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Metaphoric Narration: Mimesis of Mystic Experience in Hadewijch of Brabant's "Vision 1"

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Abstract

Utilizing linguistics and literary criticism as the interpretive framework, hermeneut Luz Aurora Pimentel elaborated the theoretical concept of "metaphoric narration." Metaphoric narration is the intellectual semiotic, or meaning-making, process of metaphorization at the level of the text; in other words, Pimentel has experimented with the possibility of metaphor in the context of the whole of a work rather than just in the context of a sentence. This article tests Pimentel's experiment by applying the theory of metaphoric narration to a close reading of Hadewijch of Brabant's "Vision 1," asking the question, Does the theory of metaphoric narration assist in analyzing narrative expression of lived, mystical experience? In working through an interpretation of this text utilizing Pimentel's theory, findings indicate that there are characteristics of metaphoric narration that Hadewijch has leveraged in order to *transmute her spiritual experience into written language that is mimetic of that lived experience*. This detailed study indicates that metaphoric narration may be a useful analytical approach of interest to medieval scholars, as it utilizes semiotics rather than psychoanalysis for its interpretive reference. It will also be of interest to literary studies in its articulation of the expressive possibilities offered by metaphoric narration, and to those in religious studies with an interest in mysticism but limited knowledge of either Hadewijch or literary methods of analysis.

HADEWIJCH OF BRABANT

Hadewijch was likely a beguine, and likely lived in Antwerp, which in the 13th century was part of the independent duchy in what is now northern Belgium and the southern Netherlands. She left behind three bodies of writings: *Visions* (including the "List of the Perfect"), *Letters*, and *Poems in Stanzas.* Her writings were found buried in the vaults of the Royal Library in Brussels during the mid-19th century; in the early 20th century, the publications of Jozef van Mierlo made them more widely available, and her work is valued in the contemporary period through van Mierlo's research. Hadewijch's writings offer representation of the pain of alienation from connection with Love and how the joy of that union might be, however fleetingly, foretasted here on earth. "Vision 1" is the first of this Brabantine mystic's fourteen *Visions* which seek, through imaginative poetic enunciations, to *express the experience* of the love between human and divine Love that will be fully realized in union after death.

Mommaers and Dutton (2004: 18) observe that "beguine" originally referred to "pious woman [*mulier religiosa*] and therefore to different forms of religious life. Recluses, converts, women living in their own homes, and even Cistercian or other real nuns could be called beguines [. . .] *beguine* probably held heretical connotations, and was often used as a derisive name." In emulation of their understanding of Christ, these women lived lives of poverty, in prayer and contemplation, with a focus on charitable works such as the care of the elderly, ill, and impoverished. These women did not take vows and frequently lived in small, self-sustaining communities often, but not always, in buildings or groups of buildings called beguinages. Beguinages began to appear in the Low Countries during second half of the 12th century. Pope Honorius III officially accepted beguines in 1216; the movement, however, was officially condemned in 1310 due to its independence from ecclesiastic authority and seemed to die out by the 16th century.

Eminent medievalist Bernard McGinn points out that

> medieval mystics lived within a total religious world. Even in the case of "illiterate" women, the mediation of a living tradition, beginning with the Bible and including liturgy, other forms of prayer and iconography, as well as the consultation with clerical advisors, must always be taken into account as significant factors in determining the kinds of "experiences" these mystics may have enjoyed (1998: 29).

Indeed, Hadewijch's extant texts reflect the religious vocabulary, metaphors, culture, and imagery of late medieval Dutch religious literature. She is recognized for drawing on the then-contemporary form of love poetry, and for her use of the vernacular. Hadewijch was

> familiar with French courtly love lyric in a unique way. She mastered the technique of the troubadours to perfection; she played with the love-themes of the southern singer—but she did not simply imitate their profane art. She succeeded in transforming the thematic conventions of this genre to serve her own purpose. She created a new genre—Hadewijch is the first in Western European literature to write mystical love lyric (Mommaers and Dutton, 2004: 1).

Steven Rozenski (2010: 308), scholar of Christian mysticism, points out: "through [. . .] poetic, musical, and ultimately interpretive structures, medieval imaginative representations of the infinite and eternal joys of heaven can reproduce, however, crudely, artifices of eternity within historical and artistic time." Indeed, Hadewijch's "Vision 1" is one example of imaginative representation of the "joys of heaven" (although Hadewijch clearly does not always experience heaven as joyful), "reproducing" or, in Ricoeurian terms, creatively and evocatively mimetic of experience of eternity. "Vision 1" is interesting in that it reflects a synthesis of Hadewijch's spiritual understanding, focused on the concept of *Minne* (Love). McGinn refers to the vision as an important genre (1998: 20), noting that a "significant alternate form of vision began in the twelfth century […] and grew in importance throughout the later Middle Ages. This involved ecstatic transport to the supernatural realm, where a revelation in pictorial form was given to the seer, most often by a heavenly being" (1998: 27). McGinn continues, "Hadewijch's *Book of Visions* […], the earliest vernacular collection of such revelations, appears to have been composed in the 1240s" (1998:200).

After providing some literary theory background for the varied readers of this present essay, a close, modern, reading of "Vision 1" will follow. The thesis of this essay is that the narrative emplotment of "Vision 1" is *creative mimetic engagement with lived experience*: it sequences an angel leading the narrator to seven trees of symbolic value and culminates in mystic encounter. Following Joseph Van Mierlo, most scholars agree that Hadewijch arranged her rich and often strange visions according to a form of mystical itinerary, with "V[ision] 1 (a tree allegory) providing the introduction, V[isions] 2–12 illustrating the seer's growth in mystical graces, and V[isions] 13–14 constituting a summary and conclusion" (McGinn, 1998: 201).

Hadewijch was clearly educated, demonstrated by her knowledge of Augustine, Origen, William of St. Thierry, and Bernard of Clairvaux; she read Latin, French, and Provençal, but wrote, with great eloquence, in Middle Dutch vernacular. Hadewijch is erudite, yet her writing is not unusual for medieval texts of this nature; although her writing does not differ significantly from her contemporaries, except perhaps in its beauty, it influenced major figures, including Jan van Ruusbroec and Jan van Leeuwen in the 14th century. "Vision 1" is therefore a useful text for testing the usefulness of a literary theory, metaphoric narration, in analyzing narrative

mimesis of lived *mystical* experience—a study which could then be replicated by applying this model to the analysis of a larger selection of mystical texts.

LINGUISTICS AND LITERARY CRITICISM: RE-READING HADEWIJCH'S "VISION 1"

Large swathes of people in the world today, particularly in the so-called developed world, strongly reject any notion of a supernatural "divine"; yet for the 13th century woman Hadewijch, the divine—clearly named both "God" and "Jesus"— was the heuristic construction through which she understood the world. Hadewijch had a relationship to this divine which was centrally important to her, and it shaped the way she chose to live her life. In his seminal study on *mimesis*, the representation of reality in literature, Erich Auerbach reflects:

> during the Middle Ages and on through the Renaissance, a serious realism had existed. It had been possible in literature as well as in the visual arts to represent the most everyday phenomena of reality in a serious and significant context [...] it had long been clear to me how this medieval conception of art had evolved, and when and how the first break with the classical theory had come about. It was the story of Christ, with its ruthless mixture of everyday reality and the highest and most sublime tragedy, which had conquered the classical rule of styles. (1953: 554–55)

The writings of Hadewijch, including her *Visions*, are located in the genre of a serious realism, representing phenomena in a style that resonated with the context in which she lived. McGinn (1998: 30) adds that

> religious women of the late Middle Ages, such as Hadewijch [...] produced such powerful and original new visions, or visualizations, of the inner meaning of salvation history and of the mystical relation between God and humans. It is understandable that they would have conceived of their imaginative constructions and the dialogues that accompanied them as divinely given insofar as these produced new theological and spiritual insights useful for themselves and their readers. But theological evaluations of these visions, both in the Middle Ages and in the present century, have never insisted that such presentations need be taken at face value or in a purely literal way.

Following the theoretical work of Luz Aurora Pimentel, this essay articulates an interpretation of "Vision 1," utilizing linguistics and literary criticism to re-read the text and articulate how Hadewijch has translated her lived mystical experience into prose form. In doing so, the finding is that the process of what Pimentel has called metaphoric narration can indeed be mimetic of mystical experience. Mystical experience is here understood as a deepening understanding of and connection with

something non-material larger than oneself; as Van Baest (1998: 35) observes, "words people are forced to use when speaking of God are more apt in the measure they are better able to point beyond themselves." Due to the possibility of expressing lived experience in literary form, "Vision 1" offers meaningful didactic purpose. Mommaers and Dutton (2004: 48) point out that "in the *Visions* we can see the spiritual leader at work as she tries through her writing to give hope to her friends who feel lost in the 'winter' or 'desert,' lacking the comfort of Love's felt presence." Thus, from the literary side, this essay contributes a response to, as Fauconnier and Turner (1998: 65) note, a "need to face squarely the far greater complexity of integrations that lie behind observable metaphorical systems."

Pimentel's theory of metaphoric narration provides a conceptual instrument that gives voice to a large, underlying movement within "Vision 1"—a movement that both controls and explains the surface details of the text and also provides a means for unlocking the narrative potential of metaphor. Her exploration of the discursive function of metaphor in narrative texts operates along two major axes: 1) manifestation in language (which Pimentel refers to as "verbal metaphor") and 2) the level of the organization of the text.[1] Metaphorization is conceptualized as both a semiotic and a semantic process, capable of organizing the meaning of certain narrative texts. This essay is neither an overview of Hadewijch's work nor an exploration of the genre of mystic writing in the medieval period. It is limited to a close reading of just one text in order to test Pimentel's theory of metaphoric narration. It inquires as to the usefulness of this literary method of analysis in interpreting the *narrative expression of lived, mystical, experience*:

> Apparently Hadewijch originally experienced something disconcerting—the real presence of a force that seized her and which was active everywhere and in everything. She was touched bodily by something unprecedented, something which could not be named, even with the most exalted and precious words—Christ—of her own tradition. This reality was so omnipresent and at once so elusive that Hadewijch wrought a new term. Not that it was an indefinite, amorphous reality: it is beyond doubt that to Hadewijch this new force was the God of Christianity, but it was the God she came to know through experience (Mommaers and Dutton, 2004: 5).

Pimentel's literary approach, applied to the written expression of lived mystical experience, resonates with the observations of Biebuyck and Martens (2011: 58) which falls, for the most part, into the Ricoeurian camp:

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[1] The latter axis relies on Jean Ricardou's *Problèmes du Nouveau Roman* (1967) and his *Nouveaux Problèmes du Roman* (1978) for his proposition of metaphor as an organizing principle (Pimentel, 1990: 7).

> The introduction of a cognitive perspective to the study of literary metaphors is certainly one of the most striking revolutions in the history of literary studies. Even a superficial comparison of Paul Ricoeur's detailed and well-documented monograph *La métaphore vive* (1975), which is now considered the hallmark of traditional metaphor research, and Lakoff and Johnson's cognitive manifesto (*Metaphors We Live By*, 1980) will clearly reveal the deep chasm between the quarrelling *anciens* and *modernes*.

Given the acknowledged interpretive lens, the first step in applying this linguistic theory to a reading of "Vision 1" is to provide a comprehensive explanation of metaphor in the text, at the level of its manifestation in language. It was through exploring the text further, through seeking an understanding of the function of metaphor at the level of the organization of the text, that a possibility emerged: *the process of metaphoric narration may be mimetic of spiritual growth*, and thus provide a useful analytic framework for elucidating a wider range of texts that seek to articulate mystical experience. Applying Pimentel's theory to a close reading of "Vision 1" reveals characteristics of metaphoric narration have been used to create a mimesis of Hadwijch's experience of *Minne*; in particular: A) metaphor as manifestation in language, and B) metaphor as an organizing principle (virtual narrative and simultaneity of time). Thus, a focus within this essay will be on the elaboration of these characteristics as they play out within the two levels of reference of metaphoric narration: its manifestation in language and as an organizing principle. But first an overview of the theory of metaphoric narration and a comment on the elusive nature of mystical experience.

METAPHOR AND METAPHORIC NARRATION

Winifried Corduan (2001: 215) points out that "one need not be a mystic to believe that there is a point at which human rational categories fall short of divine mystery. Sooner or later we can no longer comprehend God's nature; sooner or later language gives out." Donald Duclow (2000: 439), too, discusses Hadewijch's exemplary "linguistic ability" in the context of the limitations of phenomenological expression:

> words adequately describe "things on earth" but inevitably fail in expressing "heavenly wisdom." [Hadewijch's challenge, to express her mystical experience in literary form], arises from the very limits of language, and of [12th century] Dutch in particular, rather than from any weakness on her part. Her mastery of language is second to no one's: "I can express everything insofar as this is possible for a human being." Her writings make this claim hard to dispute, and modern commentators acknowledge her extraordinary achievement.

Metaphor and metaphoric narration provide literary approaches to come as close as possible to transgressing the boundaries of language when trying to express experience that bumps up against divine mystery. The idea that language "gives out" reflects the linguistic turn of the late 20th century, clearly elucidated in the Wittgensteinian notion of the limits of language. The idea of language giving out takes on the position of Descartes in that thought, which is language, delimits what exists for us as *phenomenological* reality—that which appears and is observable and measurable. Nevertheless, there are formal linguistic devices, such as metaphor and metaphoric narration, which are used to break through the limits of language to articulate affective, non-rational experience such as love—the concept which absorbed Hadewijch's life, thought, and writing.

Metaphor, according narratologist Gerald Prince (2003: 51), is "a figure of speech through which a term designating a notion, A, is substituted for or identified with another term designating another notion, B, thereby ascribing to B one or more of the qualities of A or investing it with qualities associated with A." In this essay *notion A*, Hadewijch's *lived mystical experience*, is substituted for or identified with *notion B*, the *words* in her "Vision 1." In order to test Pimentel's theory of metaphoric narration through applying it to the analysis of "Vision 1," Prince's definition of metaphor, relying on Culler (1981), Jakobson and Halle (1956) and Lodge (1977), is combined with the idea of mimesis, which Prince (2003: 52) defines as, "showing, enacting (as opposed to telling, recounting)." His reference to Aristotle and Ricoeur is lengthy, but helpful:

> For Aristotle, according to whom all art is imitation and the various arts differ depending on object, means, and manner or mode […] constitute three varieties of mimesis. In Aristotelian terms, verbal narrative could then characterized as the imitation of an action (*mimēsis praxeōs*), using linguistic means and adopting any one of the three modes. In a discussion of Aristotle's *Poetics* and its pertinence for understanding narrative, Ricoeur develops a threefold model of mimesis as imitation whereby plot, which provides the means that allow us to grasp and make sense of human time, is viewed as a temporal configuration mediating between the time prefigured in the practical field (the field of life and human action) and the time refigured through the reception of the narrative. Perhaps no concept has exerted a more powerful influence than imitation in the Western criticoliterary tradition, whether through encouraging the accurate representation of life or through fostering the imitation of classic works and ancient master or—most generally—through promoting the view that the work of art, by holding a mirror up to nature (and not merely being a mirror itself), reveals the presence of the generic in the specific, the universal in the particular, the essential in the phenomenal (Prince, 2003: 53).

"Vision 1" is the Aristotelian imitation, through linguistic means, of Hadewijch's action, her lived mystical experience, her *mimēsis praxeōs*. Ricoeur

augments this Aristotelian understanding through his theory of three-fold mimesis. "Vision 1" is, clearly, an emplotment of a chronological sequence of events: the narrator passes seven trees representing "the seven gifts of [Countenance's] Spirit" (Hadewijch, 1980: 269)[2] and arrives in the presence of "he whom I was seeking" (269); notably, "he" has a face/Countenance. Countenance instructs her to embrace various virtues, accept the sufferings of human life through love, and help others in affliction. This series of events evokes the lived mystical experience, embedded as it is in the prefigured of Hadewijch's religious world, with a refigured reality *via* the receiving reader. By holding up a mirror in this way, a re-described understanding of Hadewijch's experience within human time emerges.

McGinn (1998: 26) identifies mysticism as "a special consciousness of the presence of God that by definition exceeds description and results in a transformation of the subject who receives it."[3] Similar to Ricoeur's three-fold mimesis and its capacity to re-describe reality, and dovetailing with McGinn's understanding of mysticism, living metaphor, too, offers the possibility of a transformation of the subject who reads it. Its possibility lies in the surplus of meaning that is evoked by placing notions A and B in proximity to each other, and how that meaning is actualized in the act of reading/configuring the text; Biebuych and Martens (2011: 120) further develop this idea, relying on Pimentel's notion of paranarrative:

> Because of its connectedness with literal and non-literal parts of the context alike, a literary metaphor disrupts the primary chronology at work in the literary text and transforms the reader—much more explicitly so than is usually believed—into a collaborator in the active engagement of the reader in processing the narrative. Hence, it might be much more rewarding to approach the network of metaphors and other figures of speech in a literary text as an additional layer of narrativity, instead of tracing the unfolding of a guiding metaphor or merely falling back on already available cognitive scripts. This additional layer, which we have named paranarrative….

The term "paranarrative" is defined as "a narrative with a purely virtual existence, developing parallel or alongside the main narrative; hence *para*-narrative" (Pimentel, 1990: 210). Metaphor is a rhetorical device commonly called upon in challenging situations such as the expression of deep emotion and/or ineffable experience not because it descriptively articulates but because of its second-level referential capacity to point to, evoke, or provoke something in the mind of the reader which can create a felt resonance with the world unfolded in

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[2] Subsequent references to "Vision 1" in this edition will cite page number(s) only.

[3] McGinn words this slightly differently on the next page of his book: "mysticism is characterized primarily by a sense of an immediate relation to God and the transformation this effects in the consciousness of the recipient" (1998: 27).

front of the text. It is of note that this weakening of the narrator's authority, caused by literary metaphor and its narrative networking, does *not* lead to the absolute hegemony of the individual, solipsistic, interpreting reader. Rather, it brings the readers themselves into a position in which they dialogically exchange approaches to understanding literary metaphor (Biebuyck and Martens, 2011: 66). In the process of wrestling with the network of metaphors in order to come to an understanding of the experience the text mimetically creates, transformation occurs within the reader's understanding.

As Hadewijch's "personal spiritual life is the main subject of the *Visions*" (Mommaers and Dutton, 2004: 45), metaphor provides a means of accessing the non-tangible domain which we name "spiritual." Biebuyck and Martens (2011: 62) point out that "reading a literary metaphor may effect the activation of corresponding or complementary knowledge of the world"—which is, as a teacher, what Hadewijch would want to provoke in others through her writing. Building on a figure of speech (metaphor) that functions at the level of the sentence, metaphoric narration addresses the network of metaphors at the level of the text, expanding

> its actional, temporal, spatial and aspectual scopes in ways that are not necessarily congruent or equivalent to those in the [primary narrative of the text]. […] the paranarrative is neither instrumental nor superior to the [primary narrative of the text]. It allows the reader to gain access to alternative segments of the storyworld and opens up a complementary spectrum of perspectives. In doing so, it displays new narrative agency: just like the [primary narrative of the text], the paranarrative relies on the ongoing reordering of (textual) information about the storyworld. [This reordering] encourages the reader to interpret the relations within the figurative network in a narrative sense (instead of a logical sense for example) (Biebuyck and Martens, 2011: 65–66).

Thus, this layer of narrative stretches the limits of language to engage in creative, evocative mimesis of a kind of non-literal lived experience, enhancing the possibilities for the writer to communicate for didactic purpose.

IF MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE IS BEYOND WORDS, WHY WRITE IT?

McGinn (1998: 16), based on his long study of Christian mysticism, observes, "our issues are often widely different from those of the medieval mystics," yet there are resonates across the centuries. The 13th century saw a growing literacy among the laity, along with a concurrent development of vernacular theology and cooperation between men. "I would argue that the mutual enrichment that came precisely from this unprecedented dialogue was one of the most remarkable characteristics of the new mysticism of the later Middle Ages," reflects McGinn (1998: 18). In a context where, nevertheless, "there was no institutionally approved

way by which a woman could gain the authority to teach in an official way" (McGinn, 1998: 21), writing allowed Hadewijch to communicate her experience to others. "The theme of the old and wise lover, one who, like Jacob, wrestles with God (see Gen. 32:23–32) […]), is central to Hadewijch's teaching" (McGinn, 1998: 201)—and Hadewijch was far from unique in her Jacobian wrestling. Her writings would have deep didactic meaning for others, such as Jan van Ruusbroec and Jan van Leeuwen, providing support and guidance through teaching a sense of the realization of—and the pain of lacking—an immediate relation to God.

McGinn (1998: 46) comments that one of the characteristics of the *Visions* texts which indicates that they were written for an audience "eager to learn from the leader's experience" is Hadewijch's choice of literary form and the particular level of language she uses to explain her experience. He notes that during that pre-Enlightenment and, arguably, the pre-Renaissance period, the "use of poetry to express mystical consciousness, though not unknown in the earlier tradition, grew in significance in vernacular theology as the figures of Hadewijch [*et al.*] show" (1998: 21), to posit that "after 1200 the forms of mystical language become far more diverse with the move into the vernacular languages, a transition that allowed the modes of representation of mystical experience to take on remarkable new configuration" (1998: 18–19).

Hadewijch was one of the pioneers of this move to the vernacular, long before Vatican II, allowing for deep and meaningful connection through language to a spiritual realm. Yet these new ways of expressing experience linguistically did not emerge in a vacuum. "It seems," observe Mommaers and Dutton (2004: 46), "that the readers or listeners may have been so familiar with these images that they were able to compile them imaginatively. They were looking, then, not for new religious images but for the new way in which Hadewijch would use and explain the already familiar representations." This task is, of course, a key pedagogical challenge: how to nudge students past their previous ways of understanding into new, broader ways of understanding. Biebuyck and Martens (2011: 60) argue that "Lakoff's cognitive model has indeed convincingly shown that metaphor is a matter of conceptual information and not of semantic meaning as such—one has to understand the meaning of an utterance in order to perceive its metaphoricity"; indeed, as McGinn (1998: 26) points out, "the visionary mystics of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries themselves witness to this continuity in their deep dependence on the rich inheritance of received teaching about *contemplatio*, despite the new elements they introduced." The "innovations," to use another Ricoeurian term, introduced by Hadewijch and others living in the Netherlands area during the mid-13th century *depended upon* established traditions, both literary and theological. It was only in relation to this dependence on known meaning—as with any living metaphor—that a transformation in meaning, a deepening of meaning, could occur. And, a critical point: "the kind of visions that people actually experienced and especially the ways

in which they communicated the meaning of visions to others were shaped by theological and cultural forms that we can at best only partially recover" (McGinn, 1998: 27).

Paradoxically, perhaps, in spite of all of the narrative expression mimetic of lived experience and all of the literary theory about it, not only is the actual experience beyond words, the experience itself is, in a way, a sideshow: "Hadewijch, despite the ecstatic experiences she describes with such ardour, insists that these are not the goal. What is essential to mystical consciousness is the recognition of God's presence in absence, the realization of the joy that can be found in the midst of suffering, and the adherence to the faith hidden in the midst of 'unfaith'" (McGinn, 1998: 220). Nevertheless, we humans seek cognitive understanding.

> Hadewijch is one of the earliest Low Country authors writing in the vernacular. Her use of her native language is remarkable in its originality. She minted for herself a vernacular variant of three genres which up to that moment had only a Latin tradition in Dutch-speaking regions—religious letter, vision, and religious poem. She did this with an unusual mastery of her native language and the genre, assimilating in her texts both biblical tradition and profane courtly literature (Mommaers and Dutton, 2004: vii).

Mommaers, particularly, articulates the way in which she draws her concepts of desire from these two sources, patterning her unending desire for God against the endlessly unfulfilled desire of the troubadours. For Hadewijch, the transformation she felt through her consciousness of the presence of God, however much that experience exceeded description and however much she nevertheless sought to express it creatively, revolved around the moment of understanding of human nature: *minne* is thus, effectively, the one and only theme of her works.

Minne is the manifestation of mysticism, of a special consciousness of the presence of God. McGinn comments that "the beguine [Hadewijch] agrees with most Christian mystics that it is not feelings of sweetness but rather the practice of the virtues that proves true adherence to *minne*" (L10.1–50). Here we can return again to the literary field and the observations of Auerbach (1953: 555) from his seminal text on mimesis:

> An occurrence on earth signifies not only itself but at the same time another, which it·predicts or confirms, without prejudice to the power of its concrete reality here and now. The connection between occurrences is not regarded as primarily a chronological or causal development but as a oneness within the divine plan, of which all occurrences are parts and reflections. Their direct earthly connection is of secondary importance, and often their interpretation can altogether dispense with any knowledge of it.

Hadewijch's creative engagement with her spiritual experience, named *minne*, has produced texts mimetic of that experience, such as "Vision 1," which, because of the power of the mimesis leveraged through the literary technique of metaphoric narration, serves teaching purpose not only in the medieval period in which it was written but also in the contemporary period as evidenced by the wide popular appeal today of this and similar mystical writings. Living exclusively "for holy *minne* out of pure *minne*," as Hadewijch explains in L23, involves a life of humble moderation, devoid of eccentricities, in a bond of common love with those pledged to serve love alone: "Live in the same fervor as we; and let us live in sweet love. Live for God; let his life be yours, and let yours be ours" (McGinn, 1998: 229). *Minne* is what it means to be a mystic—that is, in immediate relation with God. In this case, that relationship is expressed through female experience, set within the context of medieval Brabant. Nevertheless, McGinn (1998: 28) points out that "'the real' is not only the historical substratum that underlies the literary presentation; in a much more powerful measure the real is often the literary presentation itself, even in its fictive part insofar as it is a product of historically effective forces and above all insofar as it becomes historically effective itself." This essay argues that the literary presentation of Hadewijch's lived spiritual experience in "Vision 1" is a *creative mimesis* that *both* reflects its historical substratum *and* has become historically effective itself.

A CLOSE, MODERN, READING OF HADEWIJCH'S "VISION 1"

A) Metaphor as Manifestation in Language: An Experience of Minne

Hadewijch's refrain is on the moment of understanding of human nature. Each vision is rooted in a biblical passage and offers a reminder of how to live if one wants to reach heaven. In this vision, as the narrator journeys through a meadow with a series of unique trees in it, Hadewijch understands the nature of human morality and the short ephemeral nature of life on earth. The explanation of each tree expresses knowledge of human existence as explained by the angel and as understood by the narrator. The vision concludes with Countenance (Love/*Minne*) outlining the challenges in desiring to follow Love. Love is, interestingly, not the triune God, who is described by the narrator as "the three names under which the wretched ones who are far from Love understand him" (267).

"Vision 1" begins with a yearning, expressed in the first-person voice, to "be one with God in fruition." This longing is accompanied by the feeling of not being grown-up enough yet for the realization of it. The narration of the experience is retrospective, indicated by the insertion of a comment by the present-time narrator: "that is what was shown to me then and still seems the same to me" (263). The narrator continues with an exposition of an event that happened on a particular

Sunday, the Octave of Pentecost, when she felt such strong desire to be one with God that she "could not control herself enough outwardly to go among persons" (263).

The inquietude felt by the narrator, like a prodromal symptom, gives way to the mystical experience narrated in "Vision 1." The narrator recounts being led by an Angel, identified as masculine (263ff) and as a member of the choir of Thrones (263), to an expanse named as the space of perfect virtue. The referent specifically noted by the text is Colossians 1:6.[4] This biblical intertext creates a first-level agricultural reference in which the gospel growing and bearing fruit in the world through those who have heard it and thus comprehended the grace of God is intentionally associated with hearing/understanding the space of perfect virtue and the comprehension of Love. Saskia Murk Jansen (1992: 124), a prominent Hadewijch scholar, warns, "given the plurality of meaning [. . .] in the Hadewijch texts it does justice neither to the complexity of Hadewijch's mystic experience nor to the subtlety of her expression of it, to dismiss this as a literary topos describing the human experience of love." The narrator of "Vision 1" is inscribed by a human having had an experience of something which she names *Minne*: the eternal love of the Divine. *Minne* is a conflation of God and love, as an approximation of that which is fundamentally inexpressible. God is *Minne*; *Minne* is God.

Rozenski (2010) points out that "the allegorical project of courtly love allows Hadewijch to take on a male persona who is similarly weak at the hands of the haughty, aloof Lady Minne" (p. 311), because "suffering and fruition are two sides of the same coin; both are necessary components of the entire structure of the narrator's relationship with *Minne*" (p. 309). A close reading of the text, however, indicates that the narrator is beautified by names given to her by the Angel (268): "powerful and strong one" (264); "wise one, instructed by reason" (264); "great one with a great will" (266). The gender identity of the narrator, who "with wise fear hid [in humility] all the virtues with which it was truly adorned" because "it felt and knew what was lacking was fruition in its Beloved" (264), is not revealed in this text. This concealment is because gender identity is irrelevant to the author; it is not the point of the narrative, attaining perfection is.

Manifestation in language is contextually located: "Vision 1" reflects the style of medieval courtly love poetry with which Hadewijch, as an educated woman, would have been familiar. Yet in "Vision 1," the gender of the players is not the point of the text. Reading it through an identity politics lens skews the mimetic

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[4] Colossians 1:3-6: "[3]In our prayers for you we always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, [4]for we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, [5]because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. You have heard of this hope before in the word of the truth, the gospel **[6]***that has come to you. Just as it is bearing fruit and growing in the whole world, so it has been bearing fruit among yourselves from the day you heard it and truly comprehended the grace of God*" (italics mine).

emplotment of experiencing Love (*Minne*) and living according to the virtues expressed symbolically by each tree as the means of, eventually, feeling *Minne* in fruition (271). Nevertheless, given that in that time period the narrator was writing in the first-person narrative voice in order to reflect her own experience, I will use the pronoun "she" throughout this analysis for ease of comprehension of the human experience, which the pronoun "it" alienates.

As the narrator begins to recount the vision, she writes of being led by an Angel from the Choir of Thrones, who is sent by Countenance to guide her to perfection (268). The Angel addresses the narrator as "mistress" (266). She is led "as if" into a *Streuobstwiese* (meadow orchard). The sense of *Streuobstwiese* is contextually related to Hadewijch's medieval European context and the vernacular literature of the 13th century: it refers to courtly pleasure gardens and to the garden of paradise; her usage of this known external reference within her narrative thus, metaphorically, opens up possibility for "new ways of understanding and presenting the direct consciousness of the presence of God […] new forms of language and modes of representation of mystical consciousness" (McGinn, 1998: 12). The trees in the *Streuobstwiese* of Hadewijch's vision are of particular significance in that as the narrator is led to each of the seven trees, she is led deeper into understanding. As the first-person narrator is drawn to closer to knowledge, so too does the manifestation, in language, of the "trees" in the *Streuobstwiese* of perfect virtue lead the reader to enter into the paranarrative, the narrative dimension in the process of metaphorization (Pimentel, 1990: 7) that is inherent in the text.

To accomplish an understanding of metaphorization as organizing this interpretation of "Vision 1," a series of operations must be performed on the text in order to reach an *infralinguistic* level of significance—that which lies below, or under, overt language. Semes, the smallest units of sense-making, are the infralinguistic units of discourse (Pimentel, 1990: 160, 211). These semes, these features which are semantic because they participate in creating meaning are, at the most basic level, words: *Streuobstwiese*; meadow orchard. A structured set of semes *appearing in a context* is called a sememe (Pimentel, 1990: 160). In "Vision 1," the seme /orchard meadow/, for example, is located in a context—that is, in relation to other words: "Then I was lead as if into a meadow, an expanse that was called the space of perfect virtue. In it stood trees, and I was guided close to them" (263).

It is important to remember that

> the infralinguistic level is a *constructed* dimension, an abstraction depending on the analytical and operational tools used. As regards metaphor, its potential narrative dimension is to be *constructed*, for it is not directly observable on the verbal texture of isolated metaphors, but generated by forms of decoding that may best be analysed both at the *infralinguistic* and at the *transphrastic* levels; in other

> words, by resorting to semantic concepts that may go below the word, so to speak, and beyond the phrase or sentence (Pimentel, 1990: 159).

The way in which semes go beyond the phrase or sentence is constructed consistent with the prefigurative (to use Ricoeur's term) of the reader; in other words, the reader brings their own contextual knowledge to the reading of the words, and the deeper her understanding of Hadewijch and the context in which she lived, the further below the word she is able to get in constructing the infralinguistic dimension. Infralinguistic units of meaning (semes/semantic features) make up/compose the signified/meaning of a word—depending on the way that meaning is constructed. As noted above, McGinn has pointed out that a) medieval mystics lived within a total religious world, and b) our modern-day issues are often widely different from those of the medieval mystics. Thus, the semantic concepts that go below the word and beyond the phrase or sentence are historically and culturally situated, hence ruling out the possibility of definitive interpretation. In the example given, an observable linguistic manifestation is the comparative "as if," in relation to the seme /meadow/. Clearly, the narrator is viewing something that is not wholly consistent with the lexical understanding of /meadow/; however, given that the infralinguistic dimension is a constructed one, this seme may connote semantic association with a natural, open, and large *space* (not place): the human soul. Each of the /trees/ is a description of an aspect of character that the narrator needs to understand, and follow, in order to come to fruition in her Beloved; thus, in utilizing garden images, the author is constructing a narrative dimension that metaphorically relates her experience of mystical encounter.

As cited above, the potential narrative dimension of metaphor is not directly observable on the verbal texture of isolated metaphors. Our understanding of the "as if" /meadow/ is developed at the transphrastic level as the whole of the vision unfolds. The narrative dimension of metaphor is here created as the reader (re)constructs the mystical experience, revealing semantic concepts that go below the word and beyond the phrase/sentence. By entering in to this creative mimetic expression of lived experience, the reader is able to connect with it in ways that are meaningful to him, expanding his own horizon of understanding (to use Gadamer's term) and, through this re-describing of reality (to use Ricoeur's term), he opens transformative possibility within his own world; this possibility reflects the didactic aspect of Hadewijch's writings, including "Vision 1."

Let us now have a closer look at the "trees" in the "meadow." On entering the space, the narrator observes that the first tree in this metaphorical *Streuobstwiese* had a brittle, rotten root: our nature. The trunk is very solid: our eternal soul. "Above" the trunk bloomed "a charming and very beautiful flower" that is the human body; however, this form can become diseased or disfigured, "corrupt," in

an instant. The biblical reference to James 1:11 is included in the text.[5] This botanical metaphor, enriched by the biblical intertext, evokes the fleetingness of human life. The tree, with its brittle root and solid trunk, evokes the incarnate human in both its fragile physical manifestation and its divine strength and stability. It is the tree of knowledge of ourselves (263).

The second tree is low, with withered leaves that hide beautiful multi-colored leaves. This tree "had recognized God's greatness and its own unworthiness, and now with wise fear hid the virtues by which it was truly adorned, because it felt and knew that it lacked fruition of its Beloved" (264). Pimentel (1990: 160) writes: "semic or compositional analysis is not performed *in vacuo*, as an abstraction, taking the whole system of language as its reference, but *in loco*, proposing context as a universe of discourse and its sole referent." This second tree exemplifies this literary concept. At the level of language, the metaphor of the withered leaves of this tree serves to evoke the potential for a rich realization, an unwithering of the leaves in Love, through realization of the Beloved. On a paradigmatic plane this tree among trees, encountered early in the syntagmatic space of perfect virtue, is the tree of humility that knows that it does not know how to satiate the longing for fruition.

The third tree is tall and strong with big, wide leaves which each bore the words: "I am the power of the perfect will; nothing can escape me" (264). The Angel addresses the narrator, "O powerful and strong one," and says, "you have conquered the powerful and strong God, from the origin of his Being, which was without beginning; and with him you shall wield power over eternity in eternity!" (264). Here we have a statement of *unio mystica*, of the Love mysticism by which Hadewijch is recognized. At the level of language, the big, wide leaves manifest the fulfillment of God through the humanity of the narrator.

The fourth tree is also tall, and it has many branches which intertwined with another tree. On each of the leaves of this tree are written the words "I am discernment: *without me you can do nothing*" (264).[6] The Angel addresses the

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[5] James 1:1–11: "[1]James, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes in the Dispersion: Greetings. [2]My brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of any kind, consider it nothing but joy, [3]because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance; [4]and let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking in nothing. [5]If any of you is lacking in wisdom, ask God, who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and it will be given you. [6]But ask in faith, never doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind; [7]for the doubter, being double-minded and unstable in every way, must not expect to receive anything from the Lord. [9]Let the believer who is lowly boast in being raised up, [10]and the rich in being brought low, because the rich will disappear like a flower in the field.[11]*For the sun rises with its scorching heat and withers the field; its flower falls, and its beauty perishes. It is the same way with the rich; in the midst of a busy life, they will wither away*" (italics mine).

[6] The text references John 15:5: "[5]I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing."

narrator, "O wise one, instructed by reason, even by the reason of the great God," and says, "read and understand the wise and long-sighted lesson that teaches those who grow up through one another!" (264). Pimentel (1990: 161) observes, "now, if semes are the semantic components of a sememe this is only as a *relational* phenomenon, not as substance. They are points of intersection resulting in the establishment of meaningful relations." As noted above, these relations are recognized as both paradigmatic (the type of seme) and as syntagmatic (the context in which the seme appears). Combining lexical meaning in phrastic and transphrastic context opens the door to the possibility of rationally expressing non-rational, mystical experience. This possibility is enriched through an understanding of inherent and afferent semes:

> The classification of semes as generic and specific responds to the dialectic of the general and the particular that shapes meaning. But sememes may also be classified qualitatively as inherent or afferent. Inherent semes "depend on the functional system of language; while afferent semes are the product of other types of codification: socialized, even ideolectal, norms." So, for example, /sex/ and /feminine/ are inherent semes in "woman," while /weakness/ is an afferent seme. […] Rastier's semantic definition of inherent and afferent semes is a refinement of the corresponding notion of *denotative* and *connotative* forms of meaning. What is interesting is that his definition and the constant emphasis on context make these two forms of meaning relative: semes that are defined as inherent in a given context may become afferent in another (Pimentel, 1990: 164).

The afferent semes are dependent on Hadewijch's ideolectal codification. In the context of the influence of late 1980s feminism on literary interpretation, Patricia Demers (1992: 62) reflects that "it may appear a form of negative capability to be so empty of self, so vigilant about losing direction; yet this is precisely the way, Hadewijch maintains." The modern concern with secular individualism differs from the concerns of the medieval author. Hadewijch is clearly drawing on known biblical texts, yet the phrastic context of the intertwined branches of this fourth "tree" activates an unorthodox human-divine relationship regarding the interdependence of the human and the divine as well as direct understanding that is not mediated by clerical authority.

The fifth tree is the tree of wisdom (265). It has three groups of three branches with sharp, long, bright green leaves that each have hearts on them. The hearts etched on the bright green leaves of this grouping of branches are red and signify fear. The fears listed include not being perfect, forsaking perfect virtues, people not showing God adequate homage, people going astray from Truth,[7] and all must die

[7] Jesus/the Beloved.

the same death whereby Jesus died.[8] It is thanks to these lowest branches, the Angel says, that "you have climbed to the highest ones" (264). The middle grouping of branches on the tree of wisdom has white hearts on its bright green leaves and are related to purity.[9] Chastity, pure and innocent work, and remaining "so pure of all stain in spirit, in desire, and in soul that no baseness may penetrate there" (265) are specified. Finally, the highest grouping of branches has gold hearts on green leaves. This grouping of leaves relates to the fidelity of veritable Love: "seeking Love in her innermost being, where she is to be found in totality" (266), accomplishing with love God's high will, and remaining steadfast. In this lengthy section the "tree" manifested in language makes use of transphrastic afferent semes linking color and spiritual qualities. Weaving the description of this particular "tree" into the threads of metaphoric narration in the whole of the text, which underlies the discrete words on the page, enables the reader to connect with lived mystical experience and, in configuring the text through reading it, deepen their own understanding, as does Hadewijch, of the solid, identifiable "trees," the behavioral virtues one may recognize and cling to in order that, like the mustard seed that falls on fertile ground, the grace of fruition in the Beloved may actualize itself.

After guiding the narrator to each of these five trees, the Angel acknowledges the tenacity of she whom he is guiding and foreshadows a denouement: "O great one with a great will, having surmounted, without being bruised, and with sweet quietude, all afflictions heard of or unheard of" (266). It is here, in paragraph 162, Love is referred to by the feminine pronoun, "the day when one has carried Love long enough, according to what *she* deserves" (266, my emphasis).

The Angel now leads the storyteller to the chalice of patience, all full of blood. Murk Jansen (1998: 58) points out that "the Beguines' language and imagery illustrates their embrace of the paradox of pain and suffering as part of their experience of a God that is Love." The break in the rhythm of the narrative produced by the introduction of the blood-filled chalice, a clear reference to the *passio* of Christ, marks a conceptual shift in the spiritual journey that was being linguistically manifested through the tree metaphor that was shaping the narrative dimension of the experience.

The Angel commands the narrator to drink from the chalice, and the narrator vows to "content God steadfastly by patient fidelity" (266). The Angel then leads her to the center of the expanse, where there is a tree with its top downwards and

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[8] Jesus is here referred to by the seme /Beloved/.

[9] The following three references are noted in the text: Revelation 3:12, "If you conquer, I will make you a pillar in the temple of my God; you will never go out of it. I will write on you the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem that comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name;" Psalm 88:6, "You have put me in the depths of the Pit, in the regions dark and deep," and 1 Corinthians 3:17, "If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple."

its roots upwards! The shock of the semantic impertinence created by the spatial orientation of the tree makes an abrupt statement regarding the way to the knowledge of God: the leafy top in the earth is hope and faith and the roots in the heavens are love and God.

Murk Jansen (1998: 53–54) comments

> The paradox of suffering in the context of a God [religious women] address as Love, has led to some of the most remarkable writing. It has also led to some highly creative use of language as the Beguines sought to express their experience in their vernacular languages, languages not refined by centuries of careful scholastic use. Their use of paradox and homonyms also encourages their audiences to avoid the error of mistaking metaphor and analogy for fact.

Paul Ricoeur (1991b [1980]: 138) adds to this understanding:

> On the one hand, for Aristotle *mimesis* takes place only within the area of human action, or production, or *poiesis*. [*Mimesis*] is an operation, as is indicated by the -*sis* ending that it shares with *poiesis* […] there is *mimesis* only where there is *poiesis*. On the other hand, far from producing a weakened image of pre-existing things, *mimesis* brings about an augmentation of meaning in the field of action, which is its privileged field.

Historically located in the high period of scholasticism, the educated noblewoman (Murk Jansen, 1998: 120) from the Duchy of Brabant manifested lived *poiesis* in language, utilizing the trope of metaphor. This *mimesis* is not fact, yet it augments the meaning of the corporal longing or *passio* within the area of human action for union of the lover and the Beloved in Love. As Rozenski (2010: 309) notes succinctly, "contemporary scholarship is well aware of the dynamics of eroticism in medieval devotion."

A sixth tree, with big round leaves, stood beyond the "upsidedown" tree (which is not counted as one of the seven trees). Here the Angel reveals to the narrator that he had been charged with accompanying her until she had outgrown the Angel in the ways that he had been showing her and, as she has now done this, she is instructed to turn to find the one she has always sought (267). She turned and saw a cross "like crystal, clearer and whiter than crystal. Through it a great space was visible" (267)—and, remember, the narrator is already in a great space, that of the /meadow/. These metaphorized spatial references, to the *Streuobstwiese* and to looking through a /cross/ refined by the adjective /crystal/ and the word "like" that triggers simile, all contribute to the narrative fabric of the text as it seeks to elicit relationship between God and humans and a deepening understanding of, and connection with, something essentially inexpressible—in other words, metaphoric narration in the service of expressing mystical experience.

The narrator describes a disk, more radiant than the sun, that is in front of the cross; this disc is eternity. Under it there was a fierce whirlpool, divine fruition in its hidden storms. Flanking the whirlpool stand three pillars: one of burning fire, the Holy Spirit; the second of topaz, the name of the Father; and the third of amethyst, the name of the Son. This description resonates with McGinn's (1998: 211) reminder of Hadewijch's "fascination with the 'divine countenance'" and his observation that it is one of the "basic symbolic images that represent the Trinity." It is at this place that He, capitalized and identified as masculine, whom the narrator sought, is encountered. He is named Countenance, but his appearance defies description.

Countenance summarizes the narrator's traverse to this point. He instructs that she be prepared for every kind of affliction, counselling her not to strike back ever or take revenge for any cause as that would supplant the right of the speaker and thereby dishonor His greatness. In addition, He notes that as the narrator desires to wholly possess Him "in His Divinity and Humanity, she will desire to be poor, miserable, and despised by all men; and all griefs will taste sweeter to [her] than all earthly pleasures" (268). He then admonishes her for her young days (her lack of grown-upness) and for her wish that He recognize her good works. He reminds her that when he lived as man, he did not ever dispel His griefs and pains with the aid of His omnipotence, advising her that as He lived fully human, so she too must "feel [herself] as [human] in all the hardships proper to the human condition, except sin alone" (269).[10] He points to His own experience of being forsaken at His death by almost all men. Countenance tells her that He will give her understanding of His will, the art of veritable Love, and the faculty of feeling Him in union during the storms of Love when her grief feels too heavy to bear. With understanding of His will and feeling Him when experiencing the grief of separation and loss, she will be able to persevere and fulfill His will and have fruition of Him.

And that is the seventh and final tree: the tree called the knowledge of Love. It has roses on it and is the fruition of Love through feeling. McGinn (1998: 201) reminds us that from Hadewich's perspective, "love is meant to be explored and experienced in all its many moods and forms rather than defined and categorized"; it is to be experienced, not intellectualized. As the text draws to a close, the narrator recounts that Countenance affirms that she will always have knowledge of His will and experience of Love, just as God left Jesus in affliction but never abandoned Him, and that she will feel Him in fruition when the time is right. The final words in the text are articulated by Countenance: "my beloved, help all persons in their affliction impartially, whether they do you good or evil. Love will make you capable of it. Give all, for all is yours!" (271).

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[10] Reference to Hebrews 4:15, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who in every respect has been tested as we are, yet without sin."

B) Metaphor as an Organizing Principle: Virtual Narrative and Simultaneity of Time

As discussed above, mysticism is a consciousness of the presence of God, a sense of an immediate relation to God which exceeds description and results in a transformation of the subject. This definition resonates with Ricoeur's three-fold mimesis and its capacity to re-describe reality and thereby offer the possibility of transformation in the understanding of the reader. Metaphor is a rhetorical device commonly called upon in challenging situations such as the expression of deep emotion and/or ineffable experience not because it descriptively articulates but because of its second-level referential capacity to point to, evoke, or provoke something in the mind of the reader which can create a felt resonance with the world unfolded in front of the text. Thus, in placing notions A and B in proximity to each other, the creative mimesis of mystical experience produces a surplus of meaning that, dependent on the receiving/reading subject, opens the transformative possibility. Pimentel (1990: 210) points out that "metaphoric narration is conceived as a paranarrative dimension due to the series of semantic transformations and relations, typical of the process of metaphorization, that are homologous to the transformations and sequential nature of a strict narrative." Thus, the expression of mystic experience is conceptualized as possible through a paranarrative dimension due to the series of semantic transformations and relations typical of the process of metaphorization.

During the course of her investigation, Pimentel (1990: 7) discovered that

> in certain narrative texts the productive act of narration performs operations that are essentially identical—or at least homologous—to the process of metaphorization itself; that there is, in other words, a *narrative dimension* inherent in metaphorization that is liable to a semiotic transposition from the purely linguistic to the fictional domain.

As demonstrated through close reading of "Vision 1," the narrative dimension of mystic experience is observable in the components of the semiotic process of metaphorization.[11] To recall the discussion above: metaphorization is a semiotic process that reveals both a linguistic manifestation (verbal metaphor) as well as an organizational capacity. Given the foreignness of the world experienced in "Vision 1," its manifestation in language, in verbal metaphor, provides explanatory language—while metaphoric narration provides a scaffolding on which to construct comprehension. Thus, "conceived as a semiotic process, metaphor can be analysed on different levels. From this perspective, as it loses its purely stylistic specificity,

[11] "The narrative dimension of metaphor is observable in the very components of the semiotic process of metaphorization" (Pimentel, 1990: 7).

narrative gains a metaphoric dimension" (Pimentel, 1990: 10). This theoretical perspective has assisted in explaining "Vision 1" and in understanding its meaning.

The fictionality, or the truth, of religio-spiritual events is a well-known problematic present in discussions and debates within the discipline of religious studies. This debate within religious studies reflects discussions within literary studies regarding the relationship between fiction and lived historical experience. Ricoeur (1991a [1979]: 117) posits that all fiction refers in some way to lived experience; otherwise it would be wholly incomprehensible. McGinn (1998: 29) too posits that "even 'fiction' can have a real didactic purpose, especially in the kind of overarching worldview within which late medieval mystics lived." Hadewijch's writing purports to flow from lived experience, and words, brought together in narrative form, are her utilization of a rational and intellectual means to explain that experience. Metaphoric narration sheds light on creative mimesis of the virtual nature of experience outside of historical time.

Metaphoric articulation is *actual* when the text explicitly marks it (Pimentel, 1990: 44), as described in the above section focusing on metaphor as manifestation in language: the seme /tree/. Metaphoric narration at the level of the organization of the text has the capacity of generating *virtual* narratives. Virtual narratives are metaphoric connections constructed by the reader through the recognition of simultaneous, or metaphoric, articulations within the whole of a text. The conjunctive and/or disjunctive relations produced by these articulations, or the process of metaphorization itself, thus serves well as principle of organization and production of narrative meaning in a text (Pimentel, 1990: 10, 46). In Hadewijch's "Vision 1," the trees create a virtual narrative as a conjunctive metaphoric connection is made throughout the text through the use of the seme /tree/. Pimentel (1990: 163) notes:

> Generally speaking, a semantically coherent text reveals, through semic analysis, a significant iteration of semes, whether generic or specific. The semantic recurrence orients the decoding of the text and results in a univocal or coherent reading. This recurrence of semes, responsible for the coherence of meaning, is Greimas's concept of *isotopy*, of central importance to our definition of metaphor.

There are seven trees located in the narrative. In iteratively placing the "trees" in the "meadow," the author begins narratively to (re)construct the mystical experience; thus, the semantic recurring of the seme /tree/ assists in decoding the text into a coherent reading. This particular seme thus, throughout the whole of the text, serves to organize the narrative inscription of the experience in a way which reflects the movement of the narrator through the "meadow" of spiritual growth; that is, it shows the way to achieve fruition in the Beloved (i.e. God/Jesus).

"Vision 1" opened with the description of five trees, associated with self-knowledge, humility, perfect will, discernment, and wisdom. The next narrated

event was the tree with its top downwards and its roots upwards, associated with the center of the expanse and with the way to knowledge of God. In following the tree line in this text, one comes to a dissonant break in the flow of the text: the Angel instructs the narrator to turn from him to find, with reference to Matthew 28:5, the one whom she has always sought. She turns and sees "a cross like crystal, clearer and whiter than crystal. And through it a great space was visible" (267). Here the narrating "I" encounters Countenance. Here no /tree/ is semiotically described. "Tree" is now an empty linguistic sign at the level of verbal metaphor, but signpost it remains, guiding the narrator. The Angel says, "remain here as a prisoner until the moment when he who had called you to come here sends you back" (266). Only after "going back" can the seventh tree, the knowledge of Love, be fully realized. Thus, the virtual narrative that can be intellectually constructed by following the semiotic process of metaphoric narration in the whole of the text reflects a mystical experience creatively expressed through the organizing process of metaphoric narration.

In "Vision 1" the local specificity of metaphor is also transcended in that it is spread across a number of "trees" each with its own specific attributes, thus creating a virtual narrative mimetic of mystical experience. This example of metaphoric narration, however, deploys a temporal dimension, that of movement and progression, parallel to the instantaneous quality of the effects of meaning that it produces at the level of language. Yet it also affirms that metaphor is capable of transcending its manifestation in language, making different times converge into simultaneity. As all of the trees are present in the space of perfect virtue, succession is abolished and, therefore, time.

The intellectual semiotic process of metaphorization evokes lived mystical experience in that in mystical experience, as in metaphoric narration, local verbal specificity is transcended. As metaphor is capable of making different times converge into simultaneity within a narrative context, thus abolishing time, so too does mystical experience make the different times converge into simultaneity within a context of lived experience of fruition.

In "Vision 1" the seme /tree/ is significantly, and specifically, iterated. The semantic recurrence of /tree/ orients a decoding of the text. This orientation results in a coherent reading which expresses, through the construction of a virtual narrative, a process of spiritual growth: these are the virtues one must embody in order to achieve fruition in the Beloved. Simultaneity of time is also evident in the existence of all of the different manifestations of /tree/ co-existing simultaneously within the space of perfect virtue. The vision occurs simultaneously with the material physicality of the narrator, referentially linked to both the medieval incarnation named Hadewijch and the ancient biblical texts. The conjunctive and disjunctive relations produced by these articulations, the process of

metaphorization itself, is thus a principle of organization and production of narrative meaning in Hadewijch of Brabant's "Vision 1."

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

By paying attention to the discursive functions of metaphor in texts, not only the manifestation in language (verbal metaphor) but also at the level of the organization of the text, the theory of metaphoric narration developed by Luz Aurora Pimentel changes the way in which we read and understand Hadewijch's "Vision 1"—remembering, of course, that "what the reader makes of the metaphor is not its resolution; however, on the contrary, the interpretation is as much ad hoc as is the incidence of metaphors themselves. The interpretation of metaphors remains open for revocation, adaptation and negotiation" (Biebuyck and Martens, 2011: 62).

The imaginative space created by Hadewijch in "Vision 1" permits reflection on the mechanics of language and writing as a phenomenon (as something that tangibly appears) that is ready-to-hand to facilitate transmutation to another kind of understanding. After close reading of "Vision 1" through the semiotic approach of metaphoric narration as explicated above, it is evident that the intellectual form of metaphoric narration has the capacity mimetically to evoke mystical experience. It augments meaning by producing what imitates, thus enhancing our understanding of the meaning of this text. It remains then to repeat this experiment through applying this semiotic work to other texts of the mystical genre, acknowledging that the possibility of falsification strengthens the capacity of metaphoric narration as an explanatory framework.

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