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Sean L. Field, *The Beguine, the Angel, and the Inquisitor: The Trials of Marguerite Porete and Guiard of Cressonessart*. Notre Dame, Ind.: Notre Dame University Press, 2012. x + 407 pp. \$45.00 U.S. (pb). ISBN 10: 0-268-02892-3.

Review by Joanne Maguire Robinson, University of North Carolina at Charlotte.

The academic page-turner is a rarity. The prose in historical monographs is often serviceable but not engaging, and meticulous textual work seems to result, all too often, in plodding prose. Sean Field has done readers a tremendous service by crafting a book that stands apart from the crowd for its clear, captivating writing style coupled by a satisfying depth of scholarship. This book is a signal example of a text that can be appreciated and enjoyed by both scholars and more casual readers. The overall structure of the book, which focuses on each of the three main characters and presents them in parallel chapters, even allows for reading chapters separately (although readers will be rewarded by reading from cover to cover). As one of the few historical studies of the contemporary world of Marguerite Porete, this volume is a welcome complement to the primarily theological and literary studies published in recent years.

The three protagonists in this captivating history are the “Beguine” Marguerite Porete (d. 1310), the “Angel” Guiard de Cressonessart, and the Inquisitor William of Paris (d. 1313/14). Field reconstructs and recounts in parallel the intersecting stories of these figures, all of whom were caught up in the interconnecting worlds of king and popes, most notably Philip IV “The Fair,” king of France (d. 1314), and Pope Clement V (1305-14). Field’s work on Guiard and William adds significant depth to figures often overlooked by scholars. This author accomplishes his goal of rectifying the scholarly history of chronological and other misinterpretations of Marguerite’s trial and the figures associated with it. He succeeds in uncovering “what problems [the extant texts] attempt to hide with their silences” (p. 25). And he does so with style and engaging prose.

Although Field gives equal weight to all three main characters in this story, it is clear that the story revolves around Marguerite Porete, author of *Le miroir des simples ames anienties et qui seulement demourent en vouloir et desir d’amour*, which Field describes aptly as a “swirling exploration of spiritual nonbeing” (p. 2). The text is most often classed in the genre of *mystique courtoise* or beguine mysticism, terms that classify texts written by women in vernacular languages and that focus on love as a central topic. Unlike her contemporary beguine authors, however, Marguerite did not base her authority as an author on visions or locutions or on any solid biographical claim. Indeed, biographical details about Marguerite are scarce if not absent from the *Mirror*, and Field reconstructs what he can of her intentions and motivations by examining texts outside her book. The *Mirror* itself survived its first and second condemnations, circulating in Old and Middle French editions that were then translated into Latin, Middle English, and Italian. As Field astutely notes, the texts that were condemned and those that survived after Marguerite’s death are not a single, unchanging entity that scholars can take at face value. Too many scholars (myself included) have overlooked the realities of a complicated manuscript tradition in doing close textual work. Field’s focus on texts outside the *Mirror* and his keen attention to the manuscript tradition help him wade through these sometimes muddy waters.

As Field makes clear, the story of the beguine, the Angel, and the inquisitor culminates in the execution of the beguine on June 1, 1310 at the Place de Grève in Paris, but the story is far more interesting and complicated than that single event. It is certainly true that without Marguerite, these three individuals would likely not have come together. As Field points out, the beguine forced her way into inquisitorial attention by continuing to revise and circulate her book even after it was publicly condemned and burned. Marguerite was, then, at least in part, responsible for earning the dubious distinction of being the first woman put to death for mystical heresy in the western church. Her trial and execution are often considered watersheds in church history. Indeed, Marguerite's execution can be seen to have laid the groundwork for the persecution of so-called "Free Spirits" as well as others pursuing religious life outside of order approved by the papacy. The association of Marguerite with Guiard de Cressonessart arguably encouraged the papal condemnation of apocalyptic movements inspired by the work of Joachim of Fiore.

One of the most satisfying parts of this book focuses on Guiard of Cressonessart, a character usually overshadowed by the more well-known Marguerite. Field does a fine job of showing that Guiard, who could easily be dismissed by contemporaries and modern scholars as mentally ill, held beliefs that fit in quite neatly with a tradition of apocalyptic expectation beginning with the work of Joachim of Fiore (d. 1202). Guiard cast himself in this drama as the Angel of Philadelphia, a biblical figure sent to defend the persecuted in the end times. Guiard appeared, it seems, out of nowhere, having no apparent connection to Marguerite prior to her arrival in Paris. He then defended Marguerite as what Field calls "an apocalyptic activist" until he recanted very late in the proceedings, only to face a sentence of lifelong imprisonment (ending, as best we know, in an early death). To Field, Guiard's involvement with Marguerite's trial gave both church and royal powers reason to intensify their condemnation of movements inspired by Joachite apocalypticism. Field discusses the significance of Guiard's leather belt (*zona pellicea*) at length, arguing that it symbolized Guiard's status on par with Elijah or John the Baptist. The author includes a translation of Arnau of Villanova's "Letter to Those Wearing the Leather Belt" for readers interested in this topic. Overall, Field paints Guiard as a hero of sorts, one who condemned persecution and challenged a church he believed had failed its most loyal members.

Field also takes up the pivotal role of the inquisitor, William of Paris, who set in motion the events that culminated in Marguerite's execution and Guiard's imprisonment. As with his treatments of Marguerite and Guiard, Field is careful to strike a reasonable balance between personal motivation and external pressure in the decisions William made over time. Marguerite was first condemned in the late thirteenth century by her first inquisitor, Guido of Collemezzo, Bishop of Cambrai. She seemed at first to comply with Guido's order to cease and desist, but she soon changed her mind and the text, adding to the original condemned text and soliciting the support of several theologians. Her second inquisitor, William of Paris, is a key player in Field's account. It was William who was alerted to Marguerite's insistence on making new copies of her book in a quest to find authorities who might validate her writing, and it was William who acted on those findings. Field shows how William, who climbed the ladders of power to become (simultaneously) confessor to the king and papal inquisitor, wielded unprecedented influence because of those dual offices. Loyal to his Dominican roots and training in canon law, he authored several works of his own and enthusiastically took on the role of defending the church against heresy, as shown by his involvement in Philip IV's crackdown on the Templars and investigations targeting Jews. He also felt pulled between loyalty to pope and crown, and the resulting balancing act likely increased the pressure to resolve the affair of Marguerite and Guiard. This trial, Field argues convincingly, provided an opportunity for William to regain his lost status as inquisitor and a reputation damaged by earlier decisions. As Field is always careful to note, each of these figures was a victim of circumstance as well as a creator of his or her own destiny.

Field does a fine job showing how, in his words, "all three historical actors at the center of this story were swept up in the ideological juggernaut that a decade of unrelenting royal propaganda had set in motion" (p. 26). Field is in his element as he works his way through archival texts, drawing parallels and

making reasonable inferences and suppositions always couched in the most careful language. Describing the primary sources as “at once quite wide and very narrow,” he makes the most of what remains on public record, specifically seven documents found in the Archives nationales de Paris, “folded up in the bottom of carton J428” (p. 24). His footnotes, which take up about 115 pages, are informative and engaging. Field makes guarded claims when the evidence warrants, but he is also quite willing to stake his claim on several key elements. His work here will be foundational for historical studies of the trials of Marguerite Porete and Guiard de Cressonessart.

This book will appeal most readily to those interested in the historical milieu and biographical details of the three main characters, but it should also appeal to those interested in medieval canon law, heresy, ecclesiology, royal politics, fringe religious movements, and medieval inquisitorial procedures. Field’s work is refreshingly free of theoretical baggage or field-specific jargon. Many students and scholars will appreciate his translations of contemporary chroniclers’ accounts and trial documents (included in the appendices), some of which appear in full translation for the first time. This exquisitely detailed, largely chronological history of the political, ecclesial, and social milieu surrounding the execution of Marguerite Porete is a welcome addition to any historian’s library.

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