



## Remembering Hadewijch

### The Mediated Memory of a Middle Dutch Mystic in the Works of the Flemish Francophone Author Suzanne Lilar

*Tijl Nuyts, University of Antwerp*

**Abstract:** Commonly known as one of the last Flemish authors who resorted to French as a literary language, Suzanne Lilar (1901-1992) constitutes a curious case in Belgian literary history. Raised in a petit bourgeois Ghent-based family, she compiled a complex oeuvre consisting of plays, novels and essays. In an attempt to anchor her oeuvre in the literary tradition, Lilar turned to the writings of the Middle Dutch mystic Hadewijch (ca. 1240), remodelling the latter's memory to her own ends. This article argues that Lilar's remembrance of Hadewijch took shape against the broader canvas of transfer activities undertaken by other prominent cultural mediators of Hadewijch's oeuvre. Drawing on insights from memory studies and cultural transfer studies, an analysis of Lilar's mobilisation of Hadewijch in two of Lilar's most important works, *Le Couple* (1963) and *Une enfance gantoise* (1976), will show that Lilar's rewriting of the mystic into her own oeuvre is marked by an intricate layering of mnemonic spheres: the author's personal memory-scape, the cultural memory of Flanders and of Belgium, and a universal 'mystical' memory which she considered to be lodged within every human soul. In teasing out the relations between these spheres, this article will demonstrate that Lilar aimed to further the memory of Hadewijch as an icon of (Neo)platonian nostalgia and as a marker of Flemish and Belgian cultural hybridity.

**Keywords:** Suzanne Lilar, Hadewijch, cultural memory / cultureel geheugen, medieval mystical literature / middeleeuwse mystiek, Francophone Flemish literature / Franstalige Vlaamse literatuur, Neoplatonism / neoplatonisme, Flemish nationalism / Vlaams nationalisme, memory studies, cultural transfer studies

In 1963, the Flemish author Marnix Gijsen wrote a review of *Le Couple*, a book-length essay written by the Flemish francophone author Suzanne Lilar.<sup>1</sup> Gijsen, a lifelong friend of Lilar's, proved to be especially struck by the latter's unconventional reading of the writings of the Middle Dutch mystic Hadewijch: 'Er is bij mijn weten geen scherpzinniger commentaar op Hadewych geleverd dan door S.L., want tot hiertoe was de dichteres meestal het slachtoffer van theologen en van oude vrijsters, en in geen van beide categorieën past de schrijfster' [To my knowledge, no more astute commentary on Hadewych has been offered than the one by S.L., for until now the poetess has mostly been the victim of theologians and old spinsters, and neither of these categories fits the author].<sup>2</sup> In *Le Couple*, Lilar resorted to Hadewijch's mystical oeuvre in defending a plea for what she herself called a 'resacralisation of love'.<sup>3</sup> The excerpts from Hadewijch's Visions, Songs and Letters Lilar referred to in the essay proved instrumental in defending her argument, which situated itself at a far remove from the interpretations of Hadewijch's work provided by readers whom Gijsen mockingly referred to as 'theologians and spinsters'.

Suzanne Lilar (1901-1992) can indeed hardly be regarded a theologian, let alone a spinster. Raised in a liberal *petit bourgeois* Ghent family, a lawyer by profession and married to one of the foremen of the Belgian Liberal Party, she made her first steps onto the literary scene in the 1940s as a playwright, soon extending her generic range to the novel and the essay. Being translated into various languages and an elected member of the Académie royale de langue et de littérature françaises de Belgique, Lilar quickly rose to fame, to the point of being referred to as 'la grande dame' of Belgian francophone letters.<sup>4</sup> In her oeuvre, Lilar regularly resorted to the mystical oeuvre of Hadewijch (ca. 1240), claiming to have grown to maturity upon discovering the latter's texts, as she put it in her 1976 autobiography *Une enfance gantoise* [A Childhood in Ghent]: 'J'étais sortie de l'enfance lorsque je fis la découverte de la poésie néerlandaise dans les Visions et les poèmes de la béguine Hadewijch, géniale mystique du XIIIe siècle' [I grew out of childhood when I discovered Dutch poetry through the Visions and Poems of the

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<sup>1</sup> Suzanne Lilar, *Le Couple* (Paris: Grasset, 1970 [1963]). Translated into English as *Aspects of Love in Western Society* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1965).

<sup>2</sup> Marnix Gijsen, 'Suzanne Lilar pleit voor de liefde', *Nieuw Vlaams tijdschrift*, 16 (1963), pp. 1129-1134 (p. 1132). Their friendship is testified to by their correspondence, part of which is preserved at the AMVC-Letterenhuis in Antwerp, and at the Archives & Musée de Littérature in Brussels [Archive and Museum of [Francophone] Literature].

<sup>3</sup> *Le Couple*, p. 17. All references in French are taken from the 1970 edition. References in English are taken from the 1965 English translation, with some slight modifications.

<sup>4</sup> Carmen Cristea and Andrea Oberhuber, 'Stratégies d'écriture et de positionnement dans le champ littéraire belge: le cas Lilar', *Textyles* 42 (2012), <http://journals.openedition.org/textyles/2297> [accessed 13 March 2020]. Lilar's works were translated into Dutch, English, Spanish, Italian, German and Japanese.

beguine Hadewijch, brilliant mystic of the thirteenth century].<sup>5</sup> When turning to the Middle Dutch mystic in her writings, she would draw not only on her personal reading memories, but also on the latter's existing position in cultural memory. Lilar's mobilisation of Hadewijch thus takes shape against the broader canvas of the collective remembering of the mystic and her work.<sup>6</sup>

While a number of studies have signalled the importance of Hadewijch to Lilar's oeuvre, they only refer to it in passing, merely repeating the latter's references to the mystic and abstaining from an analysis of the transfer strategies lying at the basis of Lilar's mobilization of Hadewijch.<sup>7</sup> Drawing on insights from memory studies and cultural transfer studies, this article aims to relate Lilar's remembrance of the mystic to the mediating activities undertaken by other cultural mediators of Hadewijch's oeuvre. In doing so, it will analyse how Lilar's commemoration of Hadewijch navigates between three mnemonic spheres: Lilar's personal memory-scape, the cultural memory of Flanders and of Belgium, and a universal 'mystical' memory which she considers to be lodged within every human soul. In the following, I will provide a brief sketch of Lilar's position in the francophone literary field in post-war Belgium as well as of her poetics. I will subsequently discuss Hadewijch's transfer history and offer an analysis of Lilar's remembrance of Hadewijch in two of her works: *Le Couple* (1963) and *Une enfance gantoise* (1976).

### ***Flemish and francophone, unfashionable and forgotten***

Taking into account the impressive track record she built during her lifetime, it is remarkable that Lilar remains largely forgotten today. This has led various scholars to ponder the question of what has been referred to as 'la paradoxale présence-absence

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<sup>5</sup> Suzanne Lilar, *Une enfance gantoise* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1976) p. 66. The translations into English from *Une enfance gantoise* are mine.

<sup>6</sup> In this article, cultural memory will be understood as the 'symbolic, mediated, performative and collective remembering' of 'reusable texts, images, and rituals specific to each society in each epoch, whose cultivation serves to stabilize and convey that society's self-image.' Jan Assmann, 'Collective Memory and Cultural Identity', *New German Critique* 65 (1995), pp. 125-133, (p. 132). Assmann's definition of cultural memory is also employed by Ann Rigney in her study *The Afterlives of Walter Scott. Memory on the Move* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 18. For an introduction to cultural memory studies, see Astrid Erll, *Memory in Culture* (New York: Palgrave, 2011).

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Françoise Mallet-Joris, [Untitled transcript of talk], *Cahiers Suzanne Lilar* (Paris: Gallimard, 1986), pp. 83-96, (p. 91, 94); Jean Tordeur, 'Une enfance gantoise à la source des Moments merveilleux', *Cahiers Suzanne Lilar* (Paris: Gallimard, 1986), pp. 97-122 (pp. 103-104), Béatrice Gaben-Shults, 'Le Théâtre de Suzanne Lilar: tentation et refus de mysticisme', *Nord. Revue de Critique et de Création Littéraires du Nord* 17 (1991), pp. 7-13, (p. 8, 12); Michèle Hecquet, 'L'Éducation paternelle: Une enfance gantoise', *Nord. Revue de Critique et de Création Littéraires du Nord* 17 (1991), pp. 23-28, (p. 23); Marijke Arijns, 'Naar een sacralisering van het minnespel. De mystieke wegen van Suzanne Lilar', in *Veel te veel geluk verwacht. Schrijfsters in Vlaanderen 1*, ed. by Lisette Keustermans and Brigitte Raskin (Amsterdam: Meulenhoff, 1996), pp. 79-195, (pp. 75-76); Justin Mwamba Isimbi Tang'Yele, *Écriture thématique et cohérence sémantique dans l'œuvre de Suzanne Lilar. Le thème de l'amour comme fil conducteur*, doctoral dissertation (Liège: Université de Liège, 2008), p. 164; Carmen Cristea, *Suzanne Lilar: Configuration d'une image auctoriale*, doctoral dissertation (Montréal: Université de Montréal, 2015), p. 65, 71, 176, pp. 230-231 <https://papyrus.bib.umontreal.ca/xmlui/handle/1866/11693> [accessed 13 March 2020].

lilarienne au sein de la mémoire culturelle belge' [the paradoxical presence-absence of Lilar within Belgian cultural memory].<sup>8</sup> Today, Lilar maintains limited visibility in a number of specific contexts. Her name figures in literary histories of Belgian francophone literature, which invariably dedicate a short number of paragraphs to her life and work.<sup>9</sup> She also enjoys limited visibility in public space, having a street and an auditorium – both in Ghent –, named after her, and some of her works can be found on the shelves of bookshops offering a section on Belgian francophone literature.<sup>10</sup> Lilar's work, however, seems to have retreated into oblivion. Rather than being remembered or in any way actively engaged with by the broad Belgian public, her memory is at present primarily being kept alive by heritage managers working in libraries and archives and by academic researchers.<sup>11</sup>

Various reasons have been adduced for Lilar's ambivalent reception history.<sup>12</sup> First of all, she was a Flemish author who wrote in French. In itself, this diglossic phenomenon is not uncommon in the Belgian literary landscape: francophone Flemish writers such as Emile Verhaeren and Maurice Maeterlinck, respectively commemorated as 'Belgium's national bard' and the 'only Belgian laureate of the Nobel Prize in Literature', published their works in French to much critical acclaim, achieving fame not only in their country of origin but also in the francophone world at large, and beyond. From the second half of the twentieth century onwards, however, this phenomenon had become less frequent and, due to communitarian turmoil in post-war Belgian politics (which constituted the culminating point of a conflict that originated in the late nineteenth century), above all less self-evident.<sup>13</sup>

Another reason accounting for Lilar's ambivalent reception is related to the double social role she adopted during her lifetime. Known as the first woman lawyer at the bar of Antwerp and married to Albert Lilar (1900-1976), a heavyweight of the Liberal Party who served several times as a minister in the Belgian government, Lilar was not only concerned with fashioning an authorial image, but also with upholding her social credibility as a former lawyer and the wife of a prominent politician. As a writer, she was

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<sup>8</sup> Cristea and Oberhuber 2012, s.p.

<sup>9</sup> Cristea and Oberhuber 2012 refer to Lilar's presence in the following literary histories: Christian Berg and Pierre Halen, ed., *Littératures belges de langue française: histoire et perspectives (1830-2000)* (Bruxelles : Le Cri, 2000) ; Jean-Pierre Bertrand et al., ed., *Histoire de la littérature belge francophone: 1830-2000*, (Paris : Fayard, 2003) ; Marc Quaghebeur, *Anthologie de la littérature française de Belgique: entre réel et surréel* (Bruxelles : Éditions Racine), 2006.

<sup>10</sup> The Brussels bookshop Tropismes, one of the most prominent francophone bookshops in the Belgian capital, tends to have a copy of the two books Lilar is probably most remembered for on its shelves: *Le Couple* and *Une enfance gantoise*.

<sup>11</sup> A case in point is the webpage recently dedicated to Lilar on the website of UGentMemorie, which strives to assemble 'the virtual memory' of the University of Ghent: <https://www.ugentmemorie.be/personen/lilar-suzanne-1901-1992>. Rigney 2012 analyses the phenomenon of authors who are largely forgotten by broader society but being kept alive by heritage workers, p. 210.

<sup>12</sup> See Cristea 2015, Cristea and Oberhuber 2012, and Marc Quaghebeur, 'Maria Van Rysselberghe et Suzanne Lilar : deux façons d'indiquer et de voiler le nom de l'auteur', in *L'Écrivain masqué*, ed. by Beïda Chikhi (Paris: Presses de l'Université Paris-Sorbonne, 2008), p. 161.

<sup>13</sup> Christian Berg, 'La Belgique Romane et sa Flandre', in *Littératures belges de langue française, histoire et perspectives (1830-2000)*, ed. by Christian Berg and Pierre Halen (Paris: Le Cri, 2015), pp. 389-412, (p. 397).

very conscious of her social status and careful not to appear as too controversial, or to interfere in any way with her husband's political activities.<sup>14</sup> According to various scholars, this double position not only determined the way in which Lilar presented herself to the public, but also spilled over into her literary practice. At a time when Belgium was involved in communitarian struggle, the decolonisation of Congo and emancipatory processes in society, Lilar steered away from the immediate historical setting in her writings, preferring to connect in her work to the 'ahistorical' and 'disengaged' neo-classicist current francophone Belgian literature underwent after the Second World War.<sup>15</sup> In the broader context of post-war francophone literature, her work is in retrospect considered to be marked by what has been referred to as an 'aesthetic anachronism': writing neo-classicist literature is not considered to be the most fashionable thing to do at a time when *le nouveau roman* was the talk of town in the francophone literary field.<sup>16</sup>

Her retreat into oblivion is quite ironic, as Lilar was very much concerned with the reception of her oeuvre. She incessantly strived to ensure its longevity through a careful process of self-fashioning, which manifested itself, amongst other things, in her tireless production of a stream of explanatory notes on both her work and her life in prefaces, reeditions, essays and interviews.<sup>17</sup> According to the literary scholar Carmen Cristea, who studied the discursive strategies involved in Lilar's position-taking in the literary field, the latter carefully crafted her authorial ethos with a clear goal in mind: '[Lilar] imagine, anticipe et organise sa propre entrée dans la légende et érige son propre mausolée destiné à la postérité' [[Lilar] imagines, anticipates and organizes her own consecration as a writer and erects her own mausoleum for posterity].<sup>18</sup> The paradoxical effect of her attempts to control the reception of her oeuvre, however, was that they made it more susceptible to be forgotten altogether; it had so often been subjected to an auto-exegesis by its author, that it came close to becoming illegible to future readers.<sup>19</sup>

### ***Testimony to the coherence of the world***

Choosing not to address the increasingly fragmented extratextual world she found herself in, Lilar turned to a more abstract and, in her view, more coherent conception of the world in her work. In her view, this coherence could be attained through the use of the analogy, a concept on which she reflected explicitly and repeatedly and which has

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<sup>14</sup> Cristea 2015, p. 120.

<sup>15</sup> Mwamba Isimbi Tang'Yele, p. 351. According to Quaghebuier 1998, Lilar excelled in this type of literature to the point of being considered as its 'quintessence', p. 283.

<sup>16</sup> Cristea and Oberhuber 2012, s.p. and Cristea 2015 p. 77.

<sup>17</sup> Cristea and Oberhuber 2012, s.p.

<sup>18</sup> Cristea 2015, p. 167.

<sup>19</sup> Cristea and Oberhuber 2012, s.p. For a more general discussion of the illegibility of authors from the past from the perspective of cultural memory studies, see Rigney 2012, p. 221.

been referred to as the central theme of her oeuvre.<sup>20</sup> After having written two well-received plays and an essay on Belgian theatre,<sup>21</sup> Lilar first reflected on the concept in *Le journal de l'analogiste* (1954), her personal *ars poetica*. In that work, she examines the nature and function of poetry, which she considers, just as the Surrealist artists she often refers to in the book, as a metonymy for art in general.<sup>22</sup> An analogy Lilar repeatedly evokes in her writings is that of the sound of the sea and the silk cloth:

À reconnaître dans le bruit de la mer le froissement d'une étoffe de soie, j'éprouvais une félicité sans mélange. Il me semblait [...] atteindre le grand enchaînement des choses. Les parois du monde cédaient. J'éprouvais l'harmonie secrète de l'univers.<sup>23</sup>

[Recognizing the rustling of a silk cloth in the sound of the sea, I experienced a profound happiness. To me, it seemed to attain the great chain of things. The walls of the world opened. I experienced the secret harmony of the universe.]

The practice of identifying resemblances in the phenomena of the world, recognizing them as pointers to the great chain of things and the secret harmony of the universe, constitutes the very essence of Lilar's poetics. In her view, a writer is to open up to the interconnections between the phenomena of the world, and to make these manifest through writing. Lilar's search for coherence, however, does not invariably engender *petit bourgeois* analogies. In another passage, she portrays a childhood memory of recognizing the swollen belly of a drowned dog in a brown ball floating on a pond, a sensation which she equally describes as offering intense perceptual pleasure:

Je me souvenais qu'une fois dans mon enfance, devant un étang sur lequel je m'étais penchée pour saisir un ballon, ayant eu le choc d'y reconnaître le ventre gonflé et noirâtre d'un chien noyé, je m'étais imposé de demeurer longtemps dans la confusion de cette tromperie, attentive seulement aux richesses qu'elle m'offrait en partage.<sup>24</sup>

[I remembered that once in my childhood, I was leaning over a pond to pick up a ball, and experienced a shock upon recognizing in it the swollen and blackish belly of a drowned dog,

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<sup>20</sup> See, for example: Jacques De Decker, 'La Confession anonyme une ars amatoria', *Cahiers Suzanne Lilar* (Paris: Gallimard: 1986, 37-45; Marc Quaghebeur, 'De l'Ambiguïté à l'Ouvert? Soixante ans de littérature belge (1940-1999)', in *Littératures belges de langue française, histoire et perspectives (1830-2000)*, ed. by Christian Berg and Pierre Halen (Paris: Le Cri, 2015), pp. 175-270 (p. 194).

<sup>21</sup> *Le Burlador* (1945), *Tous les chemins mènent au ciel* (1947), *The Belgian Theatre since 1890* (New York: Belgian Government Information Center, 1950).

<sup>22</sup> *Journal de l'analogiste* (Paris: Julliard, 1954), p. 93. Translations into English are mine.

<sup>23</sup> *Une enfance gantoise*, pp. 199-200. The same passage can be found in 'Les moments merveilleux', one of the two (previously unpublished) original texts Lilar contributed to *Cahiers Suzanne Lilar*, 125-160, (p. 140).

<sup>24</sup> *Journal de l'analogiste*, p. 75.

I forced myself to remain for a long time in the confusion of this deception, attentive only to the riches which it offered to me.]

According to Lilar, similar distortions and apparently disconcerting phenomena provide a gateway into a vision of the hidden coherence of the world. For her, it is precisely these contrasts that make the poetic search for analogies relevant and necessary. Consequently, Lilar continuously juxtaposes images that may be perceived as jarring, as uncomfortable and awkward to connect. According to the author, these disorderly juxtapositions have the potential to lead one to an order of sorts: the literary rendering of analogies is geared to attaining, as she puts it, 'la vision d'un ordre dont nos désordres portaient la nostalgie' [the vision of order of which our disorders are nostalgic].<sup>25</sup>

This notion of nostalgia is key to Lilar's conception of the coherence of the world and its re-establishment through the recognition and literary rendering of analogies.<sup>26</sup> In many of her poetical statements, Lilar exposes the conviction that true reality lies behind the phenomena of immanent reality, and that she somehow preserves a memory of this universal coherence, which she longs to revisit: 'Au fond j'avais toujours su que la vraie réalité est derrière l'apparaître des choses [...] un ailleurs délivré du temps, présent en moi comme un mémoire toujours prête à s'éveiller' [Deep down I have always known that real reality is behind the appearance of things [...] an elsewhere delivered from time, present in me as a memory always ready to awaken].<sup>27</sup> The means to answer the call of this nostalgia, according to Lilar, is poetry, or art in general. Indeed, Lilar asks from poetry that it complements the everyday which a tinge of infinity: 'répondant à une faim que rien n'avait pu contenter en ce monde, [la poésie] me fournît inlassablement ces élargissements, ces dérivations, ces apparentements grâce auxquels la pauvreté du quotidien, soudain raccordée à l'infini, ébauchait son retour à l'unité originelle' [in response to a hunger that cannot be satisfied by the world, [poetry] provides enlargements, diversions, connections thanks to which the poverty of everyday life taps into infinity, and provides an outline for a return to the original unity].<sup>28</sup> In this sense, Lilar's project can be considered to be marked by what the literary scholar Svetlana Boym calls 'modern nostalgia':

Modern nostalgia is a mourning for [...] the loss of an enchanted world [...]; it could be a secular expression of a spiritual longing, a nostalgia for an absolute, a home that is both physical and spiritual, the edenic unity of time and space before entry into history. The nostalgic is looking for a spiritual addressee.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> *Une enfance gantoise*, p. 136.

<sup>26</sup> See for example, De Decker, p. 63.

<sup>27</sup> *Une enfance gantoise*, p. 212.

<sup>28</sup> *Journal de l'analogiste*, p. 202.

<sup>29</sup> Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), p. 8.

Situated in post-war Belgium, Lilar's search for a coherent original unity through memories and analogies can be conceived of as a nostalgic yearning for an enchanted, ahistorical world. To Lilar, bearing witness to this original coherence constitutes the kernel of her project: she is convinced that it is the writer's task to recognize and poetically reshape the coherence of the world in an attempt to recompose a lost original unity. When an interviewer of the Belgian francophone newspaper *Le Soir* asked Lilar what she considered to be her most important contribution as a writer, she answered: 'Toute ma volonté est de témoigner, témoigner de la cohérence du monde. Le monde tient ensemble et j'ai besoin de le dire.' [My only wish is to testify, to testify to the coherence of the world. The world is holding together and I feel the need to stress that].<sup>30</sup> Lilar incessantly repeats this statement in her writings, emphasising that she regards the act of testifying to the coherence of the world as her very vocation: 'Je savais que j'étais sur terre pour témoigner de la cohérence universelle [...] pour recomposer l'un à travers le multiple, le même à partir de l'autre' [I knew that I was on earth to bear witness to universal coherence [...] to recompose the one through the multiple, the same from the different].<sup>31</sup> In her nostalgic testimony to the coherence of the world, Lilar would find a 'spiritual addressee' in her favourite author: the Middle Dutch mystic Hadewijch. Consequently, she propped up her testimony to the world's elusive coherence with references to the latter's work. In doing so, Lilar inscribed her oeuvre in a genealogy of Hadewijch transfer than went back to the 1830s, when the works of the Middle Dutch mystic came to the surface. Before going on to discuss Lilar's remembrance of Hadewijch, the contours of the mystic's reception history will be sketched, as these profoundly impacted Lilar's mobilisation of Hadewijch's oeuvre in her testimony to the coherence of the world.

### ***The mediated memory of a Middle Dutch mystic***

Little is known about the Middle Dutch mystic Hadewijch: most probably she wrote her Visions, Songs and Letters around 1240 in the Duchy of Brabant, focusing in all of these genres on *minne*, the mystical love the lover desires to be united with by becoming love himself. In her plea for a complete surrender to this all-consuming love, Hadewijch employed both profane and sacred registers, building an intricate oeuvre that was inspired, amongst other things, by Biblical imagery and the French courtly love lyrics.<sup>32</sup> Unlike that other famous Middle Dutch mystic, Jan van Ruusbroec (1293-1381),

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<sup>30</sup> s.n. 'Mère et fille, écrivains, Suzanne Lilar et Françoise Mallet-Joris nous disent comment vivre dans la liberté en étant femme', *Le Soir*, 21 octobre 1977. Quoted in Cristea 2015, p. 219.

<sup>31</sup> *Une enfance gantoise*, p. 213. According to Cristea 2015, Lilar's repeated mentioning of the importance of coherence to her oeuvre is not fortuitous: her discursive analysis of the interviews given by the author shows that Lilar strived to turn this notion of coherence into her very brand image [*image de marque*], p. 218.

<sup>32</sup> For a state-of-the art of the study of Hadewijch's oeuvre from the perspective of literary studies, see Frits Van Oostrom, 'Schrijvende vrouwen', in *Stemmen op schrift: Geschiedenis van de Nederlandse literatuur vanaf het begin tot 1300* (Amsterdam: Bert Bakker, 2013), pp. 402-456. An analysis of Hadewijch's oeuvre from a theological point of view can be found in Bernard McGinn, 'Three Beguine Writers', in *The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism*, vol. 3. (The Crossroad Publishing Company: New York, 1998), pp. 199-265.



Hadewijch could not boast a continuous reception history; her writings did not make it to the printing press and receded from view after the Middle Ages, only to be rediscovered in the 1830s, when two anonymous manuscripts were found in the Burgundian Library of Brussels (currently known as the Royal Library of Belgium) by the Louvain professor Franz Joseph Mone.<sup>33</sup>

The discovery of the manuscripts appealed to a wide range of philologists, historians and literary critics with at times very different ideological profiles, although often engaged in some way or another in the Flemish movement.<sup>34</sup> One such Hadewijch supporter was Marnix Gijsen, who (thirty years before he would write a review of Lilar's *Le Couple*) testified to his enthusiasm for Hadewijch in the Flemish Catholic newspaper *De Standaard*. In his piece, Marnix Gijsen bemoaned the fact that the Flemish public did not actively keep the memory of Hadewijch alive by learning her texts by heart:

Wees tactvol in gezelschap en vraag niet wie er één versregel van Hadewijch memoreeren kan [...] De lapidaire wijsheid van onze voorouders, die kennen wij slechts uit de spreuken van Breughels schilderijen. Wij gaan die niet meer putten aan de bron.

[Be tactful in company and don't ask who can remember one line of Hadewijch's [...] We only know the lapidary wisdom of our ancestors through the proverbs of Breugel's paintings. We no longer tap it from its source].<sup>35</sup>

Gijsen's use of the (now archaic) verb 'memoreeren' demonstrates the latter's conviction that in order to enrich their lives, the members of the Flemish cultured elite should learn Hadewijch's texts by heart, collectively and actively 'unforgetting' Hadewijch's oeuvre, thus carrying along the memory of her writings as 'portable monuments', to use the concept of the memory studies scholar Ann Rigney.<sup>36</sup>

For Hadewijch to be remembered, however, her obscure works had to be made legible first, and for this it needed readers who were able to mediate her oeuvre to the larger public.<sup>37</sup> Putting the works of the mystic at the disposal of the public, however,

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<sup>33</sup> The youngest surviving manuscript dates from ca. 1500 and is preserved at the library of the Ruusbroec Institute, Antwerp.

<sup>34</sup> For an introduction to the Flemish nationalist movement, see Bruno De Wever, 'The Flemish movement and Flemish nationalism. Instruments, historiography and debates', *Studies on National Movements* 1 (2013), pp. 50-80.

<sup>35</sup> Marnix Gijsen. 'Kroniek der Poëzie', *De Standaard*, 12 November 1938.

<sup>36</sup> According to Rigney, cultural remembrance can be conceived of as 'a matter of anamnesis, literally: an unforgetting', as its stakeholders engage in 'struggles to uncover forgotten histories while over-writing earlier forms of remembrance'. Ann Rigney, 'Remembrance as remaking: memories of the nation revisited', *Nations and Nationalism* 24.2 (2018), pp. 240-257, (p. 246). For a discussion of books as 'portable monuments', see Rigney 2012, pp. 17-48.

<sup>37</sup> As is the case for all objects of cultural memory, Hadewijch's memory could only 'become collective when it [was] shared, and for it to be shared it must be mediated.' Rigney 2018, p. 243. A reference work discussing the importance of mediation to processes of cultural memory is Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney, eds. *Mediation, Remediation, and the Dynamics of Cultural Memory* (Berlin; New York: de Gruyter, 2009). For an introduction to studies of cultural mediators from the perspective of cultural transfer studies, see Reine Meylaerts et al., *Cultural Mediation in Europe 1800-1950*

proved to be complicated: the lack of biographical information on Hadewijch's life, the unclassifiable nature of her works and the considerable margin of interpretation its generic hybridity entailed, catered for very different interpretations of her work. Consequently, the philologists and historians who saw it as their mission to mediate Hadewijch's work shaped her image on the basis of elements of her oeuvre that chimed with their own ideological agendas, thus inscribing different images of Hadewijch in cultural memory: liberal intellectuals in the late-nineteenth century proclaimed her to be a heterodox free-thinker and enlightened sparkle in the 'dark' Christian Middle Ages, while Catholic Flemish philologists sought to safeguard what they regarded as 'their' spiritual heritage from heterodox use by upholding the orthodox embedment of her oeuvre in the Catholic tradition, remembering her as a Flemish incarnation of the teachings of the Mother Church.<sup>38</sup> Hadewijch's work can thus be considered as what Pierre Nora calls a *lieu de mémoire* or 'memory site': a symbolic point of reference societies and groups revisit and modify in articulating their collective identities, and which is hence never fixed or finished.<sup>39</sup> In interpreting Hadewijch's work and disseminating an image of the mystic on the basis of their readings, the mediators of Hadewijch's work established what Danièle Hervieu-Léger calls a 'chain of memory' between the former's writings and their own context.<sup>40</sup> Anchored in an obscure mystical oeuvre from the past which had been made readable in part for the contemporary public by its cultural mediators, the memory of Hadewijch was thus mobilized as a calibrator

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(Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2017); Reine Meylaerts et al, 'Cultural Mediators in Cultural History: What Do we Learn from Studying Mediators' Complex Transfer Activities in Interwar Belgium?' in *Doing Double Dutch: The International Circulation of Literature from the Low Countries*, ed. by Elke Brems et al. (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2017), pp. 67-92; Reine Meylaerts and Diana Roig-Sanz, ed., *Literary Translation and Cultural Mediators in 'Peripheral' Cultures. Customs Officers or Smugglers?* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp. 1-37.

<sup>38</sup> For studies of the reception of Hadewijch's oeuvre, see: Joris Reynaert, 'F. A. Snellaert en de receptie van Hadewijch in de 19de eeuw', in A. Blockmans, *Huldenummer Prof. Dr. Ada Deprez bij haar zestigste verjaardag*, ed. by A. Blockmans. (Gent: Academia Press, 1988), pp. 157-180; Annette Van Dijk, 'Welk een ketter is die vrouw geweest'. *De plaats van Albert Verwey in de Hadewijchreceptie* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2009); Veerle Fraeters and Sarah Menu, 'Moderne Hadewijch-receptie: zes markante momenten', *Paukeslag: digitaal platform voor levend poëzie-erfgoed* (2017), <https://www.paukeslag.org/exhibits/show/moderne-hadewijch-receptie---z>. [accessed 13 March 2020]; Veerle Fraeters and David Vermeiren, 'Ruusbroec en Hadewich als voorlopers van het surrealisme: schilder-dichter Marc. Eemans en de Nederlandse mystiek in de context van Hermès (1930-1939)', *Zacht Lawijd: literair-historisch tijdschrift* 16 (2017), pp. 8-29; Veerle Fraeters, 'From Medieval Dutch Writer to French Film Character: The Presence of Hadewijch in France from the Perspective of the Film Hadewijch (2009)', in *Doing Double Dutch: The International Circulation of Literature from the Low Countries*. ed. by Elke Brems et al. (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2017), pp. 113-132; Tijl Nuyts, 'Mystiek als strategie. Surrealistische appropriatie van Middelnederlandse mystiek als modern nostalgisch project in Marc. Eemans' *Vergeten te worden* (1930)', *Vooy's. Tijdschrift voor letteren* 37 (2019), pp. 6-17.

<sup>39</sup> Pierre Nora, 'Entre mémoire et histoire: la problématique des lieux', in Pierre Nora (ed.), *Les lieux de mémoire*, 3 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1997). Referred to in Rigney 2012, p. 18.

<sup>40</sup> Danièle Hervieu-Léger, *Religion as a Chain of Memory* (Cambridge: Polity, 2000). For an application of this concept to the study of the interrelations between art, religion and identity in the Belgian context in the interwar period, see Rajesh Heynickx. *Meetzucht en mateloosheid. Kunst, religie en identiteit in Vlaanderen tijdens het Interbellum* (Nijmegen: Vantilt, 2008), pp. 29-32.

of modern identities in the present.<sup>41</sup> Lilar's remembrance of Hadewijch in *Le Couple* (1963) and *Une enfance gantoise* (1976) would be grounded in a similar conceptual structure.

### **Remembering Hadewijch as an icon of (Neo)platonian nostalgia**

Translated into various languages, earning her a worldwide readership and commonly known as her magnum opus on love, Suzanne Lilar's *Le Couple* (1963) starts from a diagnosis: Western society suffers from a crisis of love. Lilar frames this crisis within a bigger crisis of the sacred, aiming to propose a remedy to both crises in her essay. With *Le Couple*, she aims not only to move beyond the stark puritan view onto love she considers to be offered by Christian culture, but also beyond the libertarian and commercial turn to eroticism she discerns in the post-war West. While the first, in her view, displays a fear of the body, incessantly seeking its sublimation, the second places too much emphasis on the body, blindly fixating on it, which results, according to Lilar, in an inability to gauge its 'sacralizing' power.<sup>42</sup>

Opposing herself to both approaches to love, Lilar conceives of love as a sacred experience, stating that 'l'amour sera sacré ou ne sera pas' [love will be sacred or will not be].<sup>43</sup> According to the argument she develops in *Le Couple*, the loving encounter in the flesh between a man and a woman should be valued on its own terms,<sup>44</sup> as it provides the key to the recomposition of the original unity: 'l'amour des sexes est une aspiration à se délivrer de la dualité et à reconstituer l'indistinction perdue' [the love of the sexes is a mode of an aspiration towards deliverance from duality and towards a reconstitution of the lost indistinction].<sup>45</sup> While originating in the human body, she conceives of human love as being intimately linked to its contrasting pair, which is divine love. *Le Couple* thus constitutes yet another exercise in Lilar's analogical thinking, offering an exploration of 'la liaison entre le désir physique d'un corps déterminé et le désir métaphysique [...] de reconstituer l'Unité perdue' [the link between the physical desire of a determinate body and the metaphysical desire [...] to reconstitute the lost Unity].<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> This particular take on Hadewijch's reception history is indebted to Rigney's (2012) approach of Walter Scott's reception as a result of processes of cultural memory.

<sup>42</sup> *Le Couple*, p. 16.

<sup>43</sup> *Le Couple*, p. 20.

<sup>44</sup> Lilar's conception of love is essentially heteronormative and at times even homophobic, see for example *Le Couple*, p. 173: 'Certes le reproche que l'on peut faire à l'érotique païenne de s'être élaborée dans l'homosexualité est grave. Je ne cherche pas à le dissimuler' [Certainly the reproach that one can make to pagan [i.e. Platonic] eroticism for having developed in homosexuality is serious. I do not seek to hide it].

<sup>45</sup> *Le Couple*, p. 18.

<sup>46</sup> *Le Couple*, p. 20.

By passionately loving another human being in the flesh, Lilar asserts, the lover is swept up in divine love, and may become deified, i.e. may *become* God.<sup>47</sup>

As is the case with Lilar's search for analogies, which stemmed from a desire to respond to her preserved memory of original unity, her conception of sacred love reads as a testimony to modern nostalgia. According to Lilar, '[u]n grand amour est avant tout prise de conscience d'une fondamentale nostalgie' [a great love is above all an awareness of a deep-rooted nostalgia].<sup>48</sup> In *Le Couple*, the claim that this nostalgia is essential to both human and divine love is amply illustrated through extensive quotes of the writings of Plato and Plotinus, which has led commentators to characterise the work as 'Neoplatonic'.<sup>49</sup> While Lilar would not always differentiate Platonic from Neoplatonic thought, frequently bracketing together 'l'érotique platonicienne et l'exégèse qu'en donne Plotin' ['Platonic philosophy of love and Plotinus' exegesis of it'], it is clear from her writings that Plato himself as well as Neoplatonic philosophers such as Iamblichus, Plutarch and especially Plotinus profoundly impacted her thinking.<sup>50</sup> According to Lilar's (Neo)platonic conception of love, the human soul originates in God and preserves the memory of its divine state after creation: 'Dieu n'est pas seulement notre état fondamental et final, il est aussi, et en permanence, notre état le plus profond, absent de nous seulement dans la mesure où nous nous absentons de lui pour nous attarder dans les régions superficielles de notre âme' [God is not only our fundamental and final state, but is also, and permanently, our deepest nature, absent from us only insofar that we are absent from him and linger in the superficial regions of our souls].<sup>51</sup> Longing to be reunited with its original state, which is God or the One, the human soul's predicament is to put every effort in returning to its precreational origin, which is also its final destination: 'l'Un est devant nous mais aussi derrière, il est notre origine, notre état le plus profond et notre fin' [The One is in front of us but also behind us, it is our origin, our deepest state and our purpose].<sup>52</sup> According to Lilar, the return of the soul to its divine origin can only be realised by bodily merging with one's human beloved, the union with whom provides a sacral highway to transcendence.

While finding precursors to her own project in a colourful ensemble of writers and thinkers ranging from Plato to Carl Gustav Jung, from John Donne to Denis de Rougemont, Lilar assigns the role of the most important forbearer of her own conception

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<sup>47</sup> Lilar talks of 'déification à partir de l'amour' [deification through love] in *Le Couple*, p. 17. For more on the importance of the notion of deification to Christian mysticism, see John Arblaster and Rob Faesen, *Mystical doctrines of deification. Case studies in the Christian tradition* (London: Routledge, 2019).

<sup>48</sup> *Le Couple*, p. 20.

<sup>49</sup> *The Encyclopaedia Britannica* characterises *Le Couple* as a 'neoplatonic idealization of love filtered through personal experience'. s.n. 'Suzanne Lilar', *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Suzanne-Lilar> [accessed 13 March 2020].

<sup>50</sup> Lilar referred to Plato and Plotinus as 'les hautes cimes jumelles' [the two summits] of what she regarded as the 'synthesis of Eastern and Western mysticism' that would underpin her own conception of love, *Le Couple*, p. 65, 121.

<sup>51</sup> *Le Couple*, p. 63.

<sup>52</sup> *Le Couple*, p. 131.

of love to Hadewijch, to whom she dedicates a chapter in her book.<sup>53</sup> In the opening paragraph of the chapter, Lilar introduces Hadewijch as a nightingale singing her love for the divine Other:

Quel est ce brame qui déchire la nuit, quelle est cette voix qui tantôt s'épure jusqu'à muer limpiment en chant de rossignol et tantôt s'enroue et s'enraie comme à bout de forces mais reprend aussitôt, de plus en plus monotone et obsédée ?

C'est Hadewych qui chante Minne, l'amour, mais l'amant qu'elle sollicite est cet Autre dont nous sommes en quête, double céleste de notre être terrestre, avec lequel nous aspirons à recomposer le Couple mystique avant de nous engloutir dans l'Unité.<sup>54</sup>

[What is this sound like the belling of a stag in the night, this voice sometimes so limpid that it becomes the song of a nightingale, and sometimes hoarse and stifled as though exhausted and yet quickly resuming, more and more monotonous and obsessed?

It is Hadewych, singing of *Minne*, of love – but the lover to whom she appeals is that Other whom we seek, the celestial double of our earthly being, the means by which we aspire to recompose the Mystical Couple before sinking into Unity.]

While Lilar deals with most of her conversation partners in a rather neutral, essayistic tone, the passage introducing Hadewijch is written in a markedly loftier fashion. This stylistic shift should not be considered as fortuitous: the statute of the Middle Dutch mystic in Lilar's reflections differs considerably from the other precursors she resorts to. Indeed, in the opening paragraphs of the chapter on Hadewijch, Lilar explicitly links her meditations on the writings of the Middle Dutch mystic to the entire project of her essay:

les pages [...] que je vais consacrer à Hadewych trouvent leur place dans un ouvrage qui voudrait mettre quelque provocation dans son plaidoyer pour une resacralisation de l'amour humain et du Couple.<sup>55</sup>

[the pages that I am going to devote to Hadewych [...] find their place in a book that is intended to be somewhat provocative in its pleading for a resacralisation of human love and of the Couple]

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<sup>53</sup> 'Hadewych, ou l'éros clandestin', in *Le Couple*, pp. 118-132.

<sup>54</sup> *Le Couple*, p. 119.

<sup>55</sup> *Le Couple*, p. 121.

In what follows, Lilar presents Hadewijch as a highly original mystic, an exponent of the mystical ‘school of the North’, stressing that she produced her oeuvre well before Ruusbroec and Eckhart, and is hence to be considered as truly original: ‘Cent ans avant Ruusbroec et près de cinquante avant Eckhart, elle représente magnifiquement la grande école du Nord – qui n’est qu’une province de la mystique universelle, mais singulièrement dessinée’ [She came a hundred years before Ruusbroec and nearly fifty before Eckhart, and she represents gloriously the great Northern school of mysticism – one province only of the universal mysticism, but strangely well-defined].<sup>56</sup> Although characterised as a ‘Flemish’ mystic, Hadewijch is also presented by Lilar as the Middle Dutch heir to (Neo)platonism, thus reuniting the best of both ‘Flemish’ and ‘Greek’ worlds:<sup>57</sup>

C’est la plus haute pointe de la vie spirituelle et c’est ici que nous apparaît la merveille : cette mystique flamande de la première moitié du treizième siècle recoupe à chaque instant la grande mystique grecque jusque dans son expression métaphysique.<sup>58</sup>

[This was the highest point of the spiritual life; and what seems truly marvellous is that this Flemish mystic in the first half of the thirteenth century should have constantly, in her experience, cut across the main line of Greek mysticism and even its metaphysical expression.]

Studies of Lilar’s essayistic work repeatedly mention that the author invariably took pains to substantiate her arguments, resulting almost in a tic that is often attributed to her former profession as a lawyer.<sup>59</sup> It should thus not come as a surprise that Lilar puts much effort in legitimising her claims about the Middle Dutch mystic. She does so by referring to three cultural mediators of Hadewijch’s oeuvre whom she considers to be authoritative voices, mentioning them explicitly in a footnote.

The first mediator she expresses her indebtedness to is the Flemish Jesuit philologist Jozef van Mierlo : ‘Sur l’originalité et le génie de Hadewych [...], consulter les travaux du P. van Mierlo qui lui a consacré sa vie’ [On the originality and genius of Hadewych [...], consult the works of Father van Mierlo, who devoted his life to this research].<sup>60</sup> Jozef Van Mierlo (1878-1958) had a lasting influence on the mediation of Hadewijch’s oeuvre in the twentieth century: after some turbulent decades in which philologists, librarians and archivists debated as to whether Hadewijch should be considered a free-

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<sup>56</sup> *Le Couple*, p. 119.

<sup>57</sup> At the time when Lilar was writing *Le Couple*, the territory of the Dutch-speaking community of Belgium was called Flanders – as it is today. In the thirteenth century, the region in which Hadewijch operated did not belong to the County of Flanders (which roughly equals the current-day provinces of West- and East-Flanders), but to the Duchy of Brabant.

<sup>58</sup> *Le Couple*, p. 129.

<sup>59</sup> Cristea and Oberhuber 2012, s. p.

<sup>60</sup> *Le Couple*, p. 119.

spirited heretic or an orthodox nun, he put an end to the discussion by adducing convincing arguments to situate Hadewijch's oeuvre in the context of the thirteenth-century lay beguine movement of the *mulieres religiosae*.<sup>61</sup> In his view, this historic contextualisation of Hadewijch's writings allowed him to argue not only that Hadewijch firmly adhered to the doctrine of the Catholic Church, but also that her oeuvre was one of the oldest in the 'Flemish' language, and thus constituted the very origin of 'Flemish' literature.<sup>62</sup>

Van Mierlo not only mediated his Hadewijch image in Dutch-speaking and francophone academic and non-academic publications and in numerous talks to expert and lay audiences, but also published the first critical edition of the mystic's work between 1908 and 1912, which he re-edited between 1924 and 1952, and compiled numerous anthologies catering carefully-selected texts from her oeuvre to different audiences.<sup>63</sup> In this way, he manifested himself as a self-appointed guardian of Hadewijch's memory who took his *mémoire-devoir* [memorial duty], very seriously: he put every effort in keeping Hadewijch's memory alive for the common good and provided both the material objects – i.e. the books – and the interpretative outlines the twentieth-century readership needed to resort to in order to appreciate them.<sup>64</sup> Logically, Van Mierlo's editions and anthologies were heavily determined by how he wanted to shape the remembrance of 'his' Hadewijch. His mediation of Hadewijch's oeuvre, in other words, constituted a mobilization of Hadewijch's memory, a dynamic and performative act of remembrance which was geared to fixating and preformatting the future recollections of his favourite mystic.

It is interesting in this respect that Lilar not only refers to Van Mierlo, but also to the Dutch philologist, literary critic and translator Marie-Hélène van der Zeyde (1906-1990) in the same footnote: 'l'essai intelligent et agréablement subversif de Marie-Hélène van der Zeyde, *Hadewijch*' [the intelligent, pleasantly subversive essay of Marie-Hélène van der Zeyde, *Hadewijch*].<sup>65</sup> In her doctoral dissertation *Hadewijch. Een studie over de*

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<sup>61</sup> This debate revolved around vehement defenses or rebuttals of the so-called 'Bloemardinne hypothesis', which equated Hadewijch with a fourteenth-century Brussels heterodox beguine associated to the Order of the Free Spirit. See Van Oostrom, pp. 449-450.

<sup>62</sup> See Frank Willaert, 'Van Mierlo. De voordelen van vooroordelen', *Literatuur* 6 (1989), pp. 345-349 and Geert Warnar, 'De studie van de geestelijke letterkunde tussen 1900-1950. Van Mierlo (1878-1958) en de anderen'. in *Der vaderen boek. Beoefenaren van de studie der Middelnederlandse letterkunde*, ed. by Wim Van Anrooy, et al. (eds.), (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2003), pp. 179-194.

<sup>63</sup> Willaert, p. 346.

<sup>64</sup> Rigney 2012, p. 12, pp. 169-170. In her study of the afterlives of Walter Scott, Rigney employs the concept of 'portable monuments' to evoke both the 'monumental' and 'mobile' aspect of using literary works as memory sites. In doing so, she conceives of literary works as 'monumental points of reference' and thus stable artefacts which exist – and persist – across time, being only 'mobilized' when memory-workers turn to them in creating new memory sites, such as revised editions, translations and adaptations. As opposed to literary works such as Scott's novels, however, the works of Hadewijch cannot easily be characterised as stable reference points: in the Middle Dutch manuscript form in which they had been handed down, they were far too opaque to be readily consumed by the twentieth-century public. Consequently, they could only be converted into readable reference points by cultural mediators such as Van Mierlo.

<sup>65</sup> *Le Couple*, p. 119.

*mens en de schrijfster* [Hadewijch. A study of the woman and writer] (1934), Van der Zeyde maintained that Hadewijch should be regarded first and foremost as an author, rather than as a lay religious woman, presenting the Christian character of the latter's texts as the historical template in which the literary genius of Hadewijch came to fruition, rather than as the kernel of her oeuvre.<sup>66</sup> In doing so, she downplayed Hadewijch's Christian character in order to foreground the literary qualities of her texts, offering an interpretation that was regarded as subversive – and 'incorrect' – by Van Mierlo. Feeling that 'his' Hadewijch had been touched in the worst way possible, the latter launched a staunch attack on Van der Zeyde's study, declaring that the latter 'aimed too high' in trying to comment Hadewijch's oeuvre while knowing insufficiently about its Catholic breeding ground.<sup>67</sup>

To Lilar, however, it apparently posed no problem that Van Mierlo and Van der Zeyde presented very different views onto their subject matter. She credits both the work of a towering figure such as Van Mierlo and a thorn in the flesh such as Van der Zeyde: their differences in point of view do not seem to matter all that much to her argument. And yet: although Lilar mobilizes Hadewijch in a project that explicitly differentiates itself from what she considers as the rigid Catholic condemnation of the body, presenting her work in a chapter that is called 'Hadewych ou l'eros *clandestin*' (my italics) and engaging her in a project that may be characterized as equally 'pleasantly subversive' as Van der Zeyde's, she is careful to note that Hadewijch complies with all criteria of orthodoxy, thereby referring to a certain Fr. J.-B.P., who, in turn, relies on Van Mierlo's defense of Hadewijch's orthodoxy.<sup>68</sup> Stressing Hadewijch's alleged orthodoxy in this way, Lilar performs a careful balancing act: she relies on the work of an important mediator of Hadewijch's work, acknowledging his expertise, while choosing to take a different direction, as she employs his Hadewijch image to her own 'unorthodox' ends.

Being referred to in this paragraph on Hadewijch's orthodoxy, 'Fr. J.-B.P.', the third mediator of Hadewijch's oeuvre mentioned by Lilar, refers to the French Carthusian monk Jean-Baptiste Porion (1899-1987), who translated various of Hadewijch's works into French, mediating her oeuvre to a francophone readership. Lilar equally refers to Porion in the aforementioned footnote – 'Voir aussi *Hadewijch d'Anvers*, par J.-B. P., Paris, Seuil, 1954, et ses remarquables commentaires' [See also *Hadewijch d'Anvers*, by J.-B. P., Paris, Seuil, 1954, with his remarkable commentaries].<sup>69</sup> As can be glimpsed

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<sup>66</sup> Marie-Hélène van der Zeyde, *Hadewijch, een studie over de mens en de schrijfster* (Groningen: J.B. Wolters, 1934).

<sup>67</sup> Jozef Van Mierlo, 'Over Hadewijch naar aanleiding van een dissertatie', in *Verslagen en mededelingen van de Koninklijke Vlaamse Academie voor Taal- en Letterkunde* (1934), pp. 141-183. According to Rigney 2020, p. 16, 'controversy may be more important than consensus in mobilizing remembrance.'

<sup>68</sup> *Le Couple*, p. 127: 'Hadewych, dont cependant on ne discute pas l'orthodoxie, est mue comme Socrate et Platon par le désir amoureux, et pour atteindre l'objet de son désir elle use du même procédé cathartique. Sur l'orthodoxie de Hadewych, je m'en réfère à l'avis autorisé du Fr. J.-B. P., ouvrage cité, p. 31. 'La doctrine spirituelle que Hadewych enseigne, dont elle décrit les épreuves dans ces visions et des lettres (comme aussi dans les poèmes [...]), a été trouvée saine et complète, avec raison croyons-nous, par les juges qui l'ont étudiée depuis une trentaine d'années, notamment par le R.P. van Mierlo, S. J., et le R.P. Axters, O.F.'

<sup>69</sup> *Le Couple*, p. 119.



from Lilar's unpublished notebook on Hadewijch, in which the vast majority of references and copied quotes are taken from Porion's work, the latter may be considered as the mediator Lilar's understanding of Hadewijch is most indebted to.<sup>70</sup> While obviously not sharing the same Flemish nationalist motives in mediating Hadewijch's works to the broader public, Porion's view onto Hadewijch was in itself not that different from Van Mierlo's: it was also determined by a Catholic outlook.<sup>71</sup> Although Lilar did not share Porion's Catholic worldview, she did find elements in Porion's presentation of Hadewijch that suited her project. While Van Mierlo discerned only limited traces of Neoplatonic thinking in Hadewijch's texts, Porion mentioned Neoplatonic thought as one of the main influences on the writings of what he called 'the mystics of the North' [*les mystiques du Nord*], considering Hadewijch as one of their most important representatives.<sup>72</sup> Clinging on to the (limited) number of references to Neoplatonic thought in Porion's reading of Hadewijch's texts, Lilar makes Hadewijch fit her own provocative project, commemorating her as a mystic who employs physical love as the motor for divine love:

L'intérêt du cas Hadewych est que, sans tomber dans la confusion du charnel et du spirituel, son expérience suppose le charnel. Certes, il n'y a guère chez elle cet érotisme facile qui enlèverait toute valeur à la démonstration – ou s'il y en a, il est aussitôt dépassé. L'érotisme de Hadewych est érotisme au sens grec, intellectualisme sur fond affectif.<sup>73</sup>

[What makes the case of Hadewych interesting is that, without falling into the confusion of the carnal with the spiritual, her experience *assumes* the carnal. There is in her, it is true, hardly a trace of the facile eroticism which would deprive the demonstration of all value: if it ever was present, it is immediately surpassed. The eroticism of Hadewych is an eroticism in the Greek sense, that of sustained thought on a basis of feeling.]

According to Lilar, Hadewijch's 'erotic' teachings are 'Greek' in the sense that they conceive of the loving human body as a medium to lift the soul to its divine origin. Hadewijch's writings thus perfectly fitted Lilar's project, as the explicit, and in her own words, 'sole' purpose of her chapter on Hadewijch was to demonstrate the extent to which Christian mysticism and (Neo)platonism are intertwined: 'Il me suffit de montrer

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<sup>70</sup> The notebook is preserved at Archives et Musée de Littérature in Brussels: 'Suzanne Lilar: Cahiers Suzanne Lilar: *Notes sur la mystique d'Hadewijch d'Anvers*. manuscrit ([s. d.])' (ML 08493/0071). The scope of this article does not allow for an in-depth genetic study of the notebook and the transfer strategies involved in copying and paraphrasing excerpts from Porion's work.

<sup>71</sup> While Catholic in intention, Porion's mediation of Hadewijch's works allowed Hadewijch's penetration in non-Catholic circles. Psychoanalytic, feminist and postmodernist thinkers such as Jacques Lacan, Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray, for instance, became acquainted with Hadewijch's oeuvre through Porion's translations; see Fraeters 2017, pp. 115-6

<sup>72</sup> Porion, J.-B., Fr., *Lettres et écrits spirituels: document inédits*, ed. by Nathalie Nabert, (Paris: Beauchesne, 2012), p. 193.

<sup>73</sup> *Le Couple*, p. 122.

qu'une branche authentique de la mystique chrétienne coïncide avec l'érotique platonicienne ou avec l'exégèse qu'en donne Plotin' [it is enough, for my purpose, to show that one authentic branch of Christian mysticism coincides with the Platonic philosophy of love or with Plotinus' exegesis of it].<sup>74</sup> Consequently, Lilar presents the Middle Dutch mystic not a dogmatic Christian who turns away from the body, nor as a libertine woman who overemphasizes the pleasures of the flesh, losing sight of their divine orientation and goal. Lilar chooses to integrate Hadewijch into her own discourse on love, turning her into an icon of (Neo)platonist nostalgia:

Hadewych ne s'attarde jamais dans le sensualisme. Quelque chose l'arrache à ces préliminaires et la pousse vers les altitudes. C'est l'*onghedueren*, l'impatience des limites, la nostalgie de ce qui est à la fois réminiscence et destin.<sup>75</sup>

[Hadewych never lingered in sensualism. Something drew her away from these preliminaries and drove her towards higher altitudes. This was *onghedueren*, an impatience of limits, the nostalgia for that which is at the same time reminiscence and destiny]

In characterising Hadewijch's nostalgia as being reminiscent of the soul's origin, which is God, as well as pointing teleologically to its final destination, which is, again, God, Lilar grounds her own project in the oeuvre of the mystic, thus stretching a chain of memory from Hadewijch's thirteenth-century mystical oeuvre to the plea for a resacralisation of love in the second half of the twentieth century she sought to convey with *Le Couple*. In this way, Hadewijch helps her to testify to 'the nostalgia for that which is at the same time reminiscence and destiny'. Lilar thus mobilizes Hadewijch to her own endeavours, which are profoundly marked by modern nostalgia: Hadewijch helps Lilar to show the soul's origin and future homecoming in God to be two halves of a 'coherent' analogy, the reestablishment of which can remedy the crises of love and the sacred in Western society.

### ***Remembering Hadewijch as a marker of cultural hybridity***

Although Lilar highlights the 'Greek' character of her favourite mystic in *Le Couple*, she also takes care to stress her supposedly 'Flemish' character in other works, endeavouring to present Hadewijch as the figurehead of a bicultural Flemish – or Belgian – collective memory.<sup>76</sup> One such work is *Une enfance gantoise* (1976), an autobiography consisting of memories of Lilar's childhood in Ghent interwoven with references to Belgian history and commentaries on linguistic debates concerning the francophone and Flemish

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<sup>74</sup> *Le Couple*, p. 121.

<sup>75</sup> *Le Couple*, p. 128.

<sup>76</sup> On the complex relation between Flemish and Belgian collective memory, see Marnix Beyen, 'A parricidal memory: Flanders memorial universe as product and producer of Belgian history', *Memory studies* 5.1 (2012), pp. 32-44.

communities in the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>77</sup> Similarly to how she assigned an important role to Hadewijch in *Le Couple*, Lilar resorts to the Middle Dutch mystic at a crucial point in the reflection on her childhood, namely when she describes how she realised she was suddenly no longer a child when hearing the works of Hadewijch being recited during a seminary in the library of the University of Ghent:

J'étais sortie de l'enfance lorsque je fis la découverte de la poésie néerlandaise dans les Visions et les poèmes de la béguine Hadewijch, géniale mystique du XIII<sup>e</sup> siècle. [...] je me souviens de ce séminaire de la bibliothèque de l'université de Gand et de sa fenêtre ouverte sur la cour pleine d'oiseaux dont les cris aigus me frappaient au cœur et en même temps que les mots magnifiques: *orewoet der liefde* (fureur originelle de l'amour), *onghedueren* (impatience des limites), *entsinken* (s'abîmer, littéralement couler à fond).<sup>78</sup>

[I grew out of childhood when I discovered Dutch poetry through the Visions and poems of the beguine Hadewijch, brilliant mystic of the thirteenth century. [...] I remember that seminar in the library of the University of Ghent and its window overlooking the courtyard full of birds whose high-pitched cries struck me in the heart together with those magnificent words: *orewoet der liefde* (original fury of love), *onghedueren* (impatience with limits), *entsinken* (to sink, literally to sink to the bottom).]

As was the case in *Le Couple*, Hadewijch's writings are introduced by likening them to birdsong: the mystic's 'magnificent words', which are issued from her specific mystical lexicon and rendered both in their original version (as if to highlight their exotic character) and translated into French, are counterpointed with the sharp cries of birds in the library's courtyard, both of which are said to profoundly touch the young Lilar. The description of this event is not fortuitous: in singling out the memory of this first contact with Hadewijch's works, Lilar publically evokes the transformative potential of Hadewijch – she was no longer a child after hearing the mystic's texts – , thus portraying the encounter with the Middle Dutch mystic as crucial to her own personal development.

However, in *Une enfance gantoise*, which deals with communitarian conflict and linguistic debates among its primary subjects, the language of Hadewijch's mystical writings is not solely mentioned for its poetic – or perhaps even 'analogical' – resemblance to birdsong: it is also mobilized in a reflection on cultural memory. Raised in a bilingual francophone family belonging to *la petite bourgeoisie*, which had chosen to exclusively use French in the household (except for communicating with the maid), Lilar claims to have discovered Dutch – or 'Flemish', as she prefers to call it – through the writings of Hadewijch, staging the latter as an emblem of this language. In what follows, she goes on to compare the naturally poetic, musical and literary quality of 'Flemish' to the French language. As opposed to the allegedly cerebral and rigid nature

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<sup>77</sup> For a discussion of the (de)construction of national identity in *Une enfance gantoise*, see Susan Bainbrigge, *Culture and Identity in Belgian Francophone Writing* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2012), pp. 41-60.

<sup>78</sup> *Une enfance gantoise*, p. 66.

of French, Hadewijch's texts, according to Lilar, breathe the effusion of love: 'Je trouvais là une langage naturellement poétique, des mots qui, à l'inverse des mots français, fuyaient la rigidité de la définition et demeuraient comme entrebâillés sur l'effusion amoureuse' [I found there a naturally poetic language, words which, unlike French ones, escaped the rigidity of definition and remained open to outbursts of love].<sup>79</sup>

This description of the Flemish language as poetic and marked by spontaneous passion is not unique to Lilar's oeuvre: it bears resemblances to a discourse on Flemish culture and identity which marked the search for a communal cultural reference point in francophone Belgian letters. In seeking to differentiate themselves from the French metropolis, Belgian francophone authors regularly resorted to the remembrance of an imagined, mythical Flanders in their writings, performing a literary celebration of an elusive *âme flamand*, which they considered to be the foundation of Belgium's hybrid cultural identity.<sup>80</sup> Basing themselves on positivist notions of national and racial essentialism, they depicted Flemish culture as being both 'mystique et sensuelle' [mystical and sensual], conceiving of it as being shaped by the drink-fuelled festivities of brueghelesque fairs, on the one hand, and the religious atmosphere evoked by beguinages, cathedrals sticking out of the flat Flemish countryside, and mystical authors such as Jan van Ruusbroec, on the other.<sup>81</sup>

Although writing at a time when this particular remembrance of an imagined Flanders had become to a large extent obsolete, Lilar is clearly indebted to this discourse. Indeed, *Une enfance gantoise* is replete with references to the vaguely 'mystical' character of Flanders, which Lilar conveys, amongst other things, by means of a childhood memory of a visit to the beguinage of Onze Lieve Vrouw ter Hoye [Our Lady of Hoye] in Ghent. When walking its cobbled streets, she is suddenly struck by the simultaneous presence of a pleasant, well-kept beguine's garden – a classical *lieu de mémoire* in the Flemish imaginary –, and the wild water gurgling around a torn wall:

Je demeurais longtemps engluée sur ce contraste, ne sachant nommer ni définir le plaisir et comme le repos que je goûtais à assembler et superposer les deux images, celle du jardin sage et bien tenu de la béguine, celle de l'eau coulant au pied du gros mur éventré – plaisir sur lequel j'allais revenir souvent au cours de ma vie : il consistait à allier dans une exemplaire *coincidentia oppositorum* l'ordonnance à la sauvagerie.<sup>82</sup>

[For a long time I remained fascinated by this contrast, not knowing how to name or define the pleasure and the calm I enjoyed assembling and superimposing the two images, that of the quiet and well-kept garden of the beguine and that of the water flowing at the foot of the

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<sup>79</sup> *Une enfance gantoise*, p. 66.

<sup>80</sup> See Berg 2015; and Jean-Marie Klinkenberg, 'La génération de 1880 et la Flandre', in *Les Avant-gardes littéraires en Belgique: Au confluent des arts et des langues (1880-1950)*, ed. by Jean Weisgerber (Brussels: Éditions Labor, 1991), pp. 101-110.

<sup>81</sup> Berg, p. 391.

<sup>82</sup> *Une enfance gantoise*, pp. 88-89.

big torn wall - a pleasure to which I would return often in the course of my life: it consisted in combining in an exemplary *coincidentia oppositorum* order with wildness.]

While Lilar's focus on the almost sublime conjunction of the pleasant and rough character of the beguinage is clearly indebted to her penchant for the analogy, it also conveys her appreciation of the beguinage for the paradoxical, and thus, in her view, quintessentially 'Flemish', pleasure it offers.<sup>83</sup> Lilar's reveals her penchant for 'Flemish' distortions in both *Une enfance gantoise* and *Journal de l'analogiste*: 'J'étais trop flamande pour que dans ma vie l'expérience de la beauté fût première' [I was too Flemish for beauty to come first in my life] and 'J'étais trop flamande pour ne pas subir la fascination d'un art adonné à la monstruosité, à l'anomalie, à la distorsion des formes' [I was too Flemish not to be fascinated by an art devoted to monstrosity, anomaly and distortion of form].<sup>84</sup> It is significant in this respect that Lilar characterizes Hadewijch as 'une béguine', presenting her as a figure of memory that summons up the paradoxical, provocative and passionate essence of an imagined Flanders:

Je découvrais là le vocabulaire de la passion, cette chose si peu française que Racine n'avait pu la montrer que maîtrisée ou châtiée, vaincue par l'harmonie, et qui s'étalait ici triomphalement avec ses provocations et ses paradoxes: « Ce que l'amour a de plus doux, chantait Hadewijch, ce sont ses violences.<sup>85</sup>

[In her works, I discovered the vocabulary of passion, which is something so un-French that Racine had only been able to show it tamed or shackled, vanquished by harmony, and which Hadewijch triumphantly displayed through provocations and paradoxes: 'The sweetest thing about love,' Hadewijch sang, 'is its violence'].

To make her point, Lilar contrasts Hadewijch's language with that of seventeenth-century French dramatist Jean Racine (1639- 1699), one of the towering figures of French classicism. Whereas Racine – and the French language by extension – endeavours to master, conquer and shackle passion, artificially transforming it into something harmonious, Hadewijch is praised by Lilar for giving passion free rein, allowing it to be provocative and full of paradoxes. And yet, fond of contrasts and analogies as she may be, Lilar does not want to leave Racine for Hadewijch altogether. In the following passage, she makes clear that her younger self clung to the French classicist in order to shield herself from romantic Flemish identity politics:

N'eût été Racine, peut-être me serais-je enferrée dans mon romantisme flamand. Peut-être me serais-je rebellée contre le français, m'appliquant à le violenter, à lui infliger des sévices, à forcer son « génie ». Peut-être aurais-je choisi d'écrire en néerlandais, ce qui, sans être une

<sup>83</sup> On the importance of beguinages to religious and artistic identities in Flanders, see Heynickx, pp. 43-44.

<sup>84</sup> *Journal de l'analogiste*, p. 100; *Une enfance gantoise*, p. 107.

<sup>85</sup> *Une enfance gantoise*, p. 66.

disgrâce, m'eût menée moins loin sur le plan de l'écriture. Car mon œuvre y eût perdu cette vibration si caractéristique des écrivains qui vivent à fleur de deux langues et à l'affrontement de deux cultures.<sup>86</sup>

[Had it not been for Racine, I might have locked myself up in my Flemish romanticism. Perhaps I would have rebelled against the French language, applying myself to violating or abusing it, to forcing its 'genius'. Perhaps I would have chosen to write in Dutch, which, although not a disgrace, would have taken me less far in the literary field. For my work would have lost that vibration that is so characteristic of writers who live at the crossroads of two languages and the confrontation of two cultures.]

Without Racine, Lilar claims, she might have rebelled against the French language, or even opted to write in Dutch, which would not have taken her career that far (which is an interesting element to be considered from a literary-institutional perspective, although exceeding of the scope of this article). Instead, she chooses to position herself midway, in-between Racine and Hadewijch, thus cherishing her bicultural identity. In fact, to Lilar, that bicultural identity is not only situated in the juxtaposition of Hadewijch and Racine, but also *within* Hadewijch herself. That becomes clear from the following fragment, in which Lilar pictures Hadewijch as 'une Flamande' who drew heavily on a bilingual context in her work:

Repensant aujourd'hui à Hadewijch et au bénéfice que cette Flamande tira d'une formation fondée sur la préservation des différences (car le milieu dont elle sortait était probablement bilingue et sa culture littéraire française selon Van Mierlo), je me dis, non sans mélancolie, que de telles hybridisations sont aujourd'hui inconcevables.

L'aile avancée du parti flamand, figée dans le souvenir des injustices et le projet de la revanche, ne songe qu'à écraser la langue et la civilisation françaises au profit de la germanité. [...] C'est aux poètes qu'il écherait de transcender l'agressivité en dialogue, en émulation, en lutte d'amour.<sup>87</sup>

[Rethinking today of Hadewijch and the benefits that this Flemish woman drew from an education that was based on the preservation of differences (because the context she came from was probably bilingual and her literary culture French, according to Van Mierlo), I say to myself, not without melancholy, that such hybridizations are inconceivable today.

The radical wing of the Flemish-nationalist party, stuck in memories of injustice and a vengeful project, only dreams of crushing the French language and civilization in favor of 'germanity'. [...] It is up to the poets to transcend aggression into dialogue, into emulation, into a love struggle.]

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<sup>86</sup> *Une enfance gantoise*, p. 65.

<sup>87</sup> *Une enfance gantoise*, p. 67.

‘Rethinking’ [*repensant*] of Hadewijch ‘today’ [*aujourd’hui*], Lilar makes clear that she considers the remembrance of Hadewijch to be of acute relevance to the present. Just as in *Le Couple*, she clings a chain of memory onto the latter’s mystical oeuvre, linking it to her own project. Remembering Hadewijch’s thirteenth-century context, she nostalgically evokes hybridisations which are characterised as being no longer possible in the 1970s, amidst communitarian turmoil in Belgian politics, when she is writing her autobiography. Strikingly, Lilar apparently considers it to be the poet’s task not only to re-establish the abstract coherence of the world through analogies, but also to engage in a Hadewijchean ‘lutte d’amour’ [a fight or struggle of love], promoting a very concrete politico-cultural coherence: that of a bicultural Belgium, composed of two linguistic communities.

When melancholically mourning the loss of a bicultural Eden to which Hadewijch is said to have belonged, Lilar refers once again to the writings of Jozef Van Mierlo. The way in which she does so is striking: she mentions him briefly – ‘selon Van Mierlo’ [according to Van Mierlo] – without providing further background, almost as if he were a household name her readers, both in Belgium and France, should all be acquainted with. In this way, she credits Van Mierlo as a well-known authority, a brief reference to whom suffices to substantiate her claim. Although Van Mierlo himself had indeed signalled the influence of the courtly lyric on Hadewijch’s works,<sup>88</sup> he would mobilize her work to very different ends than Lilar: Van Mierlo sought to promote Hadewijch not only as a Catholic mystic, but also as a distinctly Flemish one, mobilizing her precisely in the kind of Flemish identity politics Lilar seeks to distance herself from. Consequently, Lilar’s remembrance of Hadewijch conveys a very different dream than that of the ‘radical wing of the Flemish-nationalist party’, which she portrays as being stuck in ‘memories of injustice’. Relying on Van Mierlo’s philological inquiries, Lilar highlights the fact that Hadewijch drew on the writings of francophone troubadours and trouvères when composing her love lyrics, celebrating the linguistic hybridity of her mystical lexicon:

Je songe que c’est aux troubadours et aux trouvères français que Hadewijch avait emprunté la coutume de consacrer dans ses poèmes une strophe aux saisons et plus particulièrement aux reverdies. Je songe que cette Flamande s’était forgée, sur le patron latin, un vocabulaire abstrait à l’usage de sa mystique spéculative. Je songe qu’elle se plaisait à faire scintiller dans son langage des mots français parmi les autres: *aventure, offerande, vray, joye, solaes, delijt*.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> See, for example: Van Mierlo, ‘De poëzie van Hadewijch’, in *Verslagen en mededelingen van de Koninklijke Vlaamse Academie voor Taal- en Letterkunde* (1931), pp. 285-483. Van Mierlo’s hypothesis was later confirmed by Frank Willaert, *De poëtica van Hadewijch in de strofische gedichten* (Utrecht: HES, 1984) and Peter Grijp, ‘De zingende Hadewijch. Op zoek naar de melodieën van haar Strofische Gedichten,’ in *Een zoet akkoord. Middeleeuwse lyriek in de Lage Landen*, ed. by Frank Willaert et al. (Amsterdam: Prometheus, 1992), pp. 72-92.

<sup>89</sup> *Une enfance gantoise*, p. 67.

[I imagine that it was from the French troubadours and trouvères that Hadewijch borrowed the custom of dedicating in her poems a stanza to the seasons and more particularly from the poetic genre of the *reverdie* [celebrating the arrival of spring]. I imagine that this Flemish woman forged her own abstract vocabulary for her speculative mysticism on a Latin superstrate. I imagine that she liked to have French words sparkling in her language: *aventure, offerande, vray, joye, solaes, delijt*].

It is significant in this respect that Lilar modalizes her conjectures with respect to the bilingual genesis of Hadewijch's writings through the repeated use of the first person of the auxiliary verb *songer*. While the verb is used as an epistemic auxiliary – meaning 'to think' or 'to imagine' in this context –, its litany-like repetition almost makes it sound desiderative, as if it contained a tinge of another meaning of *songer*, which is 'to dream' or 'to envision' [*songer à*]. The use of this particular verb aptly demonstrates that Lilar's recollection of Hadewijch and her historical past stems from a *present* imaginative exercise or desire (just as was the case of Van Mierlo's and others' remembrance of Hadewijch). Indeed, she maps her remembrance of Hadewijch's context onto the recent past, the present and the future, relating Hadewijch's bicultural context to the heated communitarian struggles she witnessed during her childhood in the first half of the twentieth century, to the post-war communitarian turmoil that marked the Belgian political landscape in which she writes her oeuvre, and arguably also to a projected future in which these struggles can be sublimated in a 'lutte d'amour'. Careful not to reflect too explicitly on her immediate political context, Lilar resorts to her childhood memories as well to the cultural memory of Hadewijch in projecting this future. Consequently, the publication of her autobiography can be considered as a performative act of remembrance: building on analogies between her own childhood memories and the place of Hadewijch in collective memory, Lilar aims to offer an oblique commentary on the present-day situation of her country of origin, aiming to project an alternative future for its communities.

## **Conclusion**

In retrospect, Lilar's mobilisation of Hadewijch's memory seems to gleam even more with the patina of nostalgia, for the literary context in which she set out its stakes was already on the verge of disappearance at the time of its conception. Indeed, in 1978, Flemish literature written in French had become, according to the literary scholar Christian Berg, 'un pays noyé, où n'émergent plus que quelques îlots désormais séparés du reste du monde' [a drowned country, where only a few small islands now separated from the rest of the world emerge].<sup>90</sup> While Lilar may have achieved to erect 'portable monuments' to Hadewijch's memory with *Le Couple* and *Une enfance gantoise*, the failure to consecrate her own oeuvre and authorship shows her public remembrance of the mystic to be marked by nostalgia from the very outset. Despite her precarious locus

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<sup>90</sup> Berg, p. 406.



of enunciation, however, Lilar tirelessly remodels the memory of the mystic to her own ends. While basing itself on Hadewijch images provided by cultural mediators such as Van Mierlo, Van der Zeyde and Porion, thus relying on layers of mediation offered and transfer strategies adopted by other cultural actors who equally refashioned the memory of the Middle Dutch mystic so as to match them to their projects, her mobilization of those images serves different aims: she remembers Hadewijch as an icon of (Neo)platonian nostalgia and a marker of (Flemish and Belgian) cultural hybridity.

This article has shown that Lilar's rewriting of Hadewijch into her own oeuvre is marked by an intricate layering of interconnected mnemonic spheres, the whole of which testifies to what she considers to be her *mémoire-devoir*: her vocation to testify to the memory of original unity. By contrasting Hadewijch with a French classicist such as Racine, foregrounding the former's bicultural milieu and relating her mystical thought to the works of Plato and Plotinus, she presents the Middle Dutch mystic as being both a bicultural Flemish woman author and a (Neo)platonian thinker. In this way, Lilar not only turns Hadewijch into one half of the analogies she is so fond of, but also into a precursor to her own endeavours. Retrieving the memory of original unity, Lilar desires to recompose it by establishing analogies between apparently unconnectable phenomena: between jarring elements of everyday reality, between the human and the sacred, between the Flemish and francophone communities in Belgium. In anchoring these attempts to recompose a poetic, spiritual and politico-cultural original unity in the writings of a Middle Dutch mystic, Lilar shows her project to be profoundly nostalgic.

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### **About the author**

Tijl Nuyts is working on a dissertation on mystical literature and modern identities at the University of Antwerp, focusing on the mediated memory of the Middle Dutch mystic Hadewijch in Belgium. In that context, he has published and presented on the appropriation of Hadewijch's Visions in Belgian Surrealist poetry and on the *histoire croisée* between Catholic and modernist mediators of Middle Dutch mystical literature. He is also interested in the mobilization of mysticism in other contexts, especially in late modernity: he wrote, amongst other things, on the uses of Christian mysticism in Dutch contemporary poetry and of Sufism (Islamic mysticism) in US American spoken word and in Mexican neo-avant-gardist prose.