

PDF hosted at the Radboud Repository of the Radboud University Nijmegen

The following full text is a publisher's version.

For additional information about this publication click this link.

<http://hdl.handle.net/2066/148961>

Please be advised that this information was generated on 2021-06-17 and may be subject to change.



PROJECT MUSE®

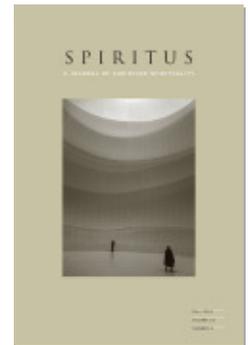
New Philology as Helpful for Spirituality Research

Elisabeth Hense

Spiritus: A Journal of Christian Spirituality, Volume 15, Number 2, Fall 2015,
pp. 172-190 (Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: 10.1353/scs.2015.0038



➔ For additional information about this article

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/597643>

New Philology as Helpful for Spirituality Research

ELISABETH HENSE

The academic field of spirituality studies is still searching for how to understand spiritual texts adequately. A spiritual text is always embedded in a kind of “producer and user web” and if this “web” is vital, texts will be modified and new text variations will be added. Therefore, we should not study spiritual texts as if they were pure, fixed, grand expressions. We should indeed examine the particularity of a spiritual text, but interconnectivities with other texts of these “text families” should not be forgotten. I want to argue here that ideas arising from the field known as New Philology might be a key to such a comparative and contextualized approach to spiritual texts. Through the examination of two case studies—a Middle Dutch Pseudo-Eckhart treatise and a recent theatre production based on the *Epithalamium* of Jean de Saint-Samson—I want to show what the intellectual space provided by New Philology can contribute to the field of Christian Spirituality.

NEW PHILOLOGY

In the field of editorial theory, a principal innovation has been made with the development of the so-called New Philology, first presented in a special issue of *Speculum* in 1990 by the philologist Stephen Nichols.¹ The inspiration for this innovation came from Bernhard Cerquiglini, who stated that instability, or variance, is a central feature of many medieval texts.

“Old” Philologists—if we may call them that—had developed strong hierarchical approaches to the editing of these instable variances in texts, but at the end of the last century their criteria for preferring a certain version of a text to another were strongly questioned. Should we underpin our preference for a text with the argument that the first version should be taken as the starting point, or should we argue that the best amended or elaborated or illuminated version should be preferred? Should we give authority to a certain stage of maturity of a text, or is maturity itself a kind of fluid notion? And how should we deal with the involvement of other people who contributed in one way or another to the production of a literary work? How should we evaluate author concepts of former centuries that made no clear difference between a writer’s own contribution and what he or she took from others? Aren’t we follow-

ing arbitrary decisions when thinking hierarchically about text variants, and wouldn't it make more sense to respect all different versions in their own right?

These and similar questions brought about the development of the so-called "New Philology." The key ideas of New Philology may be summarized as follows: (1) Literary works do not exist independently of their material embodiment. Any changes in the material features of a literary work, such as its illuminations, cover, or surrounding texts in the manuscript, are relevant to the meaning of the literary work in question. (2) Literary works come into being through instable and complex processes involving larger or smaller numbers of people, all of them playing a significant part in the final manifestation of a literary work. The place and time of origin and the purpose of a work are also important to the purport of the text. (3) Literary works continue to exist through time, and their meaning is also affected by the changing social, economic and intellectual climates to which their users are exposed.

According to Gumbrecht, New Philology scholars form a kind of guild within the philological research environment focusing on these shifts and alterations. They abandon the principle of one single, correct text edition in favor of the intellectual space provided by plurality.² New Philology research focuses on the diversity of forms, languages and meanings of texts within text families, where one text is not by definition prioritized over another, but where every text is respected both individually and in its manifold kinship with other texts. The development of and reflection upon research strategies and techniques which are helpful to map text variations and their interconnectivities are at the centre of New Philology studies.

Up to now, New Philologists have investigated mainly medieval texts. Following Cerquiglioni, Fleischman emphasizes the importance of an accurate comparison of the variances in medieval texts³ and how they fit in their different contexts.⁴ Wolf occupies himself with moveable passages in medieval manuscripts, that is, paragraphs that can shift throughout the text, thereby adding another text pattern.⁵ Nichols wants to go back to the complex culture of medieval manuscripts.⁶ He is interested in what he called the "manuscript matrix."⁷ Rust explains this term as follows: "The manuscript matrix is an imagined, virtual dimension in which physical form and linguistic content function in dialectical reciprocity: a space in which words and pages, "colours" of rhetoric and colors of ink, fictional characters and alphabetical characters, covers of books and veils of allegory function together in one overarching, category-crossing metasystem of systems of signs."⁸ Shifts within a manuscript matrix raise interesting questions: What has changed and what does this change mean? How does a change fit in its context? How can we compare modifications of a text? Putting the perspective of New Philologists in a nutshell, we might say that they throw light upon the variability of texts, the

kinship between diverse variations of texts, and the value of each text variation in its own right.

NEW PHILOLOGY AS A HELPFUL RESEARCH ENVIRONMENT FOR SPIRITUAL TEXTS

As a scholar in spirituality, I seek to investigate what New Philology can contribute to a better understanding of spiritual texts and whether New Philology is helpful to clarify the areas of variability in and interconnectivity between these texts.

174

This seems all the more useful, as spirituality at the grassroots level of religious hierarchy has become a new subject of interest within spirituality studies. Academic inquiry increasingly focuses on the mystical experiences of ordinary people, on the spiritual experiences of less privileged followers and participants in spiritual movements.⁹ With regard to medieval research, this new interest results in the inclusion of the many nameless practitioners of mystical spirituality who gave their own interpretation to the instruction they received from religious leaders, founders or prominent representatives of influential movements in specific sociocultural contexts.¹⁰ The mystical aspirations of these groups and the ways in which they were expressed will thus no longer be overlooked. With regard to present-day movements, Sheldrake elucidates how ordinary people are acting. He calls to mind what is characteristic of their “traditioning” of spiritualities and emphasizes that we should appreciate their proceedings: “There are four key principles. First, we should attend more closely to the process whereby classic traditions, born in one culture and already reshaped by transmission across time through a number of other cultures, now enter a new cultural context. Second, we must value *lo cotidiano*—that is, ‘the everyday.’ That is, the authentic re-appropriation of spiritual traditions takes place in relation to the questions and situations of daily life in the local community. Third, there is a need to give a higher valuation to popular religion—a powerful reality in religious cultures originating outside a European-North American hegemony. . . . Finally, ‘traditioning’ invites us to consider how the transmission of spiritual traditions depends not simply on clergy or technical ‘experts’ but also on a consensus of reception among the rest of the local Christian community who in reality are the ‘ordinary’ transmitters of tradition.”¹¹

These ordinary transmitters often utilize traditional texts, or fragments of such texts, which they rewrite from the perspective of their own experiences and contexts. They may do so in the context of business and economics, reformulating the Ignatian praxis of discernment of the spirit or the monastic Rule of St. Benedict. Or they may do so—as in my case studies—in the context of personal meditation and art production, reformulating the thought of Eckhart and Jean de Saint Samson. No matter in which contexts people dedicate



Curves, courtesy of Aleksandra Leković

themselves to “traditioning,” they get involved by producing their own text variants.

To my mind New Philology’s potential for research into these text variants may especially be to look at the following aspects: text changes through (1) personal appropriation, (2) translation and (3) conversion into another medium.

These are interesting directions for spirituality research for various reasons: (1) Spiritual texts lend themselves well to personal appropriation. This may occur through an oral or written adaptation of a text, whereby the text is laced with personal associations or linked to other spiritual literature. In this way, the reader of a spiritual text becomes a co-author, adapting the content of the text to his/ her own ideas and practices. (2) As spiritual communities are rarely bound to national borders, they have produced a large number of translations. For this reason, there is an abundance of source texts and other important writings in various languages, showing various mentalities and thought patterns within these spiritual communities. (3) Participants in spiritual traditions frequently seek out other forms of expressive media for key texts in their community. Music, recitals and theatre are particularly popular media. Converting a written text into another medium can drastically enhance its effect, even if the words of the text remain unaltered.

The variability of the text on the basis of personal appropriation, translation or conversion into another medium is rooted in the aspiration of participants of a particular spiritual tradition to maintain the currency of the text. In this way, the text is adapted to the participants in that particular tradition.

New Philology offers a suitable research environment for all this variation in spiritual texts; in this field, the necessary methods and techniques are being developed—adequate designs of editing, germane (digital) strategies for comparisons of text variants or text variations, advisable ways for describing the diachronous dimension of the changeability of texts, appropriate manners for analyzing hybrid forms of texts.

The following sections present two case studies. In my first case I discuss a Middle Dutch Pseudo-Eckhart treatise based on family resemblance with German Eckhart texts. Two questions are at the center of my investigations: Do we have to reshuffle our ideas about these texts when we discuss them in the intellectual frame of New Philology? What kind of family resemblance can we trace when analyzing the personal appropriation of Eckhart’s thought in the Middle Dutch context and its translation into this language and culture?

In my second case I suggest that New Philology insights can also be useful for investigations in other than medieval texts. A seventeenth century French epithalamium has inspired a German theater consortium to produce its own version of it. Two similar questions will be answered: Do we have to reshuffle

our ideas about these texts when we discuss them in the intellectual frame of New Philology? What kind of family resemblance can we trace when analyzing the personal appropriation of the *Epithalamium* of Jean de Saint-Samson, its translation and its conversion into another medium?

Strong family resemblances between texts characterized by large textual overlap can be discussed in terms of variants, whereas more remote relationships between texts characterized by more divergence in structure and semantics can be discussed in terms of variations.¹² As I showed elsewhere, particular areas of common ground between texts can also be described using the concept of intertextuality.¹³ But in the case of large overlap between texts, the need arises for a more detailed description of this family resemblance, and to my opinion New Philology is well suited to meet this need.

A MIDDLE DUTCH PSEUDO-ECKHART TREATISE

Researchers have long been interested in the authentic work of Meister Eckhart,¹⁴ his unique use of language and his philosophical talent. Research focused on characterizing Eckhart's provocative personality as faithfully as possible, as well as his original thoughts and expressions.¹⁵ As a result, a Middle Dutch text known as the Brussels Royal Library Manuscript 3067-73, f.2r-9v received little attention until recently. The text is permeated by Meister Eckhart's mysticism and thus shows strong family resemblance with the authentic work of Meister Eckhart, however we also find noticeable differences.¹⁶ As such, it was deemed of little use for providing more insight into the great *Meister* and his work. On the contrary: this text reveals an anonymous disciple, a follower of a spiritual school that interpreted Eckhart's legacy from a local perspective. It is precisely this local perspective that makes the text of interest from a New Philology point of view. I thus went in search of the differences and similarities between the early German Eckhart texts and this Middle Dutch Pseudo-Eckhart text. Below, I discuss these differences and similarities by analyzing the central mystical terms and figures of thought in the Middle Dutch Pseudo-Eckhart treatise, inquiring which features should be taken into consideration for identifying the authenticity of Eckhart's thought, examining the recontextualization of Eckhart's thought in the Middle Dutch context and further commenting on the fourteenth century concept of authorship.¹⁷

THE CENTRAL MYSTICAL TERMS AND FIGURES OF THOUGHT IN THE MIDDLE DUTCH PSEUDO-ECKHART TREATISE

Those familiar with Eckhart's authentic writings would soon recognize a number of central terms from his work in the Brussels Royal Library Manuscript 3067-73, f.2r-9v. The most notable of these are *separateness*,¹⁸ *uncreated-*

ness,¹⁹ staying indoors,²⁰ poverty,²¹ form,²² going out²³ and breaking through.²⁴ We also find various figures of thought from Eckhart's authentic work in this manuscript, for instance, that the spark of the soul is indistinguishable from and one with the Godhead,²⁵ that the highest power of the soul is God Himself,²⁶ that the soul can stand eye to eye with the Godhead,²⁷ that there is one uncreated and uncreatable light that shines into the soul,²⁸ that no touch is possible between the creation and the Godhead,²⁹ that a soul that becomes one with God no longer has a name³⁰ and that this soul has found a secret passage-way to the Godhead.³¹ Still, we must conclude that Eckhart's terms and figures of thought, through their translation to the Middle Dutch context, have at the same time also been transformed in that their content has been tempered. Not only does the Middle Dutch version lack some of Eckhart's terms and figures of thought that would have been offensive in ecclesiastical circles in Brabant, but his most provocative ideas are also omitted entirely. This includes, for instance, the idea that before the birth of man, he was one with the Godhead, then broke away out of free will and thus gave rise to himself and to all things.³² Thus, some of Eckhart's terms and figures of thought are present in the Pseudo-Eckhart treatise and some are not. In fact the treatise therefore reflects a modification of Eckhart's texts, some kind of a hybrid between Rhineland and Brabant mysticism.

THE QUESTION OF AUTHENTICITY

Quint studied the authenticity of all texts that have been accredited to Eckhart (or that seem to contain his mysticism) primarily on the basis of the following criteria: confirmation by the *Rechtfertigungsschrift*, agreement with the *Opus sermonum*, and referrals to and parallels with Eckhart texts of proven authenticity.³³ Quint composed his publication of the sermons according to this diminishing series of criteria. With regard to the treatises, most experts consider the following to be authentic: *Reden der Unterscheidung*, *Von Abgeschiedenheit*, *Liber benedictus* (*Das Buch der göttlichen Tröstungen* and *Vom edlen Menschen*). According to these experts, all other treatises published by Pfeiffer³⁴ can probably not or only partially be accredited to Eckhart. Nor can the Brussels Royal Library Manuscript 3067–73, f.2r–9v, which corresponds to excerpts from the Pfeiffer treatises 14 and 15³⁵ and to the Stiftsbibliothek Einsiedeln Manuscript 277, be counted among Eckhart's authentic works.³⁶

The Berlin Manuscript 1084, fol. 33r–36v—written more than a century later than the Brussels Royal Library Manuscript 3067–73, f.2r–9v—shows roughly the same editing of the Eckhart compilation as the Brussels manuscript, such that it must be considered its most important variant. Comparison of the Brussels and the Berlin manuscripts with Eckhart's works of proven authenticity shows that the main similarities can be found in a number of

sermons and the treatise *Von Abgeschiedenheit*.³⁷ Following Quint, both, these sermons as well as the treatise *Von Abgeschiedenheit* are counted to the authentic works of Eckhart. This means however, that the boundaries that Quint and others have created between Eckhart's authentic and non-authentic works seem rather arbitrary from a New Philology perspective. The continuity and discontinuity between texts based on Eckhart's work could perhaps best be described by means of other criteria. Eckhart's terminology and his body of thought may better clarify, which texts are a close or perhaps more distant match.

THE RECONTEXTUALIZATION OF ECKHART'S THOUGHT

For a better understanding of the user context of our Pseudo-Eckhart treatise, it seems worthwhile to look at the users of the authentic Eckhart works who belonged to the same spiritual circles as the users of the Pseudo-Eckhart treatise. In the following, the user contexts of the authentic Eckhart works are shortly indicated.

We know that the earliest distributors of Meister Eckhart's work in the Netherlands were in touch with spiritual circles, which were also interested in Ruusbroec and the modern devotion. Incidentally, in these circles we also find Eckhart's best-known Dutch critics of the fourteenth century, namely Geert Grote, Gerard Zerbolt van Zutphen and Jan van Leeuwen. Naturally, their opposition was possible solely due to the reproduction of the Middle Dutch codices that disseminated Eckhart's work,³⁸ primarily consisting of (1) several sermons;³⁹ (2) complete and fragmented manuscripts of *Die Reden der Unterscheidung*⁴⁰ and the treatise based on Ruusbroec's work, *Vanden XII Dogheden* by Godfried van Wevel, which appropriates entire passages from Eckhart's *Die Reden der Unterscheidung*; and (3) *Meister Eckhart und der Laie* and *proverbs* attributed to Eckhart.⁴¹

The manuscripts containing Eckhart's sermons are said to have been written in convents of Augustine nuns, monasteries of the third Franciscan Order and Augustine canon monasteries. The translations do not always portray the Meister's mysticism accurately, which is no doubt related to the limited education of those who were involved in disseminating the Eckhart texts. Eckhart is rarely mentioned in these manuscripts. He is, however, mentioned in the manuscripts relevant to the present research: the Brussels Royal Library Manuscript 3067-73 (f. 19r/v), and the Berlin Manuscript, Staatsbibliothek Preußischer Kulturbesitz, germ. 4° 1084 (fol. 1r-5r). Both manuscripts, in addition to our Pseudo-Eckhart treatise discussed above, thus also contain texts which are explicitly attributed to Eckhart. However, it remains unknown who, in this spiritual climate, translated German texts from the environment of Eckhart into Middle Dutch without referring to Eckhart's name, and who rearranged the



Library, photo by Thomas Geiregger

ordering in these texts compared to that in Pfeiffer's German treatises 14 and 15⁴² and in German Manuscript 277 of the Stiftsbibliothek Einsiedeln. Given the similarity in semantics, style and genre between the Middle Dutch Pseudo-Eckhart treatise and these German Eckhart texts, however, it is clear that the unknown author or authors must be sought in the literary exchange between Brussels on the one hand and Cologne, Strasburg and Basel on the other.⁴³ This literary exchange was the common framework for hybrid forms of Rhineland mysticism and Middle Dutch language and culture in Brabant. This literary exchange was a breeding ground for copying, rewriting and revising interesting texts according to own preferences.

THE CONCEPT OF AUTHORSHIP IN THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY

Eckhart's German oeuvre invited many compilers and copyists to create their own versions or adaptations. While his Latin writings were sparsely distributed and elaborated, this was by no means the case with his German writings. The large number of German manuscripts testifies to the impression that Eckhart made with his new terminology and way of thinking. Nevertheless, his words and thoughts were not always accurately recorded. In those days, no clear distinction was drawn between contemporary sources, which tended to be used rather freely, and the copyist's own disquisition. This often made reading these works exceptionally difficult and explains why Eckhart's German oeuvre was at once a blessing and a curse. As many texts and translations were lost, it is impossible to precisely identify the omissions, interpolations, misunderstandings or intentional improvements, modifications and shifts in emphasis in these texts. This means it is rarely possible to ascertain where exactly the boundary lies between what can be accredited to Eckhart himself and what others have contributed. In any case, it cannot be denied that others have played a part in Eckhart's so called authentic work.

Whether our Middle Dutch Pseudo-Eckhart treatise is a free interpretation of Eckhart works or should be seen more as an independent adaptation of Eckhart's body of thought in the Brabant context is still unclear. Likewise, the fundamental flexibility of the concept of authorship in the fourteenth century does not allow for a strict distinction between free interpretation and individual adaptation. The contemporary reader of the Middle Dutch Pseudo-Eckhart treatise who was familiar with some authentic works of Eckhart and who came across the name of Eckhart in the same manuscript could have thought about our treatise as belonging to Eckhart's body of thought. On the other hand, the contemporary reader would probably have been aware of the flexibility of authorship in those days and would have perceived the text as a Middle Dutch variation on Rhineland mysticism.

CONCLUSION

182

Earlier ideas about our Middle Dutch Pseudo-Eckhart treatise as being difficult, not interesting and nearly illegible should be abandoned. Rather we should read this treatise as a variation of the so-called authentic and non-authentic Eckhart texts. Two areas of variability come to the fore (1) the personal appropriation of the text and (2) its translation. (1) The author of the Middle Dutch Pseudo-Eckhart treatise has adopted some of Eckhart's central terms and figures of thought. Further, the meditative style of the treatise and the many references to Saint Dionysius are highly reminiscent of Eckhart. The similarities in the content and style of the Dutch treatise with Pfeiffer's German Eckhart treatises 14 and 15 and German Manuscript 277 of the Stiftsbibliothek Einsiedeln are particularly striking. Interestingly, however, the Brussels manuscript counts as the oldest source of the treatise, this means older than Pfeiffer's German Eckhart treatises 14 and 15 and German Manuscript 277 of the Stiftsbibliothek Einsiedeln.⁴⁴ It is not yet clear whether the author of the Middle Dutch treatise contributed to the writing of the German treatises, or incorporated the author or authors of the German treatises in the Middle Dutch treatise.

Along with Eckhart's influence and possibly that of one or more other German authors, the Middle Dutch author also reveals an individual profile that goes beyond merely sorting and omitting existing text fragments. Rather, the Middle Dutch text is well-gearred to the spiritual climate in Brussels; the author seems to play an intermediary role, making Eckhart's new mysticism digestible in Brabant spiritual environment.⁴⁵

(2) While the Brussels and Berlin manuscripts show little variation between them (no traces of another author, the same text mosaic, the same national language), the leap across the language boundary has led to greater changes in the text. So a very strong family resemblance between the Brussels and the Berlin manuscripts can be seen alongside with a somewhat weaker family resemblance between the Dutch and the German Eckhart texts. The Dutch text mosaic has clearly been modified compared to the Einsiedeln manuscript and the Pfeiffer treatises: text fragments have shifted, and passages have been added or omitted. And with respect to some other work of Eckhart, the terms and figures of thought have been weakened or neutralized. This means that we should indeed recognize the kinship of our Middle Dutch Pseudo-Eckhart treatise with Eckhart's work without overlooking the differences.

My following case is also related to a text that is changed by means of the personal appropriation and the translation of the text. The conversion of the text into another medium can be seen as an additional source of text variability in the next case study.

A RECENT THEATRICAL PRODUCTION BASED ON THE *EPITHALAMIUM* BY JEAN DE SAINT-SAMSON

The *Epithalamium* by Jean de Saint-Samson⁴⁶ was not rediscovered until the 1950s, and to date has remained relatively unknown. But it was this marginalized mystical text by a seventeenth century French Carmelite that was chosen in 2009 by German director Ursula Albrecht as the foundation for a theatrical production.⁴⁷ Her group, *Theater der Stille*, has used mystical texts in musical theatre performances since 1996, starting with Koans from the Buddhist tradition and later focusing on Christian texts. Initially these were classical texts by Johannes Climacus, Albertus Magnus, Meister Eckhart and John of the Cross, but Albrecht has since also worked with texts by relatively unknown mystical writers. These productions emphasize the artistic reinterpretation of mystical texts.⁴⁸ As is apparent from interviews with the members of *Theater der Stille*,⁴⁹ this reinterpretation begins with the careful reading of a text that seems strange in some way and that makes surprising or bold statements. This is followed by a consideration of the text in all its facets, gauging and interpreting the possible meanings. Finally, the group gives a subjective, highly personal account of the text, where the text as such is not changed (though it may be shortened). Albrecht works with various composers, instrumentalists, singers and stage actors, who each use their artistic capabilities in authentic ways. Albrecht's oeuvre not only invites the audience to draw comparisons between the old written text and the new performed versions, but also fascinates on account of the variability of the performances. In the following I will first compare the old mystical text and the new performance and then discuss the variability of the artistic performances.

COMPARING THE OLD MYSTICAL TEXT AND THE NEW PERFORMANCE.

The *Epithalamium* poses that the individual must find rest in God (*repos en Dieu*), and cling to God with a simple and open gaze (*adhesion de Dieu*). In this condition, people no longer move themselves, but wait until they are moved from within, through God, by God's longing (*l'aspiration*). Divine longing is an essential and fiery expression of love, which draws people to God and lets them partake in God's love. The breath of desire is blown from God to the individual and inhaled by the individual, after which he or she too can breathe their desire to God. Through the inhalation and exhalation of divine desire, people experience a sense of becoming one with God (*l'union/ l'unité avec Dieu*). In doing so, they leave behind all material means between themselves and God; they live completely removed (*l'abstraction*) from all material means and therefore find a state of spiritual solitude (*solitude d'esprit*). They must release all things (*renunciation*), even God insofar as God is used as a

means. God loves humans with pure, bare and essential love (*l'amour pur, nud, essentiel*) and humankind must love God in the same way. This transcends all experience (*surpasser*) and culminates in a speechless and selfless indulgence in ecstatic love.

Jean de Saint-Samson wrote the text of the *Epithalamium* as a conversation between the soul as the bride (*épouse*) of God and God as the bridegroom (*espoux*) of the soul. About two thirds of the text consists of a monologue by the longing soul, filled with desire for the love of God. The soul is consumed with passion; she recalls love encounters with God, she adores the glorious characteristics of her bridegroom, she calls and screams and raves with burning passion. The final third of the text is the answer of the divine bridegroom, who shows his longing for his bride and offers her the communal and mutual pleasure of his divine love (*commune et reciproque jouissance*).

184

During a performance, the family resemblance between the old text and the new production is immediately noticeable in that the text has not been modified as such, but merely translated and shortened. As this German translation is reliable, the viewer still gets a sense of the performance as a Jean de Saint-Samson text. And as the shortened text is variable—that is, different parts of the text are omitted in every performance—the viewer, by attending various performances, can in theory partake of the entire text. In other words, every performance represents a portion of the original text. And in principle every word is preserved—albeit in a different language and at the risk of not arising in a particular performance. Thus, we might state, that family resemblances between the old mystical text and the new performances are quite strong.

Because the director has chosen to respect the typical quality of the text, permitting no pastoral or cultural intermediation by the theatre group, family resemblances seem even stronger. This means, among other things, that the translation does not aim to adapt the text to the audience's spiritual tastes, nor is it the director's intention to abbreviate the text to filter out passages that a contemporary audience might find hard to digest. On the contrary: the audience is confronted with a faithful translation in which omissions are more or less incidental. The latter does not pose a problem, as the text is more an endless prayer than a story with a plot. It is up to the viewers to bridge the gap between their own spiritual culture and the text. They are challenged to search for personal connections with the text or to allow the text to pass them by as an unfamiliar story of no personal relevance.

According to the *Theatre der Stille* performers, it is precisely the mystical vocabulary of the *Epithalamium* that opens up the text and makes it mobile.⁵⁰ They let this vocabulary enter their being and perform on the basis of their personal contact with it. Sometimes this vocabulary inspires them to a scenic



Secret Passages . . . 3, courtesy of Ibo Photographia

or musical interpretation of certain passages. Sometimes it calls for the repetition of key words, the musical delivery of sentences or the insertion of performative elements. Sometimes the artists make musical leaps to existing melodies and their accompanying lyrics. To create space for this, portions of the original text may be omitted, and other portions may also be moved forwards or backwards. With the performers not bound to a central direction and each participating in the expression of the text on the basis of his or her own responsibility and capacity, it can also happen that different texts may be spoken at the same time and thus interwoven with each other. Through all of this, the texts are expressed in a contemporary and non-standard fashion, such that every performance is rightly experienced as a profound alteration of the text, although family resemblances remain strong.

THE VARIABILITY OF THE ARTISTIC PERFORMANCES

The artistic production reflects each performer's very personal experience of the text, experiences which are then clustered in joint musical and theatrical compositions. The performers search for the elasticity and mobility of the text, each choosing their own path and also aiming to incorporate more extreme views; for instance, by reciting a very devout text in a humorous way or expressing a longing for God through graceful melodies. Although every performer acts independently, all are nevertheless connected, as in a mobile, keeping each other focused, correcting one another and portraying a united,

harmonious interpretation of the text. Every performance is different, and no one performance is better or more accurate than the others. Instead, the performers continually express the text in different ways on the basis of their personal experience and mental state, and the particular contexts of each performance also help to shape the performance itself.

This artistic freedom serves to inspire all those involved in the performance, as was clear from the interviews. The artists were highly enthusiastic about the rehearsals, in which they continually pushed the boundaries of their abilities. They also had a great deal of energy for cooperation, as no one individual was obliged to adopt another's perspective, which could lead to frustration. Problems and questions were solved and answered through a process of mutual fine-tuning, which involved taking initiative and suggesting solutions, but also accepting others' solutions and making a constructive contribution to these. An improvisation—the meaning is in the word—shows the unpredictable, the unsuspected (Latin: *improvisus*); something being read and expressed in a new way. The performers repeated this process continually throughout the rehearsals, until they had acquired a large stock of possible solutions from which they could draw during a performance. No one improvisation is better than the other. There is no optimal version of this piece—there is, however, an infinite number of variants or variations, which each negotiate a different insight and as a whole are a manifestation of liveliness and creative capacity.

CONCLUSION

Generally accepted ideas about text variants (or variations) being close to each other in time and form should be abandoned. Rather we should see *Die dunkle Stille* as a real variant (respectively variation) of the *Epithalamium* of Jean de Saint-Samson. Three areas of variability come to the fore: (1) the personal appropriation of the text, (2) its translation and (3) its conversion into another medium.

(1) Without comparing themselves to medieval compilers, who created their own versions of meditative texts, the performers in fact behaved in a similar way. They made themselves co-authors of the text, albeit not to the same extent as the medieval compilers. The latter drew no distinction between the original text and their own contribution: they embraced the original text and incorporated it in their own work. The artists, however, indicate the difference between the old text and their own interpretation: the audience is witness to the interpretative performance of an old text, portrayed as another voice in a dialogue. And while the medieval compilers wrote down their texts, and in doing so gave it a fixed structure, the personal contribution of the performers in *Die dunkle Stille* is fleeting: the unique improvisations are never recorded in

writing, and rarely captured visually.⁵¹ In this way, the performers give greater weight to living in the present moment than to holding on to a fixed construct.

(2) It was essential that the performance could be delivered in the vernacular. In this musical theater, the text always plays a central role, serving as the basis for music and performance. The performers themselves felt the need to use their own language, so they could feel free in their improvisation. One of the performers, however, wished to learn the text in the original seventeenth century French. She would then recite Old French passages of the text at a moment of her choice. In this way, both languages were present, although the main language was German. The German translation was also essential for viewers; without it, Jean de Saint-Samson's *Epithalamium* would not be accessible to a German audience. The translation does not modify the original content in such a way that it conforms to the audience's taste; so it invites viewers to enter into another spiritual culture, which can be appealing precisely on account of its alienness.

(3) One of the ambitions of *Theater der Stille* is that its performers actually meditate during performances, rather than merely acting out a state of meditation. Such personal interaction with the text is what Schechner described as "believed-in" theatre.⁵² "Acting" is a merely external representation, and from an artistic and spiritual perspective is of minor interest to the group. Of much greater interest is the actual exploration of realistic spiritual possibilities.⁵³ So we might state that family resemblances stay quite strong although the artists convert the text into another medium: the text is performed through music and scenes. Viewers watch and often relate to the text through special moments in the game: the painful longing or the deep intimacy of love. Such moments arouse memories of their own spiritual experiences.⁵⁴

ADVANTAGES OF NEW PHILOLOGY FOR SPIRITUALITY RESEARCH

Die dunkle Stille by *Theater der Stille* and the Pseudo-Eckhart treatise have both been discussed within the intellectual space of New Philology—a space that allows the multilayered phenomenon of spirituality to be mapped in a non-hierarchical way. Without pre-established literary or theological norms for what might be seen as genuine, the genuine spiritual desire of *Die dunkle Stille* and the Pseudo-Eckhart treatise can come to the fore. The Pseudo-Eckhart treatise, considered uninteresting for a long time, proves to be revealing: it is in fact a fascinating rebirth of Eckhart's mysticism, framed by the spiritual climate of Brabant. And the musical theatre of Ursula Albrecht is in fact a captivating resurgence of Jean de Saint-Samson's *epithalamium*, based on the perception of German artists and their audience.

New Philology throws light on the kinship and disparity between spiritual texts. The intention of this research is not to discover equal spiritual experi-

ences but to look for modifications, which are bound to happen when spiritual texts are transmitted into new historical and socio-geographical contexts. Without modification, the transmission of a spiritual text would be neither authentic nor vital.

In recent decades, spiritual activities have boomed in the Western world, accompanied by a tidal wave of spiritual texts. The Netherlands, along with England and the United States, seems to be among the forerunners: more than a quarter of the populations of these countries sympathizes with spiritual ideas and practices.⁵⁵ The texts circulating among such groups are mostly variations on old religious literature or represent a mixture of various spiritual texts. Summarizing, we might say that New Philology not only proves to be helpful for clarifying modifications of these texts—that is, changes through (1) personal appropriation, (2) translation and (3) conversion into another medium—but also alerts us to the renewed spiritual vigor and the ever fresh breakthrough of spiritual life by walking the beaten track of “traditioning” our spiritual heritage.

NOTES

1. St. Nichols, “Introduction: Philology in a Manuscript Culture,” in *Speculum: A Journal of Medieval Studies* 65 (1990): 1–10.
2. H. U. Gumbrecht, *The Powers of Philology. Dynamics of Textual Scholarship* (Urbana & Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 38.
3. S. Fleischman, “Philology, Linguistics, and the discourse of the Medieval Text,” in *Speculum* 65 (1990): 19–37, at 25f.
4. Fleischman, “Philology,” 37.
5. J. Wolf, *New Philology / Textkritik. Ältere deutsche Literatur*, in C. Benthien and H.R. Velten, *Germanistik als Kulturwissenschaft. Eine Einführung in neue Theoriekonzepte* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 2002), 175–195, at 179.
6. St. Nichols, “Introduction: Philology,” 1 and 7.
7. St. Nichols, “Introduction: Philology,” 9.
8. M.D. Rust, *Imaginary Worlds in Medieval Books: Exploring the Manuscript Matrix* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 9.
9. See e.g. K. Waaijman, *Spiritualiteit: Vormen, Grondslagen, Methoden* (Kampen: Kok, 2000) and R.J. Woods, *Christian Spirituality* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006) for a strong focus on variations and plurality in Christian spirituality that also deals with women and children as bearers of spirituality; the ordinary and every-day forms of spirituality; anonymous, vernacular writers—both men and women; and the devotional practices of non-elitist groups.
10. P. Dinzelsbacher and D.R. Bauer, *Volksreligion im hohen und späten Mittelalter* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1990); K. Schreiner, *Laienfrömmigkeit im späten Mittelalter. Formen, Funktionen, politisch-soziale Zusammenhänge* (München: Oldenbourg, 1992); G. Walters Adams, *Visions in late medieval England : lay spirituality and sacred glimpses of the hidden worlds of faith* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).
11. Compare with P. Sheldrake, *A Brief History of Spirituality* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2013), 18.
12. See e.g. See Wolf, *New Philology*, 179; Fleischman, “Philology,” 25f.; St. Nichols, “Introduction: Philology,” 1 and 7.

13. E. Hense, *Zwischen Spiritualitäten. Intertextuelle Berührungen. Theologie der Spiritualität Band 9* (Münster: Lit, 2005).
14. Eckhart (around 1260–1328) is the most important representative of the Rhineland mystics.
15. See the 1800–1989 bibliography in Largier (1989) for more on this focus; see N. Largier, “Recent Work on Meister Eckhart. Positions, Problems, New Perspectives, 1990–1997,” in *Recherches de Théologie et Philosophie médiévales. Forschungen zur Theologie und Philosophie des Mittelalters* 65 (1998): 147–167. For the 1990–1997 bibliography. The bibliography covering recent years can be found at <http://www.meister-eckhart-gesellschaft.de/bibliographie.htm>.
16. E. Kwakkel and H. Mulder, “Quidam sermones. Mystiek proza van de Ferguut-kopiïst (Brussel, Koninklijke Bibliotheek, hs. 3067–73),” in *TNTL* 117 (2001): 151–165.
17. E. Hense and N. Kouwenhoven, *Waar de ziel haar naam verliest: handschrift Brussel KB 3067–3073 fol. 2r–9v: pareltjes van Nederlandse en Rijnlandse mystiek* (Leuven: Peeters, 2007).
18. Hense and Kouwenhoven, *Waar de ziel haar naam verliest*, 37–38.
19. Hense and Kouwenhoven, *Waar de ziel haar naam verliest*, 38–39.
20. Hense and Kouwenhoven, *Waar de ziel haar naam verliest*, 40.
21. Hense and Kouwenhoven, *Waar de ziel haar naam verliest*, 40–42.
22. Hense and Kouwenhoven, *Waar de ziel haar naam verliest*, 45–46.
23. Hense and Kouwenhoven, *Waar de ziel haar naam verliest*, 59–60.
24. Hense and Kouwenhoven, *Waar de ziel haar naam verliest*, 59–60.
25. Hense and Kouwenhoven, *Waar de ziel haar naam verliest*, 47–49.
26. Hense and Kouwenhoven, *Waar de ziel haar naam verliest*, 53–54.
27. Hense and Kouwenhoven, *Waar de ziel haar naam verliest*, 54–55.
28. Hense and Kouwenhoven, *Waar de ziel haar naam verliest*, 55.
29. Hense and Kouwenhoven, *Waar de ziel haar naam verliest*, 65–66.
30. Hense and Kouwenhoven, *Waar de ziel haar naam verliest*, 66–67.
31. Hense and Kouwenhoven, *Waar de ziel haar naam verliest*, 68–69.
32. See Meister Eckhart’s sermon *Beati pauperes spiritu* in Meister Eckhart, *Werke I and II*, in Niklaus Largier, ed. (Frankfurt: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1993).
33. K. Ruh, *Meister Eckhart*, in *Deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters. Verfasserlexikon Band 2* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1980), 331.
34. F. Pfeiffer, *Deutsche Mystiker des vierzehnten Jahrhunderts, II. Meister Eckhart* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1857).
35. R. Lievens, “De spekulatieve Vv–Gedichten,” in E. Cockx-Indestege & F. Hendrickx, eds., *Miscellanea Neerlandica. Opstellen voor Dr. J. Deschamps* (Leuven: Peeters, 1987), 71.
36. See Wolfgang Stämmler, Karl Langosch, Kurt Ruh, Christine Stöllinger-Löser, *Verfasserlexikon* 8, (Berlin: de Gruyter 1992), 577–582 for Pfeiffer’s treatises 14 and 15.
37. Hense and Kouwenhoven, *Waar de ziel haar naam verliest*, 35–71.
38. For more on the influence of Eckhart in Middle Dutch, see e.g. C. G. N. De Vooy, *Meister Eckhart en de Nederlandse Mystiek*, in: *Nederlandsch archief voor Kerkgeschiedenis* 3, 50–92, 176–194 and 265–290. J. Koch, *Meister Eckharts Weiterwirken im Deutsch-Niederländischen Raum im 14. und 15. Jahrhundert*, in J. Koch, ed. *Kleine Schriften Band 1* (Rome: Edizione di Storia e Letteratura, 1973), 429–455; A. Ubink, *De receptie van Meester Eckhart in de Nederlanden gedurende de middeleeuwen* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1978); F.-J. Schweitzer, *Die ethische Wirkung Meister Eckharts zwischen Laienfrömmigkeit und Häresie, besonders in den Niederlanden*, in K. Ruh, ed., *Abendländische Mystik im Mittelalter. Symposium Kloster Engelberg 1984* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1986), 80–93; Lievens, “De spekulatieve,” 71–75; G. Warnar, “Meester Eckhart, Walter van Holland en Jan van Ruusbroec. Historische en literaire betrekkin-

- gen in de Middelnederlandse mystiek,” OGE 69 (1995): 3–25; F. J. Schweitzer, *Meister Eckhart und der Laie. Ein antihierarchischer Dialog des 14. Jahrhundert aus den Niederlanden* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1997); and K. Ruh, *Geschichte der abendländischen Mystik* (München: Beck, 1990–1999), 19f.
39. Ubbink, *De receptie van Meester Eckhart*, 11ff.
 40. Ubbink, *De receptie van Meester Eckhart*, 163ff.
 41. Ubbink, *De receptie van Meester Eckhart*, 193ff.
 42. See Lievens, “De spekulatieve Vv-Gedichten,” 71.
 43. See Kwakkel and Mulder, “Quidam sermones,” 158 for more on the tradition of this exchange.
 44. Kwakkel and Mulder, “Quidam sermones,” 151–165.
 45. Hense and Kouwenhoven, *Waar de ziel haar naam verliest*, 35–71.
 46. Jean de Saint-Samson (1571–1636) is an extraordinarily interesting Carmelite mystic.
 47. Performances in Nijmegen, St. Peter (Black Forest), Gerleve, Cologne and Freiburg. See: www.theaterderstille.de.
 48. Compare with E. Hense and F. Maas, “Current Perspectives on Spirituality in Northwestern Europe,” *Spiritus* (2011): 67–83. Also see E. Hense, *Die Kammer der Andacht. Formbeschreibung einer Theaterproduktion* (Leuven: Peeters, 2007), 18–38 and 55–85 for a description of the approach used in the *Theater der Stille*.
 49. E. Hense and E. Klueing, *Die dunkle Stille—Das Epithalamium von Jean de Saint-Samson als spirituelles* (Dokumentationstheater, St. Ottilien: EOS, 2012).
 50. Compare the interviews with the singers and performers involved in “Die dunkle Stille” in August 2009; see Hense and Klueing, *Die dunkle Stille*.
 51. There are video recordings of the performances in Nijmegen, Cologne and Freiburg.
 52. R. Schechner, “Magnitudes of performance,” in Richard Schechner and Willa Appel, eds., *By means of performance: Intercultural studies of theatre and ritual* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 39–41.
 53. Also see my study on another production by this same company: Hense, *Die Kammer*, 21.
 54. After each performance, a talk was arranged between the artists and the viewers, so that the experience of these viewers could also be included.
 55. T. Bernts, G. Dekker and J. De Hart, *God in Nederland 1996–2006* (Kampen: Ten Have, 2007); G. Lynch, *The New Spirituality: An Introduction to Progressive Belief in the Twenty-First Century* (London: Tauris, 2007).