

ABSTRACT  
A LOVE THAT HARMS:  
VIOLENT LOVE IMAGERY IN HADEWIJCH OF BRABANT AND  
THE INFLUENCE OF RICHARD OF SAINT VICTOR

Kenneth Hoyt, B.A., M.A

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That medieval women mystics utilized violent imagery in regards to Love, and, subsequently, their union with it, is well established in the scholarly literature. The approaches to this imagery differ in their conceptions and approaches to the women: some approach via the influence of courtly literature and thus see it as an expression of a literary genre; others apply more modern critiques, seen in feminist and gender theory approaches, where, usually following Foucault, the emphasis is on how the language effects or disrupts medieval power structures; others approach the women from an historical lens, placing the women's language as an offshoot of social currents within what is often defined as medieval humanism. Yet what is often missing is an approach to these women on the grounds of the study they believed they were undertaking, that is theology.

This paper seeks to attend to this gap, though in a limited scope, through the figure of Hadewijch of Brabant and her theological grounding of violent love found within Richard of St. Victor's *De quatuor gradibus violentae caritatis* (Four Degrees of Violent Love). While not disputing many of the conclusions of previous scholarship, which this author holds to be true in most instances, this paper seeks to resituate the writings of this 13th century Beguine, within the context of medieval theology stemming from Richard of St. Victor, allowing for a recognition of nuances in her position that are often overlooked.