
H-France Review Vol. 9 (February 2009), No. 28

Kathryn A. Edwards and Susie Speakman Sutch, trans. and eds., *Leonarde's Ghost: Popular Piety and "The Appearance of a Spirit" in 1628*. Sixteenth Century Essays & Studies v. 82. Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, 2008. xiii + 125pp. Maps, figures, notes, bibliography. \$19.95 U.S. (pb). ISBN 978-1-931112-79-6.

Review by Katherine Lualdi, University of Southern Maine.

As someone deep in the process of preparing a source in translation for classroom use, I read *Leonarde's Ghost: Popular Piety and "The Appearance of a Spirit" in 1628* with heightened interest. Among the challenges any such project faces is how to make an historical text approachable, especially for an undergraduate audience, without diminishing its sense of difference as a product of time, place, and circumstance far removed from our own. Kathryn A. Edwards and Susie Speakman Sutch navigate this challenge beautifully, producing a book that is sure to appeal to non-specialists and specialists alike. The centerpiece of the book is "The History of the Appearance of a Spirit," which recounts the haunting of Huguette Roy in 1628 in the city of Dole, the capital of the Franche-Comté. Originally written in French by a local priest, Christophe Mercier, "The History" survives in a late seventeenth-century manuscript copy now located in the city's library. Despite the contemporary renown the haunting enjoyed, it soon faded from memory. Edwards and Sutch aim to return the story to the spotlight with this translation because, they assert, "it opens a rare window into the spirituality, piety, and daily lives of 'ordinary' people in early modern Europe" (p. 2).

By "rare" Edwards and Sutch are referring to the book's content, with its unusual mix of details, both mundane and extraordinary, and its socially diverse cast of characters, and to its nature as a source. Much of what scholars know about "popular" religion is drawn from legal proceedings, which, for all their richness, have noteworthy limitations.[1] As a first-hand account by someone who knew his subject well, Mercier's manuscript is another type of source entirely. Not only did he witness many of the events he describes in "The History," but he also implies that he was Huguette's confessor. Although he certainly was not an "objective" observer in the modern journalistic sense, his account vividly captures Huguette's story in motion and in the moment.

While the story of the haunting itself is intriguing and entertaining, the way in which Edwards and Sutch set the scene in their introduction is equally important to the book's value. Here they draw on contemporary records to introduce the main characters of the story, notably Mercier and Huguette, while painting a picture of the haunting's broader social, political and religious backdrop. They do so by organizing the introduction around specific topics pertinent to the local context, such as Dole and its region, urban and family life, and Catholic reform and traditional religion. Their approach makes the background information easy to navigate, especially for a general audience, and provides useful signposts to help readers forge their own paths of interpretation and analysis through "The History."

In choosing their topical signposts, Edwards and Sutch use the story's geographic and social setting to guide them. At the time of the haunting, Dole was a small yet thriving city with a strong Catholic identity. Local modes of piety drew upon a widespread belief in the presence and power of the supernatural—both divine and demonic—in the everyday world. Although this belief had deep

historical roots in the Christian tradition, it moved to the fore of Catholic consciousness in the religiously fragmented landscapes of late sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe, as Craig Harline and other scholars have shown.^[2] Thus even if Dole was firmly within the Catholic fold, confessional strife in neighboring territories made the city's secular and spiritual leaders well aware of the need to define and defend Catholic orthodoxy. People such as Huguette claiming to have direct access to supernatural phenomena were especially susceptible to scrutiny. Were her visions real or imagined? Did they come from God or the devil? According to Mercier, these were just some of the questions Huguette and her ghostly visitor had to answer before the story reached its denouement.

Mercier was one of many local residents who got swept up in the spirit's daily visits. His account of their experiences captures the immediacy of the events while crafting them into a simultaneously suspense-filled and didactic narrative. He divides it into seventeen chapters covering the roughly fifty days of the haunting, with plot twists and turns along the way. The story begins on April 7, 1628 with the arrival of the spirit at the bedside of Huguette, a poor, sick young woman in the midst of a difficult pregnancy. At this point in the story, the spirit presents herself simply as Huguette's helper; she tidies Huguette's modest home while providing her with companionship and comfort.

News of the visit spread that very day, and soon people from all walks of life entered and exited the stage of Huguette's drama, including city councilors, neighborhood women, Jesuit fathers, and, of course, Mercier himself. Only Huguette could hear and see the spirit, however, which fueled the community's suspicion and fascination. Halfway into the manuscript, and weeks into the haunting, the ghost reveals herself to be Huguette's aunt, Leonarde, who needs Huguette's help as much as Huguette needs hers. She is a soul languishing in purgatory and, according to God's command, only Huguette can gain her entry into paradise. In the closing chapters of "The History," we see Huguette join with the community in prayers and pilgrimage to release Leonarde from her suffering. Their efforts bring the story to a triumphant close: bidding Huguette a final farewell, Leonarde departs to be crowned in heaven. Throughout his retelling, Mercier casts Huguette and Leonarde as models of Christian piety for their faith in the power of good works to achieve salvation for the living and the dead.

In this sense, Mercier reveals as much about his own spiritual concerns and commitments as he does about Huguette's, a point Edwards and Sutch themselves make in their introduction (p. 6). As a priest, he was invested in the authority of the Catholic clergy to shape and guide lay religious beliefs and practices. Hence the parade of clergymen who put Leonarde through various spiritual tests to prove her goodness in decidedly Catholic terms: they order Leonarde to kiss a crucifix, to kneel before relics, to say an act of contrition. For her part, Huguette plays the willing intermediary, relaying the priests' orders and describing the spirit's response. Even when Leonarde and Huguette seem to step out of bounds, Mercier is quick to come to their defense. He clearly believed Huguette and Leonarde's journey together was divinely instituted and as such, was both orthodox and authentic; in legitimizing their story, he was, in effect, legitimizing his own.

Yet this is only one of many overlapping levels of engagement this text provides. On the one hand, Huguette fits neatly into the mold of the pious, humble, obedient woman following the guidance of her male superiors. Here culturally based assumptions about the nature of women were clearly at work. These assumptions were precisely what made women claiming to have spiritual power potentially threatening, especially in post-Reformation Europe.^[3] On the other hand, "The History" infuses Huguette with a genuine voice and sense of agency. She did not always step aside and let others take control; she pushed back occasionally, by defying a priest's orders, for instance, or devising her own tests for Leonarde. Furthermore, for all the extraordinariness of her experience, she also comes across as remarkably ordinary and real. She had a house to clean, food to cook, a husband and children to care for; she relied on neighbors for help and friendship; and like them, she relied on local clergy for spiritual guidance and intercession. In this way, *Leonarde's Ghost* offers a multifaceted view of its characters'

world and should be required reading for anyone interested in exploring the vitality and complexity of early modern Catholic society.

NOTES

[1] See Edward Muir and Guido Ruggiero, eds., *History from Crime* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994). Muir and Ruggiero assert that, while criminal records can elucidate broader social and cultural contexts, authority has “polluted” their content: “Everyone who speaks during a criminal procedure does so under the constraints of authority, which means that all speech has been conditioned by threats of punishment, the fear of torture, the influence of well connected persons, and the need of the regime to make criminal sentences exemplary” (p. ix). None of these constraints bound the characters in Huguette’s story, even if “authority” (notably clerical) was omnipresent.

[2] Craig Harline, *Miracles at the Jesus Oak: Histories of the Supernatural in Reformation Europe* (New York: Doubleday, 2003).

[3] Edwards and Sutch address this topic in their introduction (pp. 37-38). See also Jodi Bilinkoff, *Related Lives: Confessors and Their Female Penitents, 1450-1750* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2005). As Bilinkoff notes, early modern priests wrote about the spiritual experiences of their female penitents at least in part to control and legitimize them; a similar dynamic was clearly at work in “The History.”

Katharine J. Lualdi
University of Southern Maine
klualdi@maine.rr.com

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ISSN 1553-9172