oberrhein. Niederländische Mystik in den Händen der sogenannten 'Gottesfreunde' ', in

Hadewijch's texts may have reached the Upper Rhine through a network of people who took an active interest in love mysticism and to which the Brabantine Augustinians and Carthusians who compiled her collected works belonged. There is no evidence of texts by Hadewijch having travelled into Northern Germany, yet the *List of the Perfect* provides evidence that Hadewijch's spiritual network reached as far north as Denmark and that she was acquainted with at least one 'perfect soul' in Saxony, a recluse named Mina. Connexions between Brabant and Lower Saxony are further indicated by the *vita* of Margaret the Lame, a recluse in Magdeburg, which was written around 1250 by the Dominican Johannes of Magdeburg. In the prologue to *Margaret's Life*, he refers to the fame and influence of the spirituality of the *mulieres religiosae* in Brabant and Liège, which he may have known through his fellow Dominican Thomas of Cantimpré.³¹ He shaped her saintly life according to the literary format of the Brabant-Liège hagiography of religious women and it became part of the earliest collection of religious women's Lives, presumably made around 1250 by the monks of Villers for the Cistercian nuns of Ter Kameren near Brussels.³² In Germany, Margaret's Life did not circulate and the model of her life as an independent recluse acting as spiritual mistress for the community, did not gain ground. She was pushed to leave the public sphere and entered the Dominican convent in Magdeburg, just as her city fellow Mechtild of Magdeburg had to give up her ruleless beguine life and joined the Helfta-nuns. The spiritual life of religious women in Northern Germany would, in the next period, unfold sub regula within the walls of the convent life.

Kulturtopographie des deutschsprachigen Südwestens im späteren Mittelalter, ed. Barbara Feith and René Wetzel, Berlin: xxx, 2009, 83-97 (esp. 87); Jo Reynaert, 'Reception', in Patricia Dailey and Veerle Fraeters (red.), *Companion to Hadewijch*, Leiden: Brill, forthcoming.

³¹ The *Vita* of Margaret the Lame by Friar Johannes O.P. of Magdeburg, trans. by Gertrud Jaron Lewis and Tilman Lewis, Toronto: Peregrina, 2001, xxx. On Margaret the Lame of Magdeburg: Anneke Mulder-Bakker, *Lives of the Anchoresses; The Rise of the Urban Recluse in Medieval Europe*, University of Philadelphia Press, 2005, 148-73, who on p. 162 suggests that Johannes may have known the beguine movement through his brother monk Thomas of Cantimpré; Anneke Mulder-Bakker, 'Holy Women in the German Territories', in Alastair Minnis, Rosalynn Voaden (eds.), *Medieval Holy Women in the Christian Tradition c. 1100 – c. 1500*, Turnhout: Brepols, 2010, 323-5; Wybren Scheepsma, *De Limburgse sermoenen. De oudste preken in het Nederlands*, Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2005, 75-76. [OPZ Engels].

On the manuscript containing bot Wybren Scheepsma, Testimony of the interrelations Brabant-Lower Saxony: ms. Brussel, KB, 8609-20, made in Cistercian women convent Ter Kameren, Brussels (founded by Villers), ca. 1250 (part 1): contains lives of saintly women from Brabant/Liège (e.g. Lutgart, Christina Mirabilis, Ida of Leeuw) and from Germany (Elisabeth of Thuringia, Margaret the Lame of Magdeburg), plus the *Ordo revelationis* of Elisabeth of Schönau.