Beguines and Hadewijch of Antwerp

Beguines
Pronounced: ba-GEENS
popular website: http://beguines.info/?lang=en
30 minute documentary: https://youtu.be/toJp9c-LXys
Flemish Beguinages: https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/855/

Hadewijch
Pronounced: HAH-da-WAY-yache or HAH-d'-wake
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hadewijch
https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/wisdom-beguines

Three Questions:
1. What were the spiritual needs of the Beguines?
2. How were they limited in terms of time, money and education?
3. How did the Beguine movement overcome these limitations?
The Beguine Movement

**General:**
Began forming ~1200. Continued until 2013, passing of the last Beguine, Marcella Pattyn, in Kortrijk Belgium. Lay women in a parish area begin to associate in small groups to live the **Vita Apostolica**
Primarily in the “Low Countries” (Flanders, now Netherlands and Belgium)
Some lived with family, others began to live together in small groups (4-12), known as a convent.
Later evolved into courtyard houses with hundreds of beguines (25%), known as a beguinage (french), begijnhof (dutch)
Open to unmarried, widowed, divorced
Couldn’t beg, so they provided for themselves by textiles, book making.
Communal living: shared assets, wealth, work.
Served the marginalized (sick, imprisoned, poor, orphans, lepers, destitute women)
111 beguinages identified in Belgium. 13 flemish beguinages remain UNESCO heritage sites.

**What they did not have:**
No vows
No monasteries (cloister)
No order or rule
No founder

**Took responsibility:**
for their own spiritual journey (Vita Apostolica)
for their own education
for their own ministry
for their own support
for their own taxes
for their own life choices: free to leave/to join, to marry/divorce
for their own Magistra (spiritual leader)

**Standards of daily life:**
Simplicity: no display of wealth
Chastity: but free to leave
Common assets (lodging, food)
Service: ministry to marginalized
Clothing: distinctive (“grey sisters”)

**Economic factors:**
Coin based economy gave women access to money
Shift from countryside to urban centers brought women in proximity
Crusades reduced number of men, opening opportunity for women
Rise of education/literacy provided opportunity for any who could learn
Textile/Bookmaking provided cottage industry

**Cultural factors:**
Literary: Troubadours created Courtly Love literature
Man/Woman friendships became more accepted
Rise of Mendicant orders
Comfort with market economy
Demand for church reform

**Relationships:**
Parochial priests were often critical of their independence
Nuns supported/defended them
Lay people followed them
Guilds resisted their economic power
Dominicans, Fransiscans: appreciated them for accepting the “overflow”.

**Scholarship:**
Rediscovered in 1800s by scholars
Became intensely studied in 1980s with rise of feminist interest
Primary resources: wills, deeds, contracts, heresy inquisitions.

**Vernacular literary materials:**
Poetry, prayers, psalters, visions, correspondence, Bible commentaries
Why the Beguines may be popular in 21st C Spirituality:
Christina Van Dyke, "Contemplating the Future" (SCP 40th): https://youtu.be/efBn9BFaXY4
Presentation to 40th anniversary of Society of Christian Philosophers. Asserted four qualities of the Beguines that would make them popular in the 21st c.:

- Humility (via self-knowledge)
- Humanity of Christ
- Engagement with broader culture
- Listening to voices from the margin

Best online resource on Hadewijch

Lay religious movement by women starting 1200. Parallel with Dominicans and Franscicans. Desired to serve God in among the people instead of serving God in churches. Did not take vows except to the mistress of the beguinage. Couldn’t beg, so they worked. They were upper class and not used to working.

By 2nd half of 13th c. it became easy to accuse Beguines of heresy because they were so like Cathars. Unpopular with parish clergy because Beguins preferred to go to church led by Dominicans and drew others and money there.

Three 14th century events that diminished the Beguines:
1310 Council of Vienne. Declared all Beguines are heretics.
1310 Burning of Marguerite Porete
1320 Posthumous accusation of Eckhart. Primary accusation: is writing in German instead of Latin.

Hadewijch writes only about soul’s relationship to God. Scholars think she wrote 1230-1250 based on a letter with a “list of saints” Wrote 14 visions 31 letters 45 poems 16 letters/tracts

Poems are filled with puns and homonyms that come out only when read in middle dutch. So it may be that they were meant
to be heard, not read. Perhaps they were to be sung:
Wrote in form of French courtly love lyric: Love that would never lead to anything.
Troubadour Love Lyric was meant to be sung and Hadewijch’s poems have the same structure. So the troubadour love lyric music may be applied to Hadewijch’s lyrics. Plays Hadewijch with the french music at 24:45:


Gender reversal: By taking the masculine voice she talks about herself as a warrior. (See Poem: Love has subjugated me) Hadewijch gives herself the voice of the man and the voice of the lady is God (Minne = love in Dutch). Gender reversal is like Bernard of Clairvoux who took the role of woman in Song of Songs. Key to gender reversal is total otherness. These women had been in families and this was totally other than anything they had experienced. The man is to woman as soul is to body. Man is divinity of Christ, woman is his humanity.

Hadewijch had a positive view of suffering. One does not bring suffering upon ones self. Must bare suffering patiently. But later on there would be women who self-harmed because they had read texts written by men. Their suffering was the suffering of Christ.. If woman is Christ’s humanity, then they are united in Christ in suffering. Pain and suffering is where one could encounter Christ.

Living as humanity is a way to get to unity with God. See Letter 6 below.
Poem #27: Desires love, but has darkness. Hell is the seventh name for love (minne). Minne as a word is a problem in what it means. This is done deliberatelly by Hadewijch.

Hadewijch was possibly pushed out of her own community because her standards were so high.

Hadewijch Letters (31 letters)

Letter 6: To Live Christ (an example of Humanity is a way to unity with God)
English version by Mother Columba Hart: Original Language Dutch

86. where Love is, there are always great labors and burdensome pains. Love, nevertheless, finds all pains sweet: Qui amat non laborat; that is, he who loves does not labor...

117. With the Humanity of God you must live here on earth, in the labors and sorrow of exile, while within your soul you love and rejoice with the omnipotent and eternal Divinity in sweet abandonment.
324. This is the way [Vita Apostolica] on which the Son of God took the lead, and of which he himself gave us knowledge and understanding when he lived as Man.

Hadewijch Visions (15 visions)

Vision 11: The Abyss of Omnipotence (an example of the creative power of beguine spirituality)

English version by Mother Columba Hart: Original Language Dutch

I was in a very depressed frame of mind one Christmas night, when I was taken up in the spirit.

28. Then I saw coming as it were a bird, namely the one called phoenix. It devoured a grey eagle that was young, and a yellow eagle with new feathers that was old.

37. I nevertheless perceived the essence of all things I saw. For all that is seen in the spirit when one is ravished by Love is understood, tasted, seen, and heard through and through.

49. One of the eagles who were swallowed was Saint Augustine, and the other myself... The phoenix that swallowed the eagles was the Unity in which the Trinity dwells, wherein both of us Love.

72. I reflected on this union with Saint Augustine in which I had attained... it weighed on me now that this union with Saint Augustine had made me so perfectly happy.

98. For I am a free human creature, and also pure as to one part, and I can desire freely with my will, and I can will as highly as I wish, and seize and receive from God all that he is, without objection or anger on his part—what no saint can do.

Hadewijch Poems (45 stanzas, 16 couplets)

http://www.poetry-chaikhana.com/Poets/H/Hadewijch/index.html
http://www.poetry-chaikhana.com/Poets/H/Hadewijch/Lovehassubju/index.html

Love has subjugated me (an example of Gender Reversal)

English version by Mother Columba Hart: Original Language Dutch
Love has subjugated me:
   To me this is no surprise,
   For she is strong and I am weak.
   She makes me
   Unfree of myself,
   Continually against my will.
She does with me what she wishes;
Nothing of myself remains to me;
   Formerly I was rich,
Now I am poor: everything is lost in love.
St Tronds: https://gdebrabander.wordpress.com/limburg/begijnhof-sint-truiden/

Tongres: https://gdebrabander.wordpress.com/limburg/begijnhof-tongeren/

Brugges: https://gdebrabander.wordpress.com/west-vlaanderen/begijnhof-brugge/