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VEERLE FRAETERS & LIEKE SMITS

## OREWOET'S JOURNEY

### The Reuse of a Medieval Mystical Term in a Contemporary Novel

In 2016, Dutch author Emy Koopman (° 1985) published her debut novel titled *Orewoet*, after a Middle Dutch term from the oeuvre of the mystic Hadewijch (c. 1240).<sup>1</sup> It is not the only instance of the revival of this obsolete word in the twenty-first century. The Hadewigian concept orewoet has inspired female poets, novelists, and visual artists.<sup>2</sup> Also, the word was chosen twice as ‘most beautiful word in the Dutch language’ at the annual conference of the Genootschap Onze Taal [Society of Our Language], in 2006 by emeritus professor of Dutch linguistics Toon Hagen and in 2019 by poet Ellen Deckwitz. Both refer to the work of Hadewijch. In his argument for ‘orewoet’ as the most beautiful Dutch word, Hagen gives his interpretation of the term: it is ‘the peak experience of the mystic’s homage to God; the aphrodisiac of piety, the religious xtc of the thirteenth century’, enjoyed especially by women.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, he describes orewoet as a paradoxical in-between state between body and spirit, and ‘[a]ll these contradictions, incongruities and obscurities have been stored for more than seven centuries in that one shadowy and dark word’.<sup>4</sup> Deckwitz, acknowledging the complexity of the term, characterizes it as an ardent desire that transcends individuality and ‘a balancing act between hope and despair, the latent knowledge that the tangible beloved/reality can never meet all the expectations that her absence evokes’.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Emy Koopman, *Orewoet*, Amsterdam 2016.

<sup>2</sup> Examples include the poem ‘Orewoet’ in the collection *Logos* (2002) by Dutch composer and poet Rozalie Hirs; the series of collages titled *Urenwut* (2006) by Antwerp artist Anne-Mie van Kerckhoven; and the painting series *Orewoet* by artist and writer Cobi van Baars (then: Van Hulst), exhibited in 2011. For more examples see the chapter ‘Hadewijch vandaag’ in the online exhibition ‘Moderne Hadewijchreceptie: Zes markante momenten’ by Veerle Fraeters and Sarah Menu (2017), <https://www.paukeslag.org/exhibits/show/moderne-hadewijch-receptie---z/de-orewoet-van-hadewijch-and-annette-van-dijk>, *In het spoor van Hadewijch*, Hilversum 2024.

<sup>3</sup> ‘Ze is de piekervaring van de Godsen liefdesdienst; het afrodisiacum der vroomheid, de religieuze xtc van de dertiende eeuw’. Toon Hagen, ‘Het mooiste woord van... Toon Hagen’, in: *Onze Taal* 74 (2005), 209.

<sup>4</sup> ‘Al deze tegenstellingen, ongerijmdheden en duisternissen zitten al meer dan zeven eeuwen opgeborgen in die ene schimmige en donkere woordvorm’. Hagen, ‘Het mooiste woord’, 209.

<sup>5</sup> ‘Het is een spagaat tussen hoop en wanhoop, de sluimerende wetenschap dat de tastbare geliefde/werkelijkheid nooit alle verwachtingen die haar absentie oproept, zal kunnen inlossen’. Ellen Deckwitz, ‘Wat verdwenen woorden zeggen’, in: *Taalunie*, March 2017, <https://2014.archief.taaluniebericht.org/2017-03>.

This recent revival might give the impression that ‘orewoet’ was a widely used term in medieval literature. However, the sites where the word is found are limited to a very small corpus of medieval mystical texts written in the Southern Low Countries in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Hadewijch uses it fifteen times in her oeuvre, it is mentioned once by the Cistercian mystical author Beatrice of Nazareth († 1268), and occurs four times in the extensive work of John of Ruusbroec († 1381).<sup>6</sup> The *Middelnederlandsch Woordenboek* (Middle Dutch Dictionary, spanning the period 1250–1550) defines it as ‘*glow, beat, fervour, specifically spiritual fervour, a kind of spiritual madness, ecstasy*’.<sup>7</sup> With the rise in the late fourteenth century of the *devotio moderna* movement, which was suspicious of ecstatic experiences and discouraged the writing of mystical texts, the word fell into disuse; the *Woordenboek der Nederlandsche Taal* (Dictionary of Dutch Language, spanning the period 1500–1976) gives no findings at all.

The twenty-first-century interest in orewoet fits a wider trend which in cultural studies has been labeled the ‘religious turn’.<sup>8</sup> This phenomenon is also visible in contemporary Dutch literature.<sup>9</sup> Marja Pruis, for example, discusses three recent

<sup>6</sup> Besides these authors’ works, the word ‘orewoet’ also appears in two anonymous texts from the same time and region: the Middle Dutch *Life of Saint Lutgard* and the mystical sermon collection *The Limburg Sermons*, with 7 and 1 mentions respectively. All the orewoet-references occur in texts produced in the medieval duchy of Brabant, the heartland of love mysticism in the Low Countries.

<sup>7</sup> ‘*Gloed, hitte, vurigheid, drift; bepaaldelijk geestelijke gloed, eig. eene soort van geestelijken waanzin, extase*’. Eelco Verwijs & Jakob Verdam, ‘Orewoet’, in: Idem, *Middelnederlandsch woordenboek*, The Hague 1885, <https://gtb.ivdnt.org/iWDB/search?actie=article&wdb=MNW&id=39935&lemma=orewoet&domein=0&conc=true>.

<sup>8</sup> Bruce Holsinger (Ed.), ‘Literary History and the Religious Turn’, special issue of *English Language Notes* 44 (2006) no. 1; Susannah Monta (Ed.), ‘What is Religion and Literature?’, special issue of *Religion and Literature* 41 (2009) no. 2; Susan Felch (Ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and Religion*, New York 2016; Mark Knight (Ed.), *The Routledge Companion to Literature and Religion*, New York 2016; Daniel Weidner (Ed.), *Handbuch Literatur und Religion*, Stuttgart 2016; Veerle Fraeters, Tijl Nuyts, & Gwennie Debergh (Eds.), *Literatuur en religie*, Ghent 2020 (Cahier voor Literatuurwetenschap 12); Fabienne Bercegol & Michela Gardini, ‘Littérature et religion’, special issue of *Cahiers de Littérature Française* (2022) no. 21. For a brief overview of the field, see Tijl Nuyts & Veerle Fraeters, ‘Over de gebedsmat en de gène: Een inleiding tot het onderzoeksveld Literatuur en Religie’, in: Fraeters, Nuyts, & Debergh, *Literatuur en religie*, 5–19.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas de Veen, ‘Geloof het of niet – in de Nederlandse literatuur is méér tussen hemel en aarde’, in: NRC, December 21, 2023; Dirk Leyman, “‘Het ergert me hoe atheïsten je wegzetten als een achterlijke intellectuele slapjanus’”: Deze schrijvers vonden God en schamen zich daar niet voor’, in: *De Morgen*, February 17, 2024; Marja Pruis, ‘In en uit extase’, in: *De Groene Amsterdammer*, March 13, 2024. For twentieth-century engagement with religion in Dutch literature, see Jaap Goedegebuure, *Nederlandse schrijvers en religie 1960–2010*, Nijmegen 2010; Johan Goud, ‘Het “mystieke lichaam” in recente Nederlandse literatuur: Over spiritualiteit en erotiek bij Gerard Reve, Frans Kellendonk en Désanne van Brederode’, in: *Liter* 15 (2012), 35–45. See also Alexander Van de Sijpe, ‘Religieus of gesecculariseerd? Postsecularisme als interpretatiekader

Dutch novels from 2023 and 2024 that use religion to speak about human relationships in crisis and ‘the desire and inability to surrender’, stating that in these novels ‘holy and horny are not far apart’.<sup>10</sup> Although Pruis does not mention Koopman’s novel, *Orewoet* can be seen as an earlier example of the phenomenon; according to its blurb, the story, dealing with romantic love, friendship, and parent-child relationships, is about ‘the fluid line between desire and madness’. *Orewoet* provides not only an early example of interest in the mystical tradition, but also of a turn towards a vocabulary from the past to express something that our current vocabulary apparently lacks. This makes the novel an interesting case for studying how an author from the twenty-first-century reuses terms from a seemingly distant context to give expression to aspects of contemporary life: medieval words for modern feelings, and a mystical tradition for modern secular love.

This article uses the methodology of Cultural Transfer Studies to analyse Koopman’s adoption and transformation of the meaning and function of the term ‘orewoet’ in the novel *Orewoet*. This methodology has already been fruitfully applied to the international circulation of Middle Dutch literature and the reception of Hadewijch in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>11</sup> The field of Transfer Studies predicates that when a culture borrows a cultural object (a text, an image, a motif, a word, etc.) from another culture, be it past or present, it does so out of a fascination that is grounded in a perceived lack in the receiving culture. A phenomenon that is somehow ‘noticed’, but for which the contemporary cultural repertoire does not seem to have adequate language, is denoted by a concept adopted from elsewhere.<sup>12</sup> In our case, the Middle Dutch word ‘orewoet’, found in Middle Dutch mystical texts from the ‘long thirteenth century’, is reused by Koopman in her novel to refer to a phenomenon, i.e. ‘the fluid line between desire and madness’, which she felt needed to be made visible by giving it a name.

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voor christelijke referenties in Nederlandse romans’, in: *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandse Taal & Letterkunde* 139 (2023), 329-354, which includes an overview of the study of the role of religion in twentieth- and twenty-first-century Dutch literature.

<sup>10</sup> ‘[h]et verlangen naar en het onvermogen tot overgave’; ‘[h]eilig en geil liggen dicht bij elkaar’. Pruis, ‘In en uit extase’. The three novels discussed are *Moeders: Heiligen* by Dieuwertje Mertens (2023), *Open* by Philip Huff (2024), and *Oersoep* by Bregje Hofstede (2023). The latter contains references to Hadewijch, while the title sonically evokes the word ‘orewoet’.

<sup>11</sup> Ton van Kalmthout, Orsolya Réthelyi, & Remco Sleiderink (Eds.), *Beatrijs de wereld in: Vertalingen en bewerkingen van het Middelnederlandse verhaal*, Ghent 2013; Elke Brems, Orsolya Réthelyi, & Ton van Kalmthout (Eds.), *Doing Double Dutch: The International Circulation of Literature from the Low Countries*, Leiden 2017; Tijl Nuyts, ‘Remembering Hadewijch: The Travelling Memory of a Medieval Mystical Author in Modern Belgium’ (doctoral dissertation University of Antwerp, 2022).

<sup>12</sup> E.g. Itamar Even-Zohar, ‘The Making of Cultural Repertoires and the Role of Transfer’, in: *Target* 9 (1997), 351-359; Michel Espagne & Michael Werner, *Transferts: Les relations interculturelles dans l’espace franco-allemand*, Paris 1988.

Transfer processes inevitably involve transformations. Objects transported out of their original setting and into a new context will be re-semanticized and re-interpreted, to make them fit in the cultural repertoire of the host culture.<sup>13</sup> In this double process of decontextualization and recontextualization, the host culture is enriched by appropriating a good from the past, while through the act of domestication, something from that past object or phenomenon will inevitably be lost.<sup>14</sup> In the following, we will investigate the transposition of *orewoet* to the twenty-first-century context by discussing, first, the mediator of the transfer, in this case Emy Koopman, and the cultural context or repertoire she is part of; second, the transferred cultural object, being Hadewijch's term 'orewoet'; and, finally, how and why the object was transferred and which transformations took place in the process.

#### EMY KOOPMAN AND THE LITERATURE OF THE MILLENNIAL GENERATION

Emy Koopman is a Dutch novelist and investigative journalist. Having majored in Comparative Literature and Clinical Psychology, in 2016 she defended her dissertation on the relation between literature and empathy.<sup>15</sup> Her debut novel *Orewoet* was published by Prometheus in the same year, after she had already contributed personal essays to literary platforms such as *hard//hoofd*. Since *Orewoet*, Koopman has published the novel *Het boek van alle angsten* [The Book of All Fears, 2020], an autobiographical book titled *Tekenen van het universum* [Signs of the Universe, 2022] which just like *Orewoet* discusses the theme of obsessive love, the autofictional novella *Kindertrein uit Boedapest* [Children's Train from Budapest, 2023], and recently *De vrouw in de kelder* [The Woman in the Cellar, 2025], also autofictional.

Koopman belongs to the millennial generation of Dutch literature. Recent studies have noted a shift in the literature of this generation that builds on but also goes beyond postmodernism. Hans Demeyer and Sven Vitse define this shift as one towards an 'affective dominant', adopting Brian McHale's notion of a dominant as 'a structure that brings order and hierarchy in the diversity of

<sup>13</sup> Even-Zohar, 'The Making of Cultural Repertoires'; Elke Brems, 'Het lauwe bruidje van Jezus: Pierre Kemps Beatrijs', in: Van Kalmthout, Réthelyi, and Sleiderink, *Beatrijs de wereld in*, 139-156; Reine Meylaerts, Maud Gonne, Tessa Lobbes, and Diana Roig Sanz, 'Cultural mediators in Cultural History: What Do we Learn from Studying Mediators' Complex Transfer Activities in Interwar Belgium?', in: Brems, Réthelyi, & Van Kalmthout, *Doing Double Dutch*, 67-92.

<sup>14</sup> Peter Burke, 'Cultures of Translation in Early Modern Europe', in: Peter Burke & R. Po-chia Hsia (Eds.), *Cultural Translation in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge 2007, 7-38.

<sup>15</sup> Emy Koopman, 'Reading Suffering: An Empirical Inquiry into Empathic and Reflective Responses to Literary Narratives' (doctoral dissertation Erasmus University Rotterdam, 2016).

techniques and motifs used in a literary text'.<sup>16</sup> In the modernist text this dominant was epistemological, asking questions related to our ability to know reality, while postmodern literature shifted to an ontological dominant, intertwining real and fictional worlds to question reality. The contemporary novel, Demeyer and Vitse argue, asks questions that are predominantly affective rather than cognitive in nature: 'How can I feel and experience reality (myself, the other, the past)?'<sup>17</sup> This affective dominant manifests itself in motifs such as 'desire, attachment, care, and identification'.<sup>18</sup> Contemporary novels present affective crises that stem from feelings of detachment and seek restoration and reconciliation through 'the desire for a home, intimacy, control, identity, historical sensation, presence, or engagement'.<sup>19</sup> Demeyer and Vitse build on some previous studies on contemporary Dutch literature, most notably the essay *Radicaal relationisme* [Radical Relationalism] by Yra van Dijk and Merlijn Olzon.<sup>20</sup> Van Dijk and Olzon argue that the millennial novel is characterized by a 'radical relationism', exploring 'the possibilities and limitations of the construction of the individual (or subject) surrounded by, and especially *through* others'.<sup>21</sup> In these novels identities are fluid, constructed, relational, intertextual, and ambiguous. This results in fictional characters trying to escape their 'half-lives' either by dissolving their identity and disappearing, or immersing themselves in a community. The novels employ changes of perspective to demonstrate how individual identities are fluid and always constructed in relation to others.

*Orewoet* displays many of these affective and relational characteristics of millennial literature. Relationships – friendship, romantic love, and the parent-child relationship – are central to the novel, with affect being a driving force of the story, specifically orewoet or burning desire. Moreover, the novel offers a variety

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<sup>16</sup> 'een structuur die orde en hiërarchie aanbrengt in een diversiteit van technieken en motieven in een literaire tekst'. Hans Demeyer & Sven Vitse, *Affectieve crisis, literair herstel: De romans van de millennialgeneratie*, Amsterdam 2021, 27. See also Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*, London 1987; Hans Demeyer & Sven Vitse, 'De affectieve dominant: Een ideologiekritische lezing van recent Nederlandstalig proza', in: *Tijdschrift voor Nederlandse Taal & Letterkunde* 134 (2018), 220-244; Idem, 'The Affective Dominant: Affective Crisis and Contemporary Fiction', in: *Poetics Today* 42 (2021), 541-574.

<sup>17</sup> 'Hoe kan ik de realiteit (mezelf, de ander, het verleden) voelen er ervaren?' Demeyer & Vitse, *Affectieve crisis, literair herstel*, 27.

<sup>18</sup> 'verlangen, hechting, zorg en identificatie'. Ibid., 27-28.

<sup>19</sup> 'het verlangen naar een thuis, intimiteit, controle, identiteit, historische ervaring, aanwezigheid en engagement'. Ibid., 281.

<sup>20</sup> Yra van Dijk & Merlijn Olzon, 'Radicaal relationisme: Het andere engagement in de jongste Nederlandse literatuur', in: *De Gids* 3 (2015), <https://www.de-gids.nl/artikelen/radicaal-relationisme>. See also Bram Ieven & Esther Op de Beek, 'Searching for New Weapons? Dutch Studies under Late Modern Conditions', in: *Journal of Dutch Literature* 10 (2019), 71-94.

<sup>21</sup> 'de mogelijkheden en beperkingen van de constructie van het individu (of subject) te midden van, en vooral ook *door* anderen'. Van Dijk & Olzon, 'Radicaal relationisme'.

of perspectives from and on the four main characters. This is played out over two time lines. In a storyline set in 2002, Alex is 16 years old and voices the difficult relationship with his mother Agatha/May. Agatha is a single mother working as a judge. Although they were close during Alex's childhood, the relationship becomes troubled when Agatha starts a busy job, allowing them less time together. Alex skips classes, escapes in video games, and has difficulty talking to girls, even though they show interest in him. Another issue is the hidden identity of his father, which Agatha refuses to reveal. The discovery at the beginning of the novel that his father is the recently deceased artist Lucas Brandmeester leads to a further affective crisis.

The second storyline is set in the years 1969–1972 and revolves around Agatha, an activist law student who called herself by her middle name May, her lover Lucas, and their mutual friend Dirk, during their student years in Amsterdam. The story is narrated through a confessional letter by Dirk, addressed to May. Dirk comes from a strict Christian background and majors in Theology, even though he has fallen from his faith. He writes about his admiration for the free-spirited Lucas and his own unreciprocated love for May. His obsessive love for her leads him to commit a forgery: when Lucas disappears after being committed to a psychiatric hospital, Dirk writes May love letters in his friend's name. In the later part of the book we also read about this love triangle from the perspective of May's diary.

The only one of the four characters whose perspective remains obscured as he never gets a voice, is Lucas Brandmeester. His name is meaningful, Lucas being the patron saint of artists and Brandmeester meaning 'master of fire'. Lucas does indeed set the other characters on fire with obsession, while he himself disappears from their lives, first by becoming a psychiatric patient and later by his death during an art performance – possibly a suicide. Lucas is presented as a god, who inspires devotion but ultimately remains elusive for those who love and admire him. The affective crisis in *Orewoet* is one of obsessive desire for the love and presence of this god-like character (and in the case of Dirk also for May), a desire which is not fulfilled for any of the three other characters. Instead, their obsessions lead them to destructive behaviour. Only in the very last pages of the novel a hint of reconciliation can be found, in a cautious rapprochement between Alex and his mother. This scene suggests that the repair of the affective crisis caused by obsessive, unrequited love lies in secure attachment to those who are present, a resolution that perhaps reflects Koopman's background in psychology.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> The influence of this background on the novel becomes especially clear when Koopman thematizes the possible positive effects of madness in the framework of the anti-psychiatry

It should be noted that *Orewoet* is not typical of millennial Dutch literature in every respect. Most of the novels characterized as affective and relational are set in the present or near past, and feature millennial main characters who are about the same age as or slightly younger than the authors. In *Orewoet*, only Alex is a millennial character, but he is still a teenager. The other three main characters are of the baby boom generation and most of their storyline takes place in the early 1970s, giving the novel a historical character. Demeyer and Vitse have noted that despite the emphasis on the present, some millennial authors do indeed thematize the relationship between the present and the recent past, in a way that is again affective rather than epistemological.<sup>23</sup> In *Orewoet*, the historical context serves to develop the identities of, and relations between, the different characters: Dirk's secularization coincides with his emancipation from his family and a shift towards other attachments; Lucas's relationship to others is intertwined with the anti-psychiatry movement of the time; and May's obsessive love conflicts with her feminist convictions (see below). Last but not least, the intertextuality with Hadewijch is a particular form of affective engagement with the past as well.

#### HADEWIJCH'S OREWOET

Hadewijch, about whose historical identity little is known, left a corpus of Middle Dutch works consisting of Visions, Letters, Songs (Stanzaic Poems) and Mixed Poems (Rhymed Letters).<sup>24</sup> Her work is concerned solely with the theme of *Minne*: mystical love between the human soul and God. The term 'orewoet' is most prominently present in the Songs, where she uses it nine times. Most of the Hadewijch-intertextuality in *Orewoet* derives from Koopman's quotations from these Songs.

In her Songs, Hadewijch creatively combines different literary genres, both profane and religious, thus fitting the mould of what Barbara Newman has aptly

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movement. May reads R.D. Laing's book *The Divided Self* (1960), about 'madness as an attempt to recover your true self, that has been repressed by our way of living' ('De waanzin als poging om je ware zelf te hervinden, dat verdrukt is geraakt door onze manier van leven'. Koopman, *Orewoet*, 188). May is receptive to these ideas, perhaps out of her idolization of Lucas, but in the course of the novel madness still functions as a destructive force, eventually leading Lucas to a probable suicide. Koopman expresses criticism of the anti-psychiatry movement in: Emy Koopman, 'Geen pleidooi voor de psychose', in: *hard//hoofd*, June 2, 2015, <https://hard-hoofd.com/paraweek-geen-pleidooi-voor-de-psychose-2-juni-publiceren/>.

<sup>23</sup> Demeyer & Vitse, *Affectieve crisis, literair herstel*, 173-189.

<sup>24</sup> On Hadewijch as a historical figure and writer, see Veerle Fraeters, 'Hadewijch', in: M.M. Sauer et al. (Eds.), *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Medieval Women's Writing in the Global Middle Ages*, Cham 2024. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-76219-3\\_112-1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-76219-3_112-1)

called the ‘mystique courtoise’ of the thirteenth century.<sup>25</sup> Hadewijch’s songs are contrafacts, new lyrics written to existing melodies, mainly *trouvère chansons*.<sup>26</sup> In the courtly love lyric, a lyrical ‘I’, the male lover, expresses his love and sings the praise of an unattainable beloved lady. The lyrics convey his hope and fear of being (un)worthy of her love, and often end with a complaint about his anguish and the lack of reciprocity of his love. Newman defines the ‘courtly self’ of the profane love lyric as ‘unfulfilled and tormented by desire’.<sup>27</sup> Unlike courtly love poetry, Hadewijch’s lyrics also have a narrative quality which she borrowed from the courtly romance tradition. Her Songs feature a lover-knight, an allegory of the soul, on a quest to find his divine beloved, Minne, and be united with her. At times the knight speaks in the first person, while at other times his ruminations and actions are told by an omniscient narrator. In addition to a lyrical I, the Songs thus present an auctorial voice, providing expositions on the mystical process.

Moreover, Hadewijch is influenced by the monastic mystical tradition of the twelfth century, which uses the Old Testament book of Song of Songs with its passionate dialogue between a bride and groom-to-be, as a metaphor for the relationship between the soul (bride) and God (bridegroom). Besides a courtly self, always uncertain, the Songs therefore also feature a ‘bridal self’. This persona is likewise consumed by the burning desire for her absent beloved, yet never in despair, as, unlike the knight, the bride has faith in the reciprocation of her love. She is imbued with a sense of equality between the two lovers and is confident about the upcoming union. The intended public of the Songs learns that this ‘bridal’ attitude is to be preferred over that of the courtly lover who lingers in doubt and feels too small for his beloved lady. Spiritual maturity, according to Hadewijch, implies a transformation from courtly to bridal self.

The love language of the courtly love lyric on the one hand and monastic mysticism on the other strongly overlap, and consequently the concept of *orewoet* is present in both. The Middle Dutch word ‘orewoet’ may have been adapted from the term ‘ire d’amour’ [rage/madness of love], which is used by the French poet Gace Brulé († 1213), one of the *trouvères* from whom Hadewijch borrowed melodies for her songs. The Augustinian canon Richard of St. Victor († 1173) uses ‘amor insatiabilis’ [insatiable love] in his *De quattuor gradibus violentiae caritatis*; and

<sup>25</sup> Barbara Newman, *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist*, Philadelphia 1995, 137-167. On the shared lexicon of the courtly and monastic milieus of the twelfth century, see Jean Leclercq, *Monks and Love in Twelfth-century France: Psycho-Historical Essays*, Oxford 1979.

<sup>26</sup> Louis Grijp, ‘Reconstructie van de melodieën’, in: Hadewijch, *Liederen*, ed., introd., transl. & comm. Veerle Fraeters & Frank Willaert, Groningen 2009, 325-391.

<sup>27</sup> Newman, *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist*, 144. On the generic hybridity of Hadewijch’s Songs, see Veerle Fraeters, “‘Mi smelten mine sinne in minnen oerewoede’: Reflecties over genre en subjectiviteit in de Liederen van Hadewijch”, in: *Spiegel der Letteren* 55 (2013), 427-457; Idem, ‘Lyrische lessen: Personificatie als mystagogisch middel in de Liederen van Hadewijch’, in: *Spiegel der Letteren* 57 (2015), 114-128.

the mystical theologian William of St. Thierry († 1148) speaks of ‘insania amoris’ [madness of love] in *De natura et dignitate amoris*. Hadewijch was familiar with the work of both these authors.<sup>28</sup> Given the generic hybridity of her Songs, Hadewijch deploys the term ‘orewoet’ in various contexts, sometimes putting it in the mouth of the protagonist, the lover-knight, while at other times she has the auctorial voice philosophizing about it. Charting the presence of orewoet in the Songs thus offers a nuanced view on the place of the experience of ‘love madness’ in Hadewijch’s mysticism.

When orewoet is used by the lyrical I, the speaker is, without exception, a courtly self, who is voicing a complaint in the fashion of the profane love lyric. In the closing lines of Song 18, for example, the knight-lover feels crushed by the absence of Minne and voices his despair:

I cry out, and I lament:  
Minne has the days –  
And I, the nights and the madness of love!<sup>29</sup>

In another Song, the lover-in-orewoet is described as one who ‘sorely burns in hope and fear incessantly renewed’,<sup>30</sup> to the point of preferring death over orewoet:

What must I, poor one, do?  
Before it came to this point,  
– Alas, if only –  
If only her touch had been death to me!<sup>31</sup>

In other instances, however, the authoritative voice explains that orewoet is more than just the agonizing condition of unfulfilled desire, as the courtly self perceives it. It is a constructive force that spurs the growth toward mystical maturity, bridges the distance between lover and beloved, and serves as the fastest route to mystical union with the divine. In Song 28 Hadewijch uses feudal imagery to present orewoet as a gift from Minne to her loyal lover: It’s a rich fief [*een rike leen*].<sup>32</sup> Indeed, the agonizing experience of all-consuming desire leaves no space

<sup>28</sup> Joris Reynaert, ‘Sources of Hadewijch’s Mysticism’, in: Patricia Dailey & Veerle Fraeters (Eds.), *A Companion to Hadewijch*, Leiden (forthcoming).

<sup>29</sup> *Ic roepe, ic claghe / De minne hevet de daghe / Ende ic de nachte ende orewoet*. Song 18, stanza 13 (closing). Edition: Hadewijch, *Liederen* (ed. Fraeters & Willaert), 166. Translation: Hadewijch, *The Complete Works*, transl. Columba Hart, New York 1980, 179 (translation slightly modified by the authors).

<sup>30</sup> Song 14, stanza 2, vs. 19–21, transl. Hart, 166. Original text: *Hi berret sware / in hope ende vare, / altoes met nuwen uren* (Fraeters & Willaert, 138).

<sup>31</sup> Song 14, stanza 3, vs. 33–36, transl. Hart, 207, 166 (modified by the authors). Original text: *W aer salic, arme, benen? / Eert mi dus quam, / – Ay, utinam – / Hadde si mi doch doet gherenen!* (Fraeters & Willaert, 138).

<sup>32</sup> Song 28, stanza 4, Fraeters & Willaert, 224.

in the human soul for anything but Minne. It burns away all that is not love. The lover who embraces orewoet thus annihilates himself. In this way, he is like Christ who emptied himself in the incarnation (*kenosis*) and lived in complete receptiveness to God's will. Orewoet, then, is a self-transcending force that facilitates the soul's transformation into perfect likeness to Christ (deification); or – in the feudal language of Song 28 – it leads to lordship over the realm of Minne, divine love.

In high Love's school  
Is learned the madness of Love;  
For it causes delirium  
In one of good understanding.  
To one who at first had misfortune,  
It now gives success;  
It makes him lord of all the property  
Of which Love herself is Lady.<sup>33</sup>

Hadewijch's love mysticism, including the concept of orewoet, are exemplary of the medieval relational view of the self. Following classical traditions, the self was seen as a microcosm reflecting the macrocosm, and was defined, not only in relation to other selves, but also; and primarily so, to God. As Barbara Newman has shown, this relational self was porous and permeable; through its relationships with others, the self could be transformed.<sup>34</sup> Medieval theologians and mystics developed a sophisticated vocabulary to talk about this relational self. The term 'persona', for example, was used to describe the mutual indwelling of the three persons of the Trinity, which served as a model for understanding the human self. In the words of Bonaventure, *persona est ad alium*: a person is 'to-the-other'.<sup>35</sup> Mystics from the Low Countries, most notably Hadewijch and John of Ruusbroec, developed a vernacular vocabulary to speak about the relationship between the self and God, the ultimate fulfilment of which is Minne.<sup>36</sup> Orewoet is part of their vocabulary of relational love; in the state of orewoet, the soul empties itself and allows for the transformation of deification, becoming one with the divine. In her exploration of affective crises and relational selves, Koopman turns to this vocabulary, allowing her to express a dynamics of affection for which the modern Dutch vocabulary, in her view, perhaps does not offer an adequate vocabulary.

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<sup>33</sup> Song 28, stanza 6, Hart, 207. Original text: *In hogher minnen scole / leert men orewoet. / Want si bringet dien in dole / die hem wel verstoet. / Die tiersten hadde ongeval, / dien doetse hebben spoet. / Si maectene al dies here, / daer minne selve afes vrouwe* (Fraeters & Willaert, 224).

<sup>34</sup> Barbara Newman, *The Permeable Self: Five Medieval Relationships*, Philadelphia 2021.

<sup>35</sup> See Rob Faesen, *Ontmoeting: Religie als relatie in christelijke perspectief*, Amsterdam 2020, 12-13.

<sup>36</sup> Faesen, *Ontmoeting*, 46.

## KOOPMAN'S OREWOET

For the Hadewigian intertextuality in *Orewoet*, Koopman uses an edition of the Songs by E. Rombauts and N. De Paepe from 1961.<sup>37</sup> The choice for this edition over a more recent one is determined by the fact that a copy of this book plays a role in the storyline starting in 1969. The book is a gift from Dirk to May, with which he hopes to make her fall in love with him. Dirk speaks and writes in 'Hadewigian terms and phrases'; his speech and writings are infused with quotes from Hadewijch. In the scene where he introduces May to the book, he gives his interpretation of orewoet as delirious love that requires sacrifices, quoting a stanza from Song 28:

'May, have you ever heard of "orewoet"?'  
You shook your delightful head.  
I sat back and said: 'Furor Amoris! Ecstasy, drift, fervour! Love bordering on madness, tossed to and fro between hope and despair. (...) [I]t's a magnificent word, isn't it? The mystic Hadewijch used it to express her eternal, insatiable, overwhelming longing for our Lord Jesus Christ'. (...)  
'I will read you a piece', I said (...). 'In this song, Hadewijch says that for love you must be prepared to endure everything, to sacrifice everything. That is hard, but priceless orewoet will be your reward. (...)  
The madness of love / Is a rich fief;  
Anyone who recognizes this / Would not ask Love for anything else:  
It can unite opposites / And reverse the paradox.  
I am declaring the truth about this: / The madness of love makes bitter what was sweet,  
It makes the stranger a kinsman, / And it makes the smallest the proudest'.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Hadewijch, *Strofische gedichten: Middelnederlandse tekst en moderne bewerking*, ed. E. Rombauts & N. De Paepe, Zwolle 1961. Koopman sometimes quotes in Middle Dutch and sometimes in modern Dutch; for the latter she once makes use of the 2009 translation by Fraeters and Willaert. For an inventory of Hadewijch references in the novel *Orewoet*, see Silke Van Heymbeeck, 'Doet orewoet goed? Een vergelijkende studie naar de functie van het Middelnederlandse woord "orewoet" bij Hadewijch en in Emy Koopmans roman *Orewoet* (2016)' (MA Thesis University of Antwerp, 2022), 63-76.

<sup>38</sup> May, heb je al wel gehoord van "orewoet"?  
Jij schudde je verrukkelijke hoofd.  
Ik ging er eens goed voor zitten: 'Furor Amoris! Extase, drift, vurigheid! Liefde die grenst aan waanzin, heen en weer geslingerd tussen hoop en wanhoop. (...) [H]et is een magnifiek woord, niet? De mystica Hadewijch gebruikte het om haar eeuwige, onstilbare, overweldigende verlangen naar onze Heere Jezus Christus uit te drukken'. (...)  
'Ik zal je een stukje voorlezen', zei ik (...). In dit lied zegt Hadewijch dat je voor de minne bereid moet zijn alles te verduren, alles te offeren. Dat is zwaar, maar onbetaalbare orewoet zal je beloning zijn. (...)  
Orewoet van minnnen / Dat is een rike leen

Dirk also uses Hadewijch's Songs to justify his own continuous longing for May and his manipulative behaviour. 'Hadewijch knows how that goes', he writes, 'as long as one breathes one keeps on hoping and when one is in love the tiniest spark of hope suffices'.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, he claims that one should guard oneself against feelings of rejection to prevent a confrontation with existential questions, a warning inspired by a quote from Hadewijch: 'If love will not admit me to favour as her loved one, why was I ever born?'<sup>40</sup> The sacrifice he makes by introducing May to Lucas and watching them fall in love, hoping that his womanizing friend will eventually leave her and she will seek comfort with him, is also framed in Hadewigian terms: 'Everything that love commands... I wasn't allowed to make a fuss about that'.<sup>41</sup> Hadewijch recurs in Dirk's storyline set in 2002. A newspaper article found by Alex reveals that Dirk, who has become a professor in Philology, has been fabricating Middle Dutch manuscripts supposedly containing work by Hadewijch since the 1980s.<sup>42</sup> Just like he used to forge letters to May pretending to be Lucas, Dirk is now impersonating the mystic. The discovery of his fraud marks the end of his academic career.

May too internalizes Hadewijch's voice. From her 1971 diary, we learn that in orewoet she finds a vocabulary for her obsession with the absent Lucas, framing her love madness as inevitable and exceptional. She describes her love for Lucas as something outside the ordinary order of things, being of the order of orewoet: 'But all those rules, he is beyond that. They don't apply to him, they don't apply in orewoet'.<sup>43</sup> Narrating how after Lucas's disappearance she has resumed reading Hadewijch's work, she describes her affective relation to these medieval mystical lyrics:

I don't understand it all, but I do feel it. It is that excess of feeling, that overflowing of, bursting all banks. It is that constant reaching out for, with all your weight thrown into battle and all limbs stretched out continuously reaching, until it allows itself to be touched for a moment, swallows you up, overwhelms you, only to

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Ende die dat woude kinnen / Hine eyschede haer el negheen:

Die tiersten waren twee / Die doetse wesen een.

Dies ic die waerheit toghe: / Si maect dat soete es soer

Ende den vremen nagheboer, / Ende si brengt den nederen hoghe'.

Koopman, *Orewoet*, 68-69. Dirk reads from Song 28, stanza 4, ed. Rombauts & De Paepe, 202-203; trans. Hart, 206.

<sup>39</sup> 'Bovendien, Hadewijch weet hoe dat gaat, zolang men ademt blijft men hopen en als men lief heeft volstaat het allerkleinste sprankje hoop'. Koopman, *Orewoet*, 73.

<sup>40</sup> 'En als minne mij niet met minne wil ontvangen, waartoe werd ik dan ooit geboren?' Koopman, *Orewoet*, 75. Song 35, verses 17-18, transl. (modern Dutch) Fraeters & Willaert, 264-265; transl. (English) Hart, 227.

<sup>41</sup> 'Alles wat minne gebiedt... daar mocht ik niet moeilijk over doen'. Koopman, *Orewoet*, 81.

<sup>42</sup> Koopman, *Orewoet*, 226.

<sup>43</sup> 'Maar al die regels, daar staat hij buiten. Die gelden niet voor hem, die gelden niet in orewoet'. Koopman, *Orewoet*, 179-180.

withdraw just as quickly like a frightened animal. And then everything again. 'But even if she gave me something, hunger would remain, / for I want the whole'.<sup>44</sup>

When reflecting upon the gradual loss of self she experiences through her excessive enchantment with Lucas, she contrasts Hadewijch's teachings about complete surrender to Minne with her previously held feminist beliefs shaped by her reading of Simone de Beauvoir. De Beauvoir, as she remembers it, warns women against losing themselves in infatuation, and in mysticism, as 'the woman who is in love turns the man into a god and the mystic turns God into a man'.<sup>45</sup> Rather than exclusively devoting herself to a man, a feminist woman should actively engage herself in society. May writes that, while De Beauvoir may be right, she suspects her of never having experienced such a passionate infatuation as she herself has for Lucas. These feelings are better expressed by Hadewijch: 'He who for love turns warrior / will soon triumph / if he is half-hearted in nothing'.<sup>46</sup>

As these passages show, in Koopman's novel *orewoet* is used not in the spiritual context of love between the human soul and the divine, but as a secular term for love between humans who obsessively put their lover on a pedestal and regard them as god-like. In this recontextualization, Hadewijch's view of *orewoet* as a potentially constructive force for achieving spiritual maturity is lost. In *Orewoet*, delirious love is destructive, leading to a loss of self, madness, and acts of manipulation and fraud. The pain of ardent desire does not guide the characters toward a higher goal. They remain stuck in the *ire d'amour* of the courtly self, unable to see *orewoet* as a transformative force towards the realization of a deified bridal self. Obviously, such typically premodern mystical aspiration is out of place in the cultural repertoire of secular late modernity that May, Dirk, and Lucas live in – and in which Emy Koopman writes.

In an interview about the novel published in *Knack* in 2017, Koopman explicitly frames *orewoet* as a destructive force, thus clearly siding with De Beauvoir rather than with Hadewijch: "That burning desire, which the 13<sup>th</sup>-century mystic Hadewijch calls *orewoet*, is a convulsive and manic longing for ideal love. *Orewoet* is about how damaging that kind of love can be, especially if it remains

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<sup>44</sup> 'Begrijpen doe ik het allemaal niet, voelen wel. Het is dat teveel aan gevoel, dat overlopen van, buiten alle oevers. Het is dat almaar reiken naar, met alle gewicht in de strijd gegooid en alle ledematen uitgestrekt almaar reiken, tot het zich even laat aanraken, je opslokt, overrompelt, om zich als een angstig dier net zo snel weer terug te trekken. En dan alles opnieuw. "Indien Ze me een kleinigheid gaf, de honger zou blijven: / want ik wil alles totaal"'. Koopman, *Orewoet*, 177. The last line is a quote from Song 6, verses 71-72, transl. (modern Dutch) Rombauts & De Paepe, 68-69; (English) Hart, 143.

<sup>45</sup> 'Dat de verliefde vrouw van de man een god maakt en de mystica van God een man'. Koopman, *Orewoet*, 177.

<sup>46</sup> 'Wie in liefde ten strijde trekt / zal weldra zegevieren / indien hij in niets versaagt'. Koopman, *Orewoet*, 178. Song 2, verses 7-10, transl. (modern Dutch) Rombauts & De Paepe, 42-43; (English) Hart, 130.

unrequited'.<sup>47</sup> Koopman obviously understands Hadewijch's orewoet primarily from the limited perspective of the courtly lover who is trapped in the pain of love madness to the point of being willing to die. Her interest in orewoet is psychological rather than spiritual, leading her to denounce her characters' 'love madness'. While the characters use Hadewijch to justify their obsessions, the novel, and the novelist, do not.<sup>48</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The above analysis has shown that Koopman turns to the medieval tradition of love mysticism in search of a vocabulary to express an affective, relational crisis. The reconciliation that is suggested at the end of the novel takes place despite rather than because of orewoet, since mother and son finally turn towards each other instead of to the absent, god-like man of their obsession. The restoration of the affective crisis in Koopman's 'radical relationism' is comprised of horizontal relationships with those around us, while the medieval understanding of the relational self primarily involved a vertical relationship with God. The novel *Orewoet* rejects such vertical, hierarchical relationships as worth striving for. Consequently, the recontextualization of orewoet in the novel implies a selective reuse of Hadewijch's term and mystical thought. Koopman's *Orewoet* is rooted solely in the courtly love model, focusing on the painful psychological experience of the human soul suffering from unrequited love. In the secular love story of *Orewoet*, there is no place for the Hadewigian concept orewoet as a painful yet powerful force for self-annihilation that generates spiritual maturity and promises a transformation from courtly into bridal self. When transferred from the paradigm of medieval love mysticism into the cultural repertoire of secular late modernity, the dual and dynamic nature of the Middle Dutch orewoet as both destructive and constructive is lost.

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<sup>47</sup> 'Dat brandende verlangen, dat de 13e-eeuwse mystica Hadewijch orewoet noemt, is een krampachtig en manisch verlangen naar de ideale liefde. Orewoet gaat over hoe schadelijk dat soort liefde kan zijn, zeker als die onbeantwoord blijft'. Kristof Dalle, "'Vrouwen worden niet graag op een voetstuk gezet': SAINT AMOUR – Tussen liefde en waanzin: Herman Brusselmans & Emy Koopman', in: *Knack Magazine*, February 2017, 90-91.

<sup>48</sup> Since the publication of *Orewoet*, Koopman's view of obsessive romantic love seems to have evolved. Her book *Tekenen van het universum* (2022) provides a more nuanced perspective on the theme, which is also reflected in interviews around the publication. While she still connects romantic love with madness, stating that the two are 'neurobiologically related' (Marieke de Haas, 'Vragen over de liefde aan... Emy Koopman', in: *De Groene Amsterdammer*, April 14, 2022), Koopman also calls romantic love 'both destructive and creative', coinciding with a new openness to the world, similar to George Bataille's notion of ecstasy (Floor Rusman, 'Emy Koopman: "Verliefdheid is destructief en creatief"', in: *NRC*, October 3, 2022).

Yet, from the perspective of the receiving contemporary culture, there is no loss but gain. In times of affective crisis, Koopman has enriched our vocabulary on relationality with a new term. And she is not the only one. Other case studies exploring the reuse of the Middle Dutch word *orewoet* by contemporary cultural makers may reveal similar or different meanings and functions. Such research should take into account all the dimensions of Cultural Transfer Studies: the meaning of the term in its original context; the socio-biography of the mediator and her/his motivation to reuse the concept; the new context into which the medieval mystical term is being transferred; the transformation in meaning this implies. This will provide a nuanced view of the de- and recontextualization processes at work, and allow for more general conclusions about the new layer(s) of meaning that the medieval word *orewoet* acquires on its generative journey into our contemporary culture in need of affective healing.