

Marguerite in Champagne

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The life of Marguerite, *dicta* Porete, is more than elusive. The only sure evidence we have regards the date of her condemnation and that of the book she wrote, both pronounced on May 31, 1310 by the Dominican inquisitor William of Paris. Handed over to the Paris provost, her execution took place the next day, on the Place de Grève. The fact is recorded by the Saint-Denis Benedictine continuator of William of Nangis, the semi-official voice of the Capetian crown, who adds that her “noble and devout” behavior brought pious and tearful compassion to the hearts of eyewitnesses.¹ The inquisitor’s sentence indicates that she had been kept in custody for “almost a year and a half”, refusing to take an oath and respond to the interrogation, and that an earlier condemnation of her book had taken place at Valenciennes while Guido da Collemezzo was bishop of Cambrai.² According to the dates of his presence in his diocese, this action must have happened between summer 1297 and autumn 1305.³ A recent study has demonstrated beyond any reasonable doubt that Marguerite is indeed the author of this *Mirror of Simple Souls*.⁴ Various evidence, both historical and linguistic, indicate her strong degree of relationship to Valenciennes but no family ties have ever been identified there with any certainty. Her book must have been completed by the time it was praised by Godfrey of Fontaines, master of theology at Paris, whose extended stay in Liège is attested in 1301-03. All further precision is mere speculation. Her birthdate is sometimes suggested as around 1250 but there is no compelling reason to prefer that date to any other year up to, say, 1275. The only criteria for such dating is that the *Mirror* records a complex spiritual experience that went through different phases and is not likely to have been produced by a woman under the age of 25. Yet, the argument I wish to pursue in this article is that more information can be obtained by pressing more consistently a number of clues. The

¹ *Chronique latine de Guillaume de Nangis*, ed. H. Géraud (Paris: Renouard, 1843), 1: 379-80, translation in Sean L. Field, *The Beguine, the Angel, and the Inquisitor: The Trials of Marguerite Porete and Guiard of Cressonessart* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012), 234-35. For variants of this account in different chronicles compiled at Saint-Denis, see Elizabeth A.R. Brown, “Marguerite Porete, John Baconthorpe and the Chroniclers of Saint-Denis”, *Mediaeval Studies* 75 (2013): 307-44.

² Field, *The Beguine*, 226-31.

³ Pascal Montaubin, “‘Avec de l’Italie qui descendrait l’Escault’: Guido da Collemezzo, évêque de Cambrai (1296-1306),” in *Liber Largitorius: Études d’histoire médiévale offertes à Pierre Toubert par ses élèves*, ed. Dominique Barthélemy and Jean-Marie Martin (Genève: Droz, 2003), 477-502, at 486.

⁴ S. L. Field, Robert E. Lerner, Sylvain Piron, “A Return to the Evidence for Marguerite Porete’s Authorship of the *Mirror of Simple Souls*,” *Journal of Medieval History* 43 (2017): 153-173.

strongest reason that justified her final condemnation as relapsed heretic was that she circulated anew her book to various people and especially to the bishop of Châlons-en-Champagne. Despite the very thorough and minute study of all the trial documents that Sean Field has recently produced, this one detail has not yet received full attention. Why Châlons? Why should she have communicated her book precisely to that bishop?

Internal evidence

Before turning to Châlons, we first need to assess what sort of biographical information can be inferred from Marguerite's own writings. According to a suggestion initially made by Peter Dronke and strongly endorsed by many eminent scholars, from Bernard McGinn to Sean Field, it has become common to consider that the final chapters of the *Mirror*, following the "explicit" that marks the end of the poem counted as ch. 122, represent an addition to her book that Marguerite would have made after her first condemnation by the bishop of Cambrai.⁵ Furthermore, a number of those scholars consider that only at that stage would she have sought approval from various theological authorities. Yet both of these hypotheses have no firm textual grounding. As Robert Lerner has remarked, it is likely that the "explicit" only marks the ending of the poem.⁶ Before making any supposition on a composition of the book in different stages, it is necessary to observe the nature of Marguerite's writings. The *Mirror of simple souls* does not constitute a well organized and unitary work. It should rather be conceived as a *liber unicum*, a volume that gathers in one piece various records of a complex personal experience. Within this whole, different literary forms are employed. The text is written in both prose and poetry, under the form of dialogue or with a more straightforward expression of the author in the first person. In its actual form, it apparently comprises two different parts. The first and longer one is devoted to the ascent of the soul to a state of freedom and annihilation, culminating in a poem that is counted as ch. 122. The second, instead, begins as a teaching "for the forlorn who ask the way to the land of freedom"; it is thus addressed to those who are not yet ready to embark on the experiences described in the first part.⁷ No compelling evidence suggests a continuous writing process indicating that this second part would necessarily postdate the first one. Instead, different stylistic and linguistic

⁵ Field, *The Beguine*, 47-49; Peter Dronke, *Woman Writers in the Middle Ages. A Critical Study of Texts from Perpetua [† 203] to Marguerite Porete [† 1310]* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 218.

⁶ Lerner, "New Light on The *Mirror of Simple Souls*", *Speculum* 85 (2010): 100.

⁷ Marguerite Porete, *Le Mirouer des simples ames/Speculum simplicium animarum*, ed. Romana Guarnieri, Paul Verdeyen (Brepols: Turnhout, 1986) 100 ; *The Mirror of Simple Souls*, transl. Edmund Colledge, J.C. Marler, J. Grant (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999) 154.

clues rather point towards a more complex stratification of various textual units within the *Mirror*.⁸

The initial chapter announces that at some point, “before this book ends”, it will be explained how the creature has to pass through seven noble states before reaching perfection.⁹ This reference goes to ch. 118, which in turn starts by recording what has been initially promised.¹⁰ This chapter, by far the longest of the whole book, has the form of a spiritual treatise on the ascent of the soul through seven degrees. Another striking feature is that ch. 118 does not use any form derived from the scholastic neologism “adnichilatio”, but rather employs the more classic expression of “being reduced to nothingness” (*ad nichilum reduci*).¹¹ This lexical peculiarity allows us to place the initial composition of this short treatise at a comparatively early date, when Marguerite had not yet coined her distinctive notion of the “annihilated soul”. The dialogue between Love and Reason, with interventions of various other characters interspersed, can be perceived as a long didactic introduction to this spiritual teaching. Other sections of the book that entail similar traits (lack of “ames adnienties” and of a dialogic form) could also be considered as materials predating the wider composition of the book. Such is clearly the case of ch. 117 that presents the dialectic of God’s goodness and the creature’s badness in a less sophisticated way than the fifth stage of ch. 118. The same judgment also applies to the first textual units of the second part (ch. 123-132). There, Marguerite records a number of thoughts and reflections that had been useful for her at an early stage, until she could leave a state of spiritual infancy. References to childhood mark the beginning and the end of these chapters. The “considerations for the forlorn” did her good when, being one of them, she “lived on milk and pap and babbled like a babe”.¹² After presenting seven considerations devoted to various mediations towards God (123-129), the following section also refers back to an earlier period, “in the days when [she] did not know how to endure or to comport [her]self”.¹³ Introduced by a set of addresses to the Lord (130),

⁸ S. Piron, “Marguerite, entre les béguines et les maîtres”, in *Marguerite Porete et le Miroir des simples âmes. Perspectives historiques, philosophiques et littéraires*, ed. Field, Lerner, Piron (Paris: Vrin, 2013), 69-101.

⁹ Marguerite Porete, *Le Mirouer*, 14: “Ils sont sept estres de noble estre desquieulx creature reçoit estre, se elle se dispouse a tous estres, ains qu’elle viengne a parfait estre ; et vous dirons comment, ains que ce livre fine.”

¹⁰ Marguerite Porete, *Le Mirouer*, 316: “J’ay promis, dit ceste Ame, des l’emprinse d’Amour, de dire aucune chose des sept estaz, que nous appellons estres.” For the sake of clarity, scholars are used to refer to the division in chapters found in the Chantilly manuscript. It should be remembered that this division is peculiar to this specific late copy, and does not represent Marguerite’s original choice.

¹¹ S. Piron, “Adnichilatio”, in *Mots médiévaux offerts à Ruedi Imbach*, ed. I. Atucha, D. Calma, C. König-Pralong, I. Zavattero (Porto: FIDEM, 2011), 23-31.

¹² Marguerite Porete, *Le Mirouer*, 348: “... lesquex regards moult de bien me firent ou temp que j’estoie des marriz, que je vivoie de lait et de papin et que encore je sotoioie”, transl. 154..

¹³ The Latin version (p. 373) contains a proposition, “quantumcumque hoc fuerit ludus puerorum”, that is lost in the Chantilly manuscript.

Marguerite recalls some paradoxical meditations whose solution, she says, “have brought me out of the days of my childhood”.¹⁴ Entering the Land of Freedom, Love greeted her with a song (132) after which she “began to emerge from [her] childhood, and [her] spirit began to grow old”.¹⁵ Such statements refer of course to a spiritual coming of age. Yet their autobiographical nature strongly supports the view that Marguerite is incorporating here some earlier material into a new textual layer. The clearest evidence is provided by a return of the dialogic form and the use of “ame anientie” as soon as ch. 133.¹⁶ Therefore, both sections of the *Mirror*, before and after ch. 122, betray marks of a complex composition.

Reflecting on the textual history of this book, we should first of all be amazed that it survived at all in spite of the many tribulations it went through. This very survival points to the fact that Marguerite was not in total isolation and could find some support and understanding. The earliest case we positively know of appears one generation later. The young noble Watelet de Masny, born in or around Valenciennes in 1310, was part of the retinue that accompanied Philippa of Hainaut to England on the occasion of her marriage with Edward III in 1327. Pursuing a brilliant career at Edward’s court as Walter de Manny, making occasional returns to Hainaut, he probably is the person who provided the copy of the *Mirror* out of which the Middle English translation was produced – most likely by Michael of Northburgh, bishop of London, around 1350.¹⁷ This circulation suggests a possibility that, in Marguerite’s lifetime, some people among the local nobility had developed an interest in her writings. By contrast, it should be emphasized that book culture was more limited among beguines. To take one point of comparison in the same time and area, Marie des Coles, a wealthy beguine from Cambrai, drew her last will in 1305, distributing pieces of land and a house between her nephew and the Chapter of Sainte-Croix. Among the garments and cloth she left to her family, friends, a servant, some poor women of her street and a beguine in Lille, her most precious movables were two wooden cups and a chest. No book is recorded.¹⁸ As Walter Simons has remarked, beguinages never hosted a *scriptorium* and books were scarce, besides an intensive use of the Psalter.¹⁹ Recent studies have emphasized instead the

¹⁴ On this chapter, see Camille de Villeneuve, “Au-delà de la dette. La dissolution de la relation d’amour dans le *Miroir des simples âmes* de Marguerite Porete”, in *Marguerite Porete*, ed. Field, Lerner, Piron, 155-67.

¹⁵ Marguerite Porete, *Le Mirouer*, ch. 131, 388; ch. 132, p. 390, lin. 29: « Lors, commençay a yssir de l’enfance, et mon esperit veillart a devenir... » ; transl. Colledge *et al.*, 168.

¹⁶ Ch. 133, p. 392: “He, Dieux, dit Divine Amour qui se repose d’elle en Ame Anientie...”

¹⁷ Lerner, “New Light”, 104-107.

¹⁸ Lille, Archives départementales du Nord (henceforth, ADN), 6 G 36, n° 326, Dec. 13, 1305.

¹⁹ Walter Simons, “*Staining the Speech of Things Divine*: The Uses of Literacy in Medieval Beguine Communities”, in *The Voice of Silence: Women’s Literacy in a Men’s Church*, ed. Thérèse de Hemptinne and María Eugenia Góngora (Turnhout : Brepols, 2004) 85-110. Id., “Geletterdheid en boekengebruik bij de vroegste

importance of an oral cultural transmission among beguines, and that Marguerite may have intended her book to be read aloud.²⁰ As Dom Poirion noticed long ago, echoes of the *Mirror* are found in the more recent section of the Flemish poetry transmitted under the name of Hadewijch, probably composed in Brussels in the first decades of the fourteenth century.²¹ This implies that Marguerite's teaching circulated orally among beguines, under the form of poems or songs that could be adapted and translated across the linguistic border. On the other hand, the format of the book would have been more suitable for an aristocratic audience, familiar with private reading rather than collective recitation. Nobility is certainly a crucial theme for Marguerite. Rather than betraying her origin, it may simply have indicated the audience she was addressing²².

It is of course impossible to assess how many manuscripts containing the *Mirror of simple souls* were circulating in private hands by 1305. Besides her personal copy that was confiscated and publicly burnt in Valenciennes, at least another one must be acknowledged to account for the survival of the text, not necessarily many more. If their possessors were mainly members of the nobility, it is reasonable to assume that they had paid themselves for the production of those codices. Until now, the supposition that Marguerite was able to have numerous copies of her book produced and perhaps even distributed by messengers was the main reason to conceive of her as a "woman of means".²³ If we must conclude, instead, that imagining such multiplication of books is unnecessary, **there is no reason to conceive of her as wealthy**. When seeking approval by three theologians, she need not have provided each of them with a new codex. Instead, she could have more simply shown her personal volume in turn to John of Quievrain, Frank of Villiers and Godfrey of Fontaines.²⁴

begijnen", *Handelingen der koninklijke Zuidnederlandse Maatschappij voor Taal- en Letterkunde en Geschiedenis* 53 (1999): 167-80.

²⁰ Geneviève Hasenohr, "D'une 'poésie de béguine' à une 'poétique des béguines'. Aperçus sur la forme et la réception des textes (France, XIIIe-XIVe s.)", *Comptes-rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* 150 (2006), 913-943; Kocher, *Allegories*; Piron, "Marguerite".

²¹ J. B. Porion (ed.), *Hadewijch d'Anvers, Écrits mystiques des béguines*, Paris, Seuil, 1994. Piron, "Marguerite".

²² Joanne Maguire Robinson, *Nobility and Annihilation in Marguerite Porete's Mirror of Simple Souls* (New York: SUNY, 2001); John Van Engen, "Marguerite (Porete) of Hainaut and the Low Countries", in *Marguerite Porete* (ed.) Field, Lerner, Piron, 25-68.

²³ Marie Bertho, *Le Miroir des âmes simples et anéanties de Marguerite Porete: Une vie blessée d'amour* (Paris: Larousse, 1993), 29-32; S. Kocher, *Allegories of Love in Marguerite Porete's Mirror of Simple Souls* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), 32; Lerner, "New Light", 108; Tanya Stabler Miller, *The Beguines of Medieval Paris: Gender, Patronage, and Spiritual Authority* (Philadelphia: Penn, 2014), 238-244; Barbara Newman, "Annihilation and Authorship. Three Women Mystics of the 1290s", *Speculum* 91 (2016), 590-631, at 616-618.

²⁴ The Middle English version implies Brother John answered by sending a letter, possibly in the vernacular, and this makes much more sense than the formulation found in the Latin text. This letter may have accompanied the return of the volume lent by Marguerite.

The suggestion that the price of books could provide a measure of her wealth was not absurd, but it is clearly a case of conjecture built on conjecture. Instead, it should be strongly emphasized that we have no certainty at all about her social status. She certainly moved among beguines, since she was described as such and mentions them as an audience²⁵. Yet, there is no secure indication that she ever was a member of a court beguinage, such as Sainte-Elisabeth in Valenciennes. It is extremely difficult to infer anything about her social background out of the contents of what she wrote.²⁶ One of the few sure things we know about her regards her outer appearance. In all likelihood, she wore a thin meulequin upon her hair²⁷.

Elaborating on Geneviève Hasenohr's discovery of a Valenciennes manuscript containing extracts of the original version written by Marguerite, Robert Lerner strongly advocates the seniority of the Middle English translation over the Middle French rephrasing transmitted by the Chantilly manuscript.²⁸ Recent findings by Justine Trombley should renew the interest in the Latin version and its early uses.²⁹ In all likelihood, this translation appears to have been produced in the context of the Council of Vienne (1311-1312). All of these versions present distortions from the original. In all of them, some parts are missing, due to material accidents. It is also quite notable that the Middle English version lacks the last three chapters and has a different conclusion. If there were any reason to argue that Marguerite made some additions to her work at some point after her first condemnation, philology would suggest that these final pages stand as the best candidate.

Circulating a prohibited text

All we know about her final years is expressed in slightly different terms in two of the trial documents. The phrasing found in the advice given by the canon law experts is a bit more detailed than the account provided by the final sentence drawn by the inquisitor.³⁰ It is apparent that, on that issue, William of Paris was simply repeating the lawyers' statement in a condensed form, leaving aside some significant details and modifying some specific phrasing.

²⁵ S. L. Field, "Being a Beguine in France ca. 1300", in *Labels and Libels: Naming Beguines in Northern Medieval Europe*, ed. Letha Böhringer, Jennifer Kolpakoff Deane, and Hildo van Engen (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014): 117-133

²⁶ See the opposing views of Van Engen, "Marguerite (Porete) of Hainaut" and Piron, "Marguerite, entre les beguines et les maîtres".

²⁷ Zan Kocher, "The Virgin Mary and the Perfect Meulequin: Translating a Textile Analogy in Marguerite Porete's *Mirror of Simple Souls*", *Philological Quarterly* 90 (2011): 1-19.

²⁸ Lerner, "New Light".

²⁹ Justine Trombley, "New Evidence on the Origins of the Latin *Mirror of Simple Souls* from a Forgotten Paduan Manuscript", *Journal of Medieval History*, 43 (2017): 137-152.

³⁰ Verdeyen, "Le procès d'inquisition", 78, 81-82 ; Field, *The Beguine*, 225, 228.

Their more complete report should therefore be preferred, without neglecting variants of the second document. According to both records, after the Valenciennes condemnation, Marguerite had acknowledged having kept a copy of her book twice “in court”, that is, in judicial circumstances: first, in front of the inquisitor of Lorraine, who has now been identified as Ralph of Ligny;³¹ then, to the new bishop of Cambrai, Philip of Marigny. The canonists emphasized that this information had been conveyed to them by William of Paris who also found out that Marguerite had communicated her book to the bishop of Châlons as well as to “many other simple people, *begardis* and others”. Such formulation implies that William had gathered testimonies to that effect, from the bishop and the “beghards”, and forwarded them to the Paris canon lawyers, together with the account of Marguerite’s hearings in front of the inquisitor of Lorraine and bishop Philip, so that they could judge how Marguerite had openly violated the prohibition made by bishop Guido. This document, produced by a commission of five regent masters of the canon law faculty, cannot be dismissed as a manipulation of evidence perpetrated by the inquisitor. The masters must have had in hand these four notarial instruments transmitted to them by William of Paris. A comparison of the two parallel accounts of Marguerite’s past history obviously shows that the inquisitor drew from the same set of documents, emphasizing or omitting a number of details. The wording found in the advice and the sentence therefore derives from this now lost earlier documentation.

Since this is probably all we shall ever know about the crucial events that led to Marguerite’s capture, historical imagination has to be tightly controlled when trying to make sense of these statements. To begin with, we have to reflect on the very notion of circulating a prohibited book. Many scholars, including Sean Field, consider that it is precisely in this period that Marguerite would have produced multiple copies of her book and sought for approval on the part of three theologians, in a “rehabilitation campaign”. Before assessing the plausibility of such a course of action, some comparison is required. We know of no other medieval case where a book written by a lay person and condemned by a bishop was then circulated in a “rehabilitation” effort. Yet we know quite well some contemporary cases of intense circulation of prohibited texts among lay people that may serve as a comparative test. One year after the death of Peter John Olivi, the Franciscan General Chapter held in Lyons in

³¹ Field, “The Inquisitor Ralph of Ligny, Two German Templars, and Marguerite Porete”, *The Journal of Medieval Religious Cultures* 39 (2013), 1-22

1299 strictly forbade the possession of any of his works among the Order.³² Despite the prohibition, these books nevertheless circulated, in Latin and in vernacular abbreviations, among a network of Languedoc Franciscans and their lay entourage who were careful not to disseminate them beyond the strict group of sympathizers.³³ The action they took in 1309 was to launch an appeal to pope Clement V, with the support of the Narbonne consuls, asking among other things for a toleration of the veneration of Olivi's grave and memory and the lifting of the ban on his works. Throughout the first decade of the fourteenth century, the famous physician Arnau of Vilanova was among the defenders of Olivi's followers in Narbonne. He himself was trying to promote his controversial views on the coming of the Antichrist and the need of reform of the Church, in a campaign that has been recently described as "prophetic resistance".³⁴ Undeterred by two briefs imprisonments in Paris and Rome, gathering support in various circles (at the Aragonese and papal courts or among Franciscans) he wrote and circulated many apologetical tracts and attacks against his Dominican opponents. The wealth he accumulated through his medical practice allowed him to have multiple copies of his works produced. The examples reveal different strategies to confront a doctrinal condemnation: clandestine diffusion, appeal to higher authority, or intensive propaganda. In the last two instances, strong political support was crucial.

Marguerite's exact situation might have been unprecedented, but she must have known that flouting an episcopal sentence could entail very serious consequences, for her as well as for anyone handling her book. Nothing in what she wrote allows us to posit that she would have wanted to challenge openly a pronouncement of ecclesiastical authority. Her thoughts ran on a different level: "Sainte Eglise la petite" had but an inferior degree of reality. Had she attempted to appeal to the pope, this would probably have left some traces in the Paris trial documents. She was probably lacking the necessary support to engage in such a procedure. Her network was much less organized than the one the Narbonne Spirituals could rely on, and she did not have the financial means and political backing of Arnau.

³² On the long and complex history of Olivi's trials, S. Piron, "Censures et condamnation de Pierre de Jean Olivi: enquête dans les marges du Vatican," *Mélanges de l'Ecole française de Rome. Moyen Âge*, 118 (2006), 313-373.

³³ R. E. Lerner, "Writing and Resistance Among Beguins of Languedoc and Catalonia", in *Heresy and Literacy, 1000-1530*, ed. P. Biller, A. Hudson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 186-204; David Burr, *The Spiritual Franciscans. From Protest to Persecution in the Century After Saint Francis* (University Park: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003); Louisa A. Burnham, *So Great a Light, So Great a Smoke: The Beguins Heretics of Languedoc* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008).

³⁴ Rosario Lo Bello, *Resistenza profetica. Arnaldo di Villanova e i frati minori* (Milano: Vita e Pensiero 2014). See also Gian Luca Potestà, "Dall'annuncio dell'anticristo all'attesa del pastore angelico. Gli scritti di Arnaldo di Villanova nel codice dell'Archivio Generale dei Carmelitani", *Arxiu de textos catalans antics* 13 (1994): 287-344; Id., "Arnaldo di Villanova collezionista, propagandista e interprete del profetismo pseudogioachimita," *Joachim posuit verba ista. Gli pseudoepigrafi di Gioacchino da Fiore dei secoli XIII e XIV*, ed Gian Luca Potestà, Marco Rainini (Rome: Viella, 2016), 237- 255.

It was crucial for a woman or for a lay person lacking a formal theological training, to seek approbation by male religious authorities of any written document touching matters of faith before circulating it. Such is the case in these very years for Gertrud of Helfta or Angela of Foligno whose books were both approved by a large number of friars, German Dominicans in one case and Italian Franciscans in the other.³⁵ Later in the fourteenth century, the Florentine upholsterer Agnolo Turini turned to his spiritual guide, Giovanni delle Celle, before circulating a theological treatise he had written.³⁶ In all those cases, approbation comes first, before producing more copies of a text. Marguerite's situation may have been very peculiar, but comparative evidence shows that theological authorizations were normally sought before a book was made available to a third party. Could she have acted otherwise?

The sentence pronounced by Bishop Guido made clear that Marguerite would be convicted as a heretic if she used her book anew or expressed again any of her views. This implies that anyone reading this prohibited text or promoting its circulation could be considered as her accomplice and would risk the same condemnation. She herself appended the praises to her text. In that process, she could have had the freedom to modify their contents, perhaps while translating them from Latin. Yet it is unlikely to suppose that she twisted their wordings, since all three declarations are very cautious and do not advocate an unrestricted dissemination of the *Mirror*. Admitting the book was so sophisticated (*ita altus*) that he could not grasp it fully, the Franciscan friar recommended that it be well kept and its reading reserved for a few.³⁷ Such restriction in use did not imply any rejection of the contents. The book was said to have been truly written by the Holy Spirit, and no cleric in the whole world would be able to contradict anything in it, as far as they could understand it. Whatever his place of origin, "frere Ion of Querayn" (whose full name only appears in the Middle English version) was presumably attached to the Valenciennes convent.³⁸ In that quality, he may have attended the condemnation sentence proclaimed by the bishop. After such a strong public contradiction, it is difficult to conceive that he could have praised the *Mirror* as divinely inspired and unassailable. Godfrey of Fontaines states even more clearly the restriction he

³⁵ Gertrude of Helfta, *Le Héraut*, P. Doyère ed. (Paris: Cerf [Sources Chrétiennes, 139] 1968), 104-6. Maria Pia Alberzoni, "L' *approbatio*: curia romana, ordine minoritico e Liber", in *Angèle de Foligno. Le dossier*, ed. Giulia Barone, Jacques Dalarun (Rome: École française de Rome), 293-318.

³⁶ Sabrina Corbellini, "Beyond Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy: A New Approach to Late Medieval Religious Reading" in *Cultures of Religious Reading: Instructing the Soul, Feeding the Spirit, and Awakening the Passion*, ed. Ead. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), 33-53.

³⁷ *Le Mirouer*, 407 : "Hic frater dixit quod iste liber erat vere factus a Spiritu sancto et quod si omnes clerici de mundo audirent solum quod intelligerent, ipsi nichil contradicere scirent. Et rogavit quod bene custodiretur et quod pauci viderent. Et dixit quod erat ita talis altus quod ipsemet non poterat intelligere."

³⁸ The most likely identification is Quievrain, 10 miles east of Valenciennes.

puts to using the book, but he betrays no sign of awareness of a controversial record. Surely, he did not hold a high opinion of the doctrinal condemnations pronounced in Paris by bishop Tempier in 1277, and considered it was the duty of a master in theology to denounce the mistaken doctrinal interventions of a prelate.³⁹ He certainly had more respect for female spirituality than did his colleague Henry of Ghent, but his ecclesiology was more traditional and recognized, as was usual among secular theologians, the primacy of episcopal authority. To quote Catherine König-Pralong: “Son intellectualisme est confiné au *studium*; le domaine de référence plus vaste de l’Église comme communauté des chrétiens est déterminé par une autre perspective, de politique pastorale”.⁴⁰ Thus, Marguerite could be praised as a fine writer of things divine but, not being a member of the University, she could not be defended against a decision made by her bishop. Godfrey may have been sad and disappointed at her condemnation, but he would not have had any motive, according to his vision of the church, to give her further support once she had been convicted. Therefore, nothing in our documentation backs the notion that her quest for approval took place after the condemnation. The reverse order seems much more plausible. Once the *Mirror* had been condemned, it was too late to seek endorsement of any kind.

Why would Marguerite, in such circumstances, have had recourse to the distant bishop of Châlons-en-Champagne, a city located almost 200 kilometers to the south of Valenciennes? Little is known about Jean de Châteauvillain. Born in a noble family of Southern Champagne, he had held his see since 1285. His actions demonstrate a strong support for the Capetian king Philip the Fair who had acquired the county of Champagne by marrying its heir, Jeanne de Navarre.⁴¹ Jean is not known to have had any special interest in holy women, nor a taste for mystic writings in the vernacular or even any degree of theological expertise. Marguerite had no reason to have had knowledge of him beforehand on account of his reputation, and he had no motive to be present in Valenciennes at any time. If she wanted to find support in another ecclesiastical circumscription, she could have more easily made contact with the neighboring French-speaking bishops of Arras, Noyon, Laon, Liège or Tournai. If it was a matter of appeal, following hierarchical order, she should have turned to the archbishop of Reims, Robert de Courtenay. Why, then, attempt to reach Châlons, a minor city that lay even beyond Reims? It would be difficult to believe that Marguerite sent her book around to numerous

³⁹ S. L. Field, “The Master and Marguerite. Godfrey of Fontaines’ Praise of the *Mirror of Simple Souls*,” *Journal of Medieval History* 35 (2009), 1-14; Catherine König-Pralong, *Le bon usage des savoirs. Scolastique, philosophie et politique culturelle* (Paris: Vrin, 2011), 105-123.

⁴⁰ König-Pralong, *Le bon usage*, 111.

⁴¹ Field, *The Beguine*, 56.

clergy, and that Jean alone reacted. The hypothesis of a massive dissemination of the *Mirror* is not economic, and the information provided by William of Paris gives no indication that such was the case. In sum, there is no obvious reason why Marguerite would have willingly attempted to make contact at a distance with Jean de Châteaouvillain. We must therefore conclude this examination by accepting as highly plausible a hypothesis that has never been seriously considered until now by scholarship. The most likely cause of their encounter is that she was herself present in Châlons. And if she was there, in the first place, it must have been because she had to leave Valenciennes.

Leaving Valenciennes

Reaching the conclusion that Marguerite departed from the city she was initially connected with requires us to give a fresh look at what is known of her first trial. The Valenciennes condemnation is generally referred to briefly as the antecedent of her final arrest and the Paris procedure. Yet, in its own right, it stands out as quite a serious event.⁴² The lawyers' advice describes it in two successive sentences that apparently refer to different judicial documents. On the one hand, William of Paris had gathered and forwarded them testimonies on the part of "many witnesses" who attested the condemnation and burning of "a book containing heresies and errors". In order not to be fooled by this formulation, it is necessary to remind that "many" implies "at least two", not necessarily much more. The inquisitor had either made the trip to Hainaut, sent someone there, or had been able to find in Paris some witnesses who had been present at the event. The third hypothesis may be the most likely. In his condemnation sentence, William adds that Marguerite was "explicitly prohibited, by [her] bishop, under pain of excommunication, from composing or having again such a book". This piece of information has to derive for those testimonies. It must refer to the public sermon that bishop Guido delivered in Valenciennes before the destruction by fire of the *Mirror*. At that stage, the threat of excommunication had certainly been uttered in the past tense (eg. "you have been warned..."), referring to the admonitions Marguerite had received during the trial, since an even more serious threat was mentioned in the second document transmitted to the canon lawyers. In a sealed letter produced after the ceremony, containing an account of the speech he gave at that moment, Guido warned her that if she should revert to her book, he was "condemning [her] as heretical and relinquishing her to be judged by secular justice".

⁴² The best examinations so far are by Kocher, *Allegories*, 29-31 and Field, *The Beguine*, 43-45.

This letter has not been preserved among the otherwise rich archives of the Cambrai cathedral. Such a loss should not come as a surprise. Most of the documents that have survived the centuries are those that could serve to assert one's jurisdiction, be it that of the bishop, the cathedral Chapter or any other institution. Records of the mere exercise of jurisdiction that had no value to prove or confirm some right had much less reason to be preserved. For instance, the only reason we know anything about Marion Du Fayt, a beguine from Cambrai that Guido banished from the city in 1304, is that the bishop admitted soon after that he had had no right to do so. Being the daughter of a chaplain named "Guillon De Fayt, dit povre ame" (yet born out of lawful matrimony – her father having probably taken orders as a widower), Marion was under the jurisdiction of the Chapter. Guido had ignored the fact, and now acknowledged it.⁴³ His letter of recantation was to be read, in French, in all parish churches of Cambrai. Such publicity was probably meant to correct the bishop's infringement of the Chapter's rights and ensure that his action would not create a precedent, more than to restore Marion's reputation. It could also imply that her banishment had been proclaimed in the same way across the city. Likewise, it is only because of judicial susceptibilities that we have any notice of the arrest, earlier in the same year, of religious women in Bezin belonging to Saint-Lazare leper-house of Cambrai, by agents of the bishop's bailiff. In a brief note, Guido assured the Chapter of Saint-Géry collegiate church that in acting according to his spiritual jurisdiction, he had not intended to infringe Saint-Géry's temporal jurisdiction over Bezin.⁴⁴ In both cases, absolutely nothing is said about the spiritual motives of such strong actions taken against holy women. We are at a loss to guess whether the two cases, happening within months of each other in or around the same city, were connected in any way. It would be pure speculation to suggest that they have anything to do with Marguerite's condemnation. Yet, the most likely date for her first trial also falls in that period, soon after the praise of her book by Godfrey of Fontaines (probably in 1301-03).

⁴³ ADN, 4 G 843, n° 3 and 6 (this brief cartulary contains two copies of the same document) (1304, June 29): "Com nous eussions mandé a faire banir de Cambray par no provost et nos eskievins de la ville de Cambray Marion de Fayt, beghine, fille monseigneur Guillon de Fayt, dit Povre ame, capellan de l'eglise Notre Dame de Cambray et né de loyal mariage, et sachons chou, vraiment, Nous qui savons orendroit quelle est de la juridiction du capelle Nostre Dame de Cambray et estoit adonc, laquelle cose nous ne saviemes mie adonc, cognissons que le dit banissement faire ne faire ne peumes ne deumes, ne poons ne devons selonc les privileges de no eglise de Cambray ..." This case was already mentioned by Kocher, *Allegories*, 30 ; Field, *The Beguine*, 41.

⁴⁴ ADN, 7 G 84 (1304, Feb. 24): "Cum ballivus noster seu gens eius nostram spiritualem iurisdictionem de mandato nostro exercens apud Besaing in territorio de Wanbaies quasdam religiosas mulieres sorores sancti Lazare Cameracensi ceperit, non est nostre intentionis per huiusmodi vobis et ecclesie vestre aut temporali iurisdictioni in aliquo derogari." The farm of Bezin was located in what is today Fontaine-au-Pire, 8 km outside Cambrai. On Saint-Lazare, see Henry Dubrulle, *Cambrai à la fin du Moyen Âge* (Lille: Lefebvre Ducroq, 1904), 226.

Concomitance is of course not causality. Nevertheless, it is a striking fact that in the same brief lapse of time – which corresponds to a truce in the Flemish wars Philip the Fair was fighting nearby, between the defeat of the French army at Courtrai (July 1302) and its victory at Mons-en-Pévèle (August 1304) – a tighter control was imposed on religious women in and near Cambrai.

These two cases are helpful in figuring out the stages that led to the condemnation of the *Mirror* and what followed. Guido da Collemezzo's interests lay more with canon law, which he had taught earlier in his career, although he also took notes from Saint Bernard in view of his pastoral duties.⁴⁵ He certainly was not the meticulous type of bishop, such as Jacques Fournier in Pamiers two decades later, who was eager to check personally the doctrinal purity of his entire diocese.⁴⁶ Instead, Guido's attention had probably been attracted by Marguerite by way of a denunciation. This informer who felt that the *Mirror* and its author were troublesome or dangerous is likely to have been himself a cleric, invested with some spiritual authority in Valenciennes. As he did with the ladies of Saint-Lazare, the bishop would not have hesitated to arrest the beguine. Recourse to torture is unlikely at that stage, since the only question that mattered is whether she was the author of the book. The information about this early trial that William of Paris had at his disposal indicates that she clearly admitted her authorship. During this period of arrest, she would have been the subject of an investigation on her person, but the most intense scrutiny was directed to her book.

Comparative evidence of other doctrinal trials suggests that probably only one reader went through the whole book and drew a list of suspect passages that deserved a qualification of “heresy” or “error”. The very fact that both words are used in William of Paris' record of the condemnation implies that such a precise theological appraisal was performed at that stage⁴⁷. The examiner being a local, or at least residing in the area, a Latin translation would have been unnecessary for him. Having his report in hand, the bishop could not have passed on a doctrinal condemnation without asking for a round of advice from the most learned persons in theology and law available. Typically, as was happening in contemporary heresy trials in Southern France, their number would have included lecturers from the Mendicant convents in Valenciennes and senior members from various monasteries in and around the city, as well as

⁴⁵ Montaubin, “Avec de l'Italie”. Field, “Guido of Collemezzo's *extraccio de dictis Bernardi et quibusdam aliis super evangelio missus est angelus Gabriel*”, *Mediaeval Studies* 74 (2012), 143-162. Id., *The Beguine*, 39-42.

⁴⁶ Jean Duvernoy (ed.), *Le Registre d'inquisition de Jacques Fournier, évêque de Pamiers (1318-1325)*, (Toulouse: Privat, 1965).

⁴⁷ Josef Koch, “Philosophische und theologische Irrtumliste von 1270-1329. Ein Beitrag zur Entwicklung der theologischen Zensuren”, in *Mélanges Mandonnet* (Paris: Vrin, 1930), t. 2, 305-29, repr. in Id., *Kleine Schriften*, (Rome: Storia e Letteratura, 1973), t. 2, 423-50.

civil or ecclesiastical judges active locally.⁴⁸ This assembly would not have been requested to study the actual book, but only to reflect on the list of extracts prepared beforehand by the first expert and read by the judge in charge of the trial. Their role was to assert which article should be deemed as outright heresy, as simply an error or as an inadequate formulation. Godfrey of Fontaines had given a benevolent look at the whole book, noting its difficulties and even its danger for the simple minded, but admitting it was rightfully leading to “divine practices”; the experts, instead, passed a judgment on the face value of decontextualized statements, and if they took notice of his praise, they may have felt the master had been deceived by a treacherous writer. Likewise, there is no indication that any of the theologians convoked during the Paris examination had a first hand knowledge of the *Mirror*. If we bear in mind that William of Paris already had at his disposal a list of qualified “heresies and errors”, it is not necessary to posit that he himself carefully went through the writings of Marguerite. He could have simply relied on the initial examination and its approval by the assembly of scholars convened in Valenciennes. By simply drawing the logical inferences from the existence of this first doctrinal trial, we realize that this event cannot be reduced to a simple face to face encounter between the beguine and the bishop. Many more people were involved in it.

The documentation available from Cambrai’s archives can help us in discerning more precisely the profile of some of the persons who took part in the procedure. A personal knowledge of the author would have presumably prevented her confessor or parish priest from misunderstanding her book so dramatically. Our suspicion should rather lie with another, indirect source of information. The action taken against her demonstrates that she created public concern by saying and writing unusual things – but this need not have happened by the spreading of written text, a simple rumor could have been sufficient. The superior ecclesiastical authority in the city was an archdeacon from the cathedral Chapter of Cambrai. After a long period of activity in that function by the local Ernoul d’Antoing,⁴⁹ the office was occupied by one of the many Italian clerics who had come to Cambrai in the wake of Guido da Collemezzo.⁵⁰ This Paulo da Todi died before 1311 at the Roman Curia, and may not have resided often in Valenciennes, at least after the death of Boniface VIII and the

⁴⁸ Célestin Douais, “La formule *Communicato bonorum virorum consilio* des sentences inquisitoriales”, *Le Moyen Âge* 11 (1898): 157-192, 286-311.

⁴⁹ Anne-Marie and Pierre Pietresson de Saint-Aubin, *Archives départementales du Nord. Répertoire numérique. Série G (clergé séculier)*, Lille, Doulez-Bataille, 2 vols. 1960-1968. See ADN, 7 G 88, 7 G 538, 16 G 24, from 1286 to 1299. Although their dates of activities do not overlap and their toponyms are rather close, he should not be confused with Arnoul de Mortagne, provost of the Chapter from 1301 on (4 G 117, 4 G 149, 4 G 685, 4 G 40, 4 G 176).

⁵⁰ Montaubin, “Avec de l’Italie”.

departure of Guido.⁵¹ Another character who must have played a crucial part in the procedure is the bishop's official. In 1304, this function was performed by Master Simon de Bucy who is described as a doctor in law ("professor legum") in an account of his confrontation with the cathedral Chapter over jurisdictional issues.⁵² Bucy was not only a man of learning and a zealous ecclesiastical judge. He also happened to belong to a major family, originating from a castle near Soissons and connected to the French crown. He was himself the nephew of the bishop of Paris, Simon Matifas de Bucy (1290-1304), and is probably related to another Simon de Bucy who became president of the Paris Parliament four decades later. His presence is attested in Paris where he was active at the Parliament as soon as 1311 as procurator of the king.⁵³ If we were looking for someone who had taken part in Marguerite's first condemnation and was in position to testify about it during her second trial, he certainly is the ideal suspect.

Some further implications may be drawn from the verdict. The conviction for heresy only applied to her book; it would apply to her person if she were to return to her errors. The bishop's letter implies that Marguerite must have confessed in some way of having erred, abjured her errors and promised not to go back to what she wrote.⁵⁴ Yet, it is not quite certain that she "walked away from it personally unharmed".⁵⁵ According to the norms of Southern French trials, being convicted of having written heresies, she would have received at least some drastic penance, such as wearing a cross, and ordered to accomplish a number of pilgrimages.⁵⁶ It may sound odd to conceive of Marguerite as a penitent, but this is the only way she could have survived the conviction of being the author of a book that had been deemed heretical. Later, she may have changed her mind, but in the course of her first trial, she must have complied with the authorities. At any rate, her reputation was ruined for good by the verdict. As in the case of Marion Du Fayt, a public proclamation of the sentence would have been made in all churches of the city. But the burning of her book in a public square was sufficient to produce an unforgettable public humiliation. There is no certainty that she was

⁵¹ ADN 4 G 69, n° 946 (1311, 4 Feb.). The Chapter opposes the allocation of the prebend to a nephew of Napoleone Orsini, on the grounds that he was not ordained as a priest. Paul's presence is recorded only once in 1302.

⁵² ADN 3 G 536, f. 119-122r and 4 G 148 (1304, 6 Oct.).

⁵³ Edgard Boutaric, *Actes du Parlement de Paris* (Paris: Plon, 1867), t. 2, 86-87; Robert Fawtier (dir.), *Registre du Trésor des chartes* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1958) t. 1, 379, 427.

⁵⁴ Field, *The Beguine*, 45. Henry Ansgar Kelly, "Inquisitorial Deviations and Cover-Ups: The Prosecutions of Margaret Porete and Guiard of Cressonessart, 1308–1310", *Speculum* 89 (2014): 954-955, fails to grasp this crucial point.

⁵⁵ Field, *The Beguine*, 45.

⁵⁶ Leigh Ann Craig, *Wandering Women and Holy Matrons. Women as Pilgrims in the Later Middle Ages* (Turnhout: Brill, 2009): 175-202, drawing largely on Annette Palès-Gobilliard (ed.), *Le Livre des sentences de l'inquisiteur Bernard Gui (1308-1323)* (Paris: Editions du CNRS, 2002).

living among beguines in the Valenciennes area, within the city itself or in its immediate vicinity.⁵⁷ If such was the case, the effect of the condemnation on her community must have been unequivocal. To take a point of comparison, the statutes of the Reims beguinage, founded in 1249, stated that no women would be accepted whose mores might provoke a risk of corruption of the others, or who had been the object of a scandal (“de qua sit scandala”). Such persons could be expelled without discussion by the leaders (*magistrae*) or the protectors of the beguinage.⁵⁸ Although this disposition was primarily focused on the issue of chastity, doctrinal purity was also required. Having caused public scandal, Marguerite’s place was no longer in Valenciennes. As Guido initially decided in the case of Marion, and as was frequent for criminal punishment, an outright banishment from the city or even from the diocese could have been imposed upon her (instead of or after the forced pilgrimages). Even with no such punishment inflicted, she could have felt it was safer to leave.

If the departure from her hometown is understandable, the choice of heading towards Châlons is much less obvious. It is not unheard of for beguines to travel long distances. Not long before, a woman named Paupertas left her recluse life in Metz for the beguinage in Lille.⁵⁹ But Lille was a major city, whose beguinage was famous hundreds miles around, while Châlons did not have the same power of attraction. Except for the trading route to the Fairs of Champagne, it lay beyond the immediate geographical horizon of someone born and raised in Hainaut. Two questions therefore present themselves. Did Marguerite choose to go there on purpose? And was it her initial destination, or did she first settle somewhere else in between? The option of a straightforward and purposeful route may not be the most economic hypothesis. It is of course conceivable that she had a plan to put herself out of reach of the Cambrai bishop’s sentence. Marguerite could have known that Guido had sent around his sealed letter only to the neighboring dioceses, and decided to go one step further, while remaining in French-speaking areas. She could have had a companion who had connections in Châlons, and showed her a way outside of Valenciennes. Positing another undocumented character in her story remains a safe guess. As a rule, medieval women and religious people would not have undertaken long travels alone. Yet, the hypothesis of a direct trip to Champagne is too conjectural. It would be safer to consider that only one causality applied at first: the decision, be it forced or not, to leave the diocese of Cambrai. The military context –

⁵⁷ Lerner, “New Light”, suggests that she could have resided in the beguinage of Masny, whose lords were the parents of Watelet.

⁵⁸ Paul Varin, *Archives administratives de la ville de Reims* (Paris: Crapelet, 1839), 1, 711-713.

⁵⁹ E.A.R. Brown, “Marguerite Porete, John Baconthorpe and the Chroniclers of Saint-Denis”, 326, 340-4. W. Simons, *Cities of Ladies. Beguine Communities in the Medieval Low Countries. 1200-1565* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 136.

latent wars in Flanders, and conflict between Artois and Cambrésis – could be sufficient to explain a choice of heading south, towards the dioceses of Noyon or Laon.

The time interval between the Valenciennes verdict and her seizure in Châlons would also argue in favor of the notion of Marguerite settling for a moment somewhere between Hainaut and Champagne. At the latest, the condemnation took place in the autumn 1305, probably not more than a year or two earlier. Three years later, by November 1308, Marguerite was in the hands of William of Paris, presumably only a few months after Jean de Châteauevillain first alerted the inquisitor of Lorraine. It is of course conceivable that she remained quietly in Châlons for some years, secretly working anew on her book, before presenting it to the bishop. Yet such a scenario requires too many suppositions to be fully acceptable. It would be safer to surmise that she remained for a time in hidden location, from which she was forced to leave for some reason. Arriving at a later date in a more exposed episcopal city, her reputation would have quickly attracted attention.

The presence of at least one friend by her side is also suggested by another crucial issue. Otherwise, how would she have managed to produce of a new copy of the *Mirror*? In the Paris canon lawyers' words, Marguerite circulated in Châlons "the said book, one similar to it, containing the same errors". Due to the destruction of the first witness, it was indeed impossible to judge whether the book she circulated was identical to the one condemned earlier and destroyed by fire. Only modern scholars might possibly be in a position to do so, if it should be finally decided that the Middle English version derives from a copy circulating before the Valenciennes trial while the French and Latin version would stem from the text as it was available in 1308. Although no certainty may be attained on that matter, it is worth asking questions. Did Marguerite simply recover a copy of the *Mirror* that had been in possession of a third party, and possibly made some corrections and additions to it? The stylistic stratification of the *Mirror* presented above strongly suggests that she did not rework her whole text from scratch. If she recovered her writings in a fragmentary form, the authorial voice that is heard in various places throughout the book could be the signature of this new composition, binding together prose and poems written at different times. At any rate, it is necessary to remember that this work never received a formal "edition", but was twice snatched away from its author by ecclesiastic authorities. If the textual transmission of the *Mirror* is remarkably complex and unstable, it was as much the case even before Marguerite's death.

The seizure

What is certain is that she disobeyed Guido, produced a new copy of her book, and “several times had it, and several times used it”, to quote the exact formulation of the inquisitor.⁶⁰ Did she think that the prohibition sentence was not binding outside of the Cambrai diocese, or did she face knowingly the ultimate consequences of her actions? It is a matter that must remain open to interpretation. The “several times” emphasized by the inquisitor are meant to convey a sense of pertinacity. It refers to what she admitted under different interrogations, before being brought in front of William, and may simply reflect the various moments when she admitted having possessed her book to her interrogators. The verbs employed, ‘to have’ and ‘to use’, only refer to a private possession of this prohibited book and other volumes, which was a sufficient infringement of the Valenciennes sentence. By having shown her writings around, she was aggravating her case.

The way in which the lawyers’ advice depicts how Marguerite communicated her book to the bishop and “to many other simple people, begardis and others” deserves further analysis. That sentence does not belong to the declaration made by Jean de Châteauvillain, but rather summarizes supplementary information brought by William of Paris. As the wording of his final sentence makes clear, William obtained “evident testimonies of many witnesses worthy of faith who have sworn concerning these matters in our presence” that Marguerite had circulated her book to bishop Jean “and many other people”.⁶¹ Such formulation indicates that the inquisitor took the pain to investigate in Châlons and interrogate a number of people who had seen the *Mirror* or who knew about it. It is more economic to posit his travel to Champagne rather than the convocation of a number of unknown people in Paris. The mention of “begardis” deserves some attention. This typically Germanic word, used to describe male communities organized in similar fashion as the beguines, is quite unusual at that date in a French source. Given the context, it had no pejorative meaning, and was probably used to designate some pious lay people who had heard of Marguerite. This single word is insufficient to reconstruct her social environment in Châlons. By necessity, she met a number of people we are not in a position to identify.

The only clue to her actions is contained in the verbal clause that she “communicated the said book as though good and licit”. It would be an error to take this phrase as implying that she was widely diffusing her writings. Besides her possible awareness of the risk she was running by showing it, she could as well have had in mind the spiritual danger of presenting her writings to unprepared souls. Whenever the final chapter of the *Mirror* was penned, it

⁶⁰ Field, *The Beguine*, 228.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

clearly warns the reader that its teaching is not meant for many. It is not clear whether Marguerite had found a soul mate in Châlons, or earlier on during her travels, but it is understandable that she would not have easily taught her secrets to anyone inexperienced. If she used her book as a pedagogical device for spiritual teaching, it would have only been to a restricted audience, and to people she would have trusted.

We also need to bear in mind that the way in which William summarized his inquiry may not strictly represent the actual wording of the questions put forward to the witnesses. To “communicate” is a technical verb that describes an act of showing a document to a third party. The verb does not imply any attempt at having an audience read and approve the contents of the document. With such a distinction in mind, it is possible to make sense of what happened, with either of two psychological versions of Marguerite. The story is commonly told taking for granted that she behaved as “the obstinate”, trying to convince powerful people that her book was sound and her intentions were pure and catholic. I would like to show that the documents also allow us to picture her as “Marguerite the fatalist”, disillusioned about the possibility of making herself understood. Some pious people in Châlons, perhaps beguines among them, knew that she was keeping some books with her, and this might be strictly what they later told William of Paris. Someone in town must have understood that she was the author of a book condemned a few years earlier in Valenciennes, and then denounced her to the bishop. Jean would then have summoned Marguerite and asked her to show him the book. Obeying the bishop’s request, she would have “communicated” to him the documents she had been told not to hold or possess. By simply doing so, without any voluntary action on her part besides asserting that she considered the contents of her book as “good and licit”, she could be convicted as a relapsed heretic. Such a scenario makes use of all the words present in the documents we have, without adding further conjectures. It has the advantage of escaping a depiction of Marguerite as seeking support from a bishop she had no reason to trust, while she knew very well that a death sentence was hanging over her head.

Once she was uncovered, the sequence of events that follows is easily reconstructed. We do not know to whom the letters of bishop Guido were addressed. Bishop Jean may have had only a vague knowledge of her case. He would have felt safer calling in the Dominican inquisitor for Lorraine, Ralph of Ligny, who happened to be active in autumn 1307 in the baillage of Chaumont, in southeastern Champagne. As Sean Field recently demonstrated, Ralph was not a man of decisive action.⁶² Being perhaps unsure whether Marguerite fell

⁶² Field, “Ralph of Ligny”.

within his jurisdiction, or being only imperfectly aware of her record, he thought it wiser to hand her over to someone who had a direct jurisdiction over her, the new bishop of Cambrai Philip of Marigny. Philip was active on different fronts in Cambrai as soon as he made his “entrée” in 1306. But he was also connected to Paris where he owned a house, negotiating with Mahaut d’Artois the borders of their respective lands, and intriguing with his brother Enguerran in order to obtain the archbishopric of Sens whose holder was in poor health as early as the summer of 1308.⁶³ He is not found in Cambrai later than January 1308.⁶⁴ A letter sent to his provost in Cambrai in June 1308, concerning the payments due to Mahaut on account of the settlement of the border between Artois and Cambrai, is dated from a place named Canteleu in Normandy.⁶⁵ The very logic of the unfolding events in Marguerite’s case strongly suggests that Ralph brought her straight to Paris, in order to deliver her into her bishop’s hands. After interrogating her, Philip quickly understood that the interest of the Crown requested that the case be dealt with by William of Paris, as inquisitor of France. He could have relinquished not only the suspect, but also the previous documentation produced in Cambrai: the interrogatories, the articles extracted from the book, and the letter issued by Guido. Simon de Bucy, now residing in Paris, would have been an obvious choice to be called in order to witness the earlier condemnation. He might also have helped in the transmission to the inquisitor of some of these documents.

Therefore, a global reconsideration of the evidence shows that positing a travel of Marguerite from Valenciennes to Châlons does not create supplementary complications. To the contrary, it solves in one go two major difficulties of her story. It explains away why a beguine from Hainaut made contact with the bishop of Châlons, and why a subject of the Empire was transferred to Paris at the hands of an inquisitor of France.

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⁶³ Jean Favier, *Enguerran de Marigny*, in Id., *Un roi de marbre* (Paris: Fayard, 2005), 643-644.

⁶⁴ ADN 7 G 15, quoted by Kocher, *Allegories*, 30.

⁶⁵ ADN 3 G 118, n° 1094. This letter, dated June 14, is incorporated into a document produced in Arras ten days later. I assume that this “Cantumluppi” is identical to an homonymous village that fell among the possessions of his brother Enguerran, *Registre du Trésor des chartes*, 85, presumably Canteleu in pays de Caux (comm. Luneray, Seine-Maritime).