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Sean L. Field, Robert E. Lerner, and Sylvain Piron, eds., *Marguerite Porete et le Miroir des simples âmes: Perspectives historiques, philosophiques et littéraires*. Paris: Vrin, 2013. 368 pp. Notes, bibliography, and index. \$43.00 U.S. (pb). ISBN 978-2-7116-2524-6.

Review by Tanya Stabler Miller, Loyola University Chicago.

In recent years, few historical figures have fascinated and puzzled medievalists more than Marguerite Porete, a laywoman who was burned at the stake in 1310 for writing and circulating a book deemed heretical. Everything that is known about Marguerite, from her determination to teach and write in spite of ecclesiastical censure, to her refusal to respond to an inquisitor's questions, to her demeanor at her own execution (which reportedly moved witnesses to tears), attests to her extraordinary character. Trial records and chronicle accounts provide only the sketchiest of information about her life, trial, and death. Her book, known to modern scholars as *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, moreover, provides little information about its author. Theologically daring and stylistically complex, *The Mirror* was written in the French vernacular, weaving courtly themes and concepts with patristic, monastic, and scholastic references and arguments. Although Marguerite's inquisitor demanded that all extant copies be turned over to the Dominican prior in Paris and destroyed, French, Latin, Italian, and Middle English copies circulated throughout the Middle Ages.

To add to the complexity of this picture, for centuries the fate of Marguerite, labeled a *beguina* (or *beguine*) in her trial records, was isolated from the book she authored. Indeed, *The Mirror* circulated, without attribution, in its original Old French and in translations. Monastic communities owned copies of the *Mirror*, evidently believing the book to be perfectly orthodox. It was not until 1946 that the Italian scholar Romana Guarnieri made the connection between the woman identified as "Marguerite of Hainaut, called Porete" in the trial records and the book known as the *Mirror of Simple Souls*.

Since this reunion between author and book, scholarly research on Marguerite fragmented along disciplinary lines. Due to its status as a condemned book that later circulated alongside devotional literature, the *Mirror* has attracted a great deal of attention from scholars of medieval philosophy and theology. The breadth of its circulation and the number of translations demand philological expertise, particularly as scholars grapple to make sense of the omissions, additions, and discrepancies across the extant manuscripts. Historians, for their part, authored some of the earliest studies on Marguerite's case and its broader significance for understanding popular heresy and the inquisitorial process. Yet, historians have generally kept their distance in the wake of Robert Lerner's research on Marguerite and her defender Guiard of Cressonessart.[1]

This state of the field has changed in recent years with the publication of a number of influential studies by scholars reading and researching across disciplinary lines. In this spirit, Sean Field, Robert Lerner, and Sylvain Piron have made an important contribution to Porete studies with this fine collection of twelve essays (seven in French; five in English) by historians, literary scholars,

philosophers, and philologists. Originating in a conference, held in 2010, to mark the 700th anniversary of Marguerite's execution in Paris, this volume features essays that offer new insights into this fascinating figure and her tragic fate, and the significance and long-term influence of her book.

The editors begin with a thorough overview of the state of the field, relating the remarkable story of Romana Guarnieri's 1946 discovery and charting the trajectory of Porete research since. As the editors show, disciplinary preoccupations, crucial misreadings (specifically of key trial records), and a lack of interdisciplinarity have hampered scholarly understanding of Marguerite and her book. While noting the various paths along which Porete studies have traveled, the editors draw on the assembled expertise of the volume's contributors to point scholars towards future avenues of research.

The first essay, by historian John Van Engen, examines Marguerite as a "person of her Netherlandish region" (p. 27). Observing that it is all too easy to think of Marguerite as "French" (her trial took place in Paris and her book was originally written in Old French), Van Engen draws on his unparalleled knowledge of Netherlandish history and culture to illuminate Marguerite's understanding of social relations and engagement with local religious culture. Painting a rich portrait of the overlapping political and ecclesiastical interests in Valenciennes, as well as the thriving literary culture of the region, Van Engen illustrates the ways in which Marguerite--too often portrayed as an elitist loner--relates spiritual lessons utilizing concepts borrowed from the world of seigneurial lordship and urban mercantilism: the world of a laywoman of Valenciennes. Firmly contextualizing Marguerite in the social, political, and religious world in which she lived, Van Engen sets the stage for the remaining essays, bringing to life a breathing, thinking person who tenaciously sought support for her work and stubbornly refused to stop teaching, even while acknowledging that those who could truly understand its message did not need it.

Sylvain Piron's essay picks up on many of these themes, extracting philological clues in the *Mirror* to analyze its author's engagement with her religious and cultural milieu. Of particular importance is Piron's observation that Marguerite's book reflects her participation in the world of beguine spiritual expression (songs and poetry recitations); her knowledge of trouvère songs and romance literature; and her deep familiarity with scholastic culture as conveyed in sermons. These three milieus, traditionally examined separately, overlapped and intermingled in the cities of medieval Europe. Rather than try to pinpoint the precise texts that influenced Marguerite's *Mirror*, then, we ought to imagine Marguerite absorbing these modes of expression aurally, creating a work that was entirely distinctive in both style and content. Along with these observations, Piron presents a philological analysis of the *Mirror* that suggests that translations of Marguerite's book were moving, influencing, and being shaped by Latinate clerics at a rate generally unrecognized in the scholarship.

As the editors note, philological analysis of the *Mirror* has lagged behind other areas of Porete studies, despite the fact that grappling with the complex transmission history of the extant versions is arguably among the most important areas of research. Philologist Geneviève Hasenohr's impressive command of the manuscript tradition, then, justifies the inclusion of two contributions to this volume. In the first essay, Hasenohr returns to some of the points raised in her earlier work while engaging with Piron's arguments about the relationship between the Latin and French

versions of the *Mirror*. In response to Piron, who posited that the Middle French translation of the *Mirror*--the fifteenth-century Chantilly manuscript--was based on an intermediate Latin translation, Hasenohr takes a linguistic approach to the texts, arguing that Chantilly descended directly from the original Old French version. Hasenohr closes her essay with a useful appendix of corrections to the 1986 Guarnieri/Verdeyen edition of the *Mirror*.^[2]

Olivier Boulnois's essay turns to the question of Marguerite's understanding of freedom of the spirit. Noting rightly that scholars have approached Marguerite's book through the lens of its condemnation as "heretical," Boulnois examines the central themes in Marguerite's book as part of a conversation engaging with monastic and scholastic writings. Of particular significance is Boulnois's discussion of the afterlife of the condemned articles cited in Marguerite's trial documents as they were digested into the Vienne Decrees and later fueled Jean Gerson's condemnations of affective mysticism. Approaching the *Mirror* from a theological perspective, Boulnois shows that Marguerite's discussion of the progression of the Soul into God and the possibility of spiritual perfection had precursors in Cistercian writings, namely the *Lettre aux frères du Mont-Dieu* of William of Saint-Thierry. Her stance on the virtues and the will, moreover, echoed aspects of Peter Abelard's theory of intention.

Camille de Villeneuve examines the *Mirror*'s radical understanding of Pure Love with its emphasis on eliminating the "debt" incurred in the love relationship between God and the Soul. In an insightful, focused essay, Villeneuve compares the fifth and sixth stages of the soul's spiritual ascent, as described in the *Mirror*. In the fifth stage, the Soul, since not yet freed of its will to sin or not sin, and God, who in his goodness owes his Love to the Soul as its Creator, remain in a kind of amorous negotiation. This stage usefully compares with the next, wherein the Soul renounces these negotiations altogether, acquiescing to the possibility of a relationship in which love is not guaranteed. To achieve true reciprocity and freedom, the Soul must open itself to renouncing even love itself.

Jean-René Valette's contribution focuses on the influence of courtly themes and modes of thought on Marguerite's *Mirror*. In a useful, detailed analysis of the emergence of a "declericalized" spiritualized romance literature in the thirteenth century, Valette offers a way to understand the influence of courtly literature on Marguerite's *Mirror*. Drawing attention to Marguerite's deep familiarity with courtly terminology and themes, as well as specific works, such as the *Roman de la Rose*, Valette joins scholars such as Barbara Newman and Zan Kocher, who have shown that Marguerite was a brilliant lyricist and writer who drew freely and creatively on courtly themes to describe mystical union with God.

In "Addenda on an Angel," historian Robert Lerner returns to the case of Marguerite Porete's defender, Guiard of Cressonessart, the self-styled "Angel of Philadelphia," on whom he wrote in 1976.^[3] That essay, which included a translation of the documents concerning Guiard's trial, has remained, with the exception of Sean Field's recent book, the only study on the man who mysteriously emerged in Paris to defend Marguerite.^[4] In the "Addenda," Lerner considers aspects of Guiard's case anew. While Lerner once doubted that Guiard was a cleric, observing that Guiard was "acting like a beghard," a fresh analysis of the trial records yields evidence of Guiard's Latinity and theological learning, both markers of clerical education. This insight also leads to a reconsideration of the specialized Latin terminology present in the trial records. To conclude,

Lerner includes evidence of a wider response to Guiard's claims and activities in a letter by the Catalan physician, theologian, and reformer Arnald of Villanova.

William Courtenay's essay centers on what the notarial records reveal--and obscure--about the role university masters played in royal cases. Drawing on cases initiated by the royal court in 1303 (concerning the conflict between Philip the Fair and Pope Boniface VIII) and 1307 (the proceedings against the Knights Templar), Courtenay shows that royal agents staged legal processes to guarantee the result the king sought and to give the impression that the king and his agents acted only after seeking the counsel of learned men. Documents were crafted and preserved, moreover, to give the appearance of unanimity for the king's position and to attach the reputations of Paris's faculty of theology to royal policies and decisions. In laying out this background, Courtenay turns to the trials of Marguerite Porete and Guiard of Cressonessart, demonstrating that these strategies were deployed in these cases to guarantee the desired outcome.

Sean Field's essay focuses specifically on William of Paris's handling of Marguerite's case. In a close analysis of the extant trial documents, Field shows that William, with regard to Marguerite, conducted two separate inquiries: one focused on the question of Marguerite's guilt and another on the orthodoxy of her book. Drawing on Courtenay's findings concerning the Crown's strategic use of theological expertise and calculated shaping of official documentation, Field's essay makes sense of the puzzling omissions in the trial documents. Humiliated by a papal rebuke for his handling of the Templar case, William proceeded against Marguerite in such a way as to project personal competency and unanimity for the judgment he sought. Together, Courtenay's and Field's contributions demonstrate the importance of reading the trial records alongside contemporary cases. While much of the scholarship on Marguerite Porete has foregrounded the theologians' role in condemning her, close examination of the inquisitor's circumstances and context show that William of Paris deliberately shaped the record to create the impression that the theologians convicted Marguerite and approved her fate.

Marleen Cré considers the Middle English version of the *Mirror*, which has gotten much attention in recent years, particularly since the publication of Robert Lerner's 2010 essay arguing that the Middle English translation is the closest to Marguerite's original French version.[5] Even before Lerner's study, the Middle English version was of great interest to scholars interested in identifying connections between the *Mirror* and other mystical works of English provenance, including *Cloud of Unknowing*. Cré's essay traces the influence of the *Mirror* on Middle English writings, uncovering textual networks connecting the Middle English version glossed by "M.N." and other Middle English compilations (specifically the Westminster compilation) to a literary "triangle" encompassing the Carthusian Charterhouses of London and Sheen, and the nearby Bridgettine Abbey of Syon. Establishing similar preoccupations in both texts, Cré notes a shared inclination to present radical and conventional spiritual advice side by side.

The volume closes with the second of two essays by Geneviève Hasenohr. This final contribution centers on a close analysis of *La discipline d'amour divine*, a devotional work by an unnamed Celestine monk dating from the late fifteenth century. *La discipline* directly engages with the *Mirror* in order to counter what the anonymous author perceives as the *Mirror*'s more dangerous or misleading passages. This finding, alongside codicological and paleographical analysis, strongly suggests that the Middle French version of the *Mirror* known as Chantilly is of an earlier

provenance than scholars have generally thought. Hasenohr closes her essay with excerpts from the prologue and several chapters from *La discipline*, all featuring substantial extracts from the *Mirror*.

Overall, this volume presents some of the best new research on Marguerite and her book, with plenty of suggestions for and guidance on future research. It will be of interest to a broad range of scholars, from specialists in French vernacular literature to historians of medieval heresy. Although some of the essays might by themselves seem of interest only to specialists, the editors are to be commended for their careful organization and presentation of the pieces, many of which are in dialogue with and shed light on each another. As a whole, the essays demonstrate the need for Porete scholars to read across disciplinary lines in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the life, work, and fate of this extraordinary woman.

LIST OF ESSAYS

Sean L. Field, Robert E. Lerner, and Sylvain Piron, “Marguerite Porete et son *Miroir*. Perspectives historiographiques”

John Van Engen, “Marguerite (Porete) of Hainaut and the Medieval Low Countries”

Sylvain Piron, “Marguerite, entre les béguines et les maîtres”

Geneviève Hasenohr, “Retour sur les caractères linguistiques du manuscrit de Chantilly et de ses ancêtres”

Olivier Boulnois, “Qu’est-ce que la liberté de l’esprit? La parole de Marguerite et la raison du théologien”

Camille de Villeneuve, “Au-delà de la dette: la dissolution de la relation d’amour dans le *Miroir des simples âmes* de Marguerite Porete”

Jean-René Valette, “Marguerite Porete et le discours courtois”

Robert E. Lerner, “Addenda on an Angel”

William J. Courtenay, “Marguerite’s Judges: The University of Paris in 1310”

Sean L. Field, “William of Paris’s Inquisitions against Marguerite Porete and her Book”

Marleen Cré, “The *Mirror of Simple Souls* in Middle English Revisited: The Translator and the Compiler”

Geneviève Hasenohr, “La seconde vie du *Miroir des simples âmes* en France: Le Livre de la discipline d’amour (XVe-XVIIIe s.)”

NOTES

[1] Robert E. Lerner, *The Heresy of the Free Spirit in the Later Middle Ages* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1972).

[2] Romana Guarnieri and Paul Verdeyen, eds. *Margaretae Porete Speculum simplicium animarum / Marguerite Porete, Le mirouer des simples ames*, CCCM 69 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1986).

[3] Robert E. Lerner, "An 'Angel of Philadelphia' in the Reign of Philip the Fair: The Case of Guiard of Cressonessart," in eds. William C. Jordan, Bruce McNab, and Teofilo F. Ruiz, *Order and Innovation in the Middle Ages: Essays in Honor of Joseph R. Strayer* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1976), 343-364.

[4] Sean L. Field, *The Beguine, the Angel, and the Inquisitor: The Trials of Marguerite Porete and Guiard of Cressonessart* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012).

[5] Robert E. Lerner, "New Light on the Mirror of Simple Souls," *Speculum* 85 (2010): 91-116.

Tanya Stabler Miller
Loyola University Chicago
tstabler@luc.edu

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