



Marguerite Porete: The Mirror of Simple Souls

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Margaret (?-1310) was a beguine from Hainaut who was burned at the stake as a relapsed heretic. Here is the first modern English translation of the complete text of The Mirror, written between 1296 and 1306, a theological treatise that analyzes how love in humans is related to divine love and how the soul may experience a lasting union with God in this life.

Marguerite Porete: The Mirror of Simple Souls Details

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From Reader Review Marguerite Porete: The Mirror of Simple Souls for online ebook

Holly says

A mix of my not-favorites things...heresy and court poetry. While Porete is certainly an interesting historical figure my interest in her does not extend to her interpretation of the Free Spirit heresy. What I am interested in however is how this woman submitted her book to church authorities in Paris just about the same time they were winding down with the Templar Knight heresies. Less than a month after fifty four Templar Knights were burned to death in a field outside Paris, this woman too met the same end in the same way. Her behavior during this time is interesting; she refused to testify or even defend herself, so her inquisitor was forced to build a case based off of her book, which had already been condemned and burned before her eyes a few years earlier. Marguerite, though, felt her book was not heretical and wanted to redeem herself by going to Paris for endorsement. That unfortunate step is the one that killed her when she was charged as a relapsed heretic (by the same inquisitor that tried the Templar's) and burned before a stricken crowd who sadly watched this woman meet her end with courage and bravery. Kind of a long sad story that isn't found in this book.

After completing a research project about Porete I have modified my views concerning her work. My research entailed examining Marguerite's actions between her first heresy charge and her execution. Placing these events within their historical context was illuminating and I found I judged her based not only on my modern standards but also the hasty judgments she was subject to in her day. What she did here, in writing this book, is actually a pretty clever idea. With that said, clever ideas, especially constructed in poetic form, can get lost on a reader. There are several warnings contained in this book, even by Marguerite herself upon her own later additions that take possible misunderstandings into consideration...it really must be approached in the sense Marguerite does not spell out. I can only explain it as art, rather than instruction. Because it is deeply poetic, it is therefore subject to many interpretations-some dangerous. It is that element that causes the work to misinform or mislead a reader dangerously. For that reason alone, the book is probably not recommended to many readers pursuing spiritual instruction without an appropriate introduction.

Brian Wilcox says

So impressed by this read over a decade ago, will read again, now in Classics of Western Spirituality edition. This book is work to read, but worth the effort. And not a book for persons unready to fall over the precipice from dogmatic constraints, or possibly very good selection for those needing a push to let go and discover another so-called heretic that simply lived too intimate with truth for the hierarchy to consider how she was a light of hope, not a darkness threatening the present and future of the Catholic church.

Porete's message is liberating, as she speaks of the primal priority of love above virtue. She details for us how this way of Love unfolds to union with Love.

She, like other truth-tellers, are often not at-home among their own, those they offer their gift to not to hurt, but bless. Yet her treatise of truth-telling lyrics lives on many centuries after the burning of her body, at the injunction of Catholic church hierarchy. This fate and this treatise may remind us that sometimes the fear of falsehood easily blinds one to the truth.

Chad Lynch says

Not for those new to mysticism

A bewildering, magical book, that is definitely not for those new to mysticism—if I had read this book a few years ago, I would not have been ready for it, and even now I'm certain much of its riches lay undiscovered to my current spiritual level.

A book that neatly removes any and all middlemen, it is unsurprising that the Church found her and her message to be such a threat to institutional religion.

Sean says

Some wild and astonishing moments, but mostly I was skimming over what felt inaccessible.

Patti Clement says

Studied her life in the Foundation of Spirituality course when we covered Women Mystics! We read excerpts but I'm looking forward to reading whole book once my studies are done.

Erika says

I didn't think I would "like" this book, and that's really not why I read it. I read it because of one line in "World Without End" which referenced it. And yes, I am so neurotic, I had to read it just to "get" that one reference. Its translated to English, which doesn't mean I understood it. Not at all. Sometimes I wondered if I wasn't "spiritual" enough to understand it. Sometimes I wondered if I didn't understand it because it was SO CRAZY. Sometimes I wondered if a different translation would make more sense to me, but again, it was written in English, so... Anywho, I am really glad I read it. The content, in the historical context, is off the hook. I'm glad I have this reference tucked away in my brain. I'm going to hold on to it, and maybe do a re-read one of these years. Its already really informed my understanding of another book, "The Shack" and my mind is blown that I would read these two books consecutively. Cue "Twilight Zone" music...

Greg says

I found this edition of the Classics of Western Spirituality pretty difficult. Porete was a beguine who was denounced and burned as a heretic in 1310. The text is a running dialogue intended to describe the relationship between the individual and God, especially the relationship between the Soul and Divine Love. Porete's spirituality is unique, especially with respect to Divine Love. She refers to five stages in which

divine love makes a transition to act directly on the soul. The first stage involves grace working on the soul, removing sin, and commanding acts to love God. The second stage involves the abandonment of self, and the third stage involves love of works to perfect and multiply those works. In the fourth stage, the soul becomes consumed by the ecstasy of God's love, and in the fifth stage the soul comes into mystical and existential union with God. These stages involve three kinds of "death" along the way, in similarly difficult language and concept. For those very serious students of ecclesiastical history and medieval mysticism I think there is much to study in this work. For me though, I must confess, most went straight over my head.

See my other reviews [here](#)!

Katharine Holden says

Tried very hard to find meaning in this. Finally gave myself permission to take it back to the library. Blech.

Brenda Neufeld says

Strange and brilliant.

Rev. Bobbie says

Before the world discovered the word spirituality Marguerite was writing about it.
Modern words from a 13th C mystic ..translated by Ellen Babinsky read this and get centered.

Rev. Bobbie says

Women look too far to find the real stories of spiritual women. Marguerite Porete is a wonderful spiritual leader whose writings come from this 13th C mystic. Translated by Ellen Babinsky this becomes a beautiful teaching.
We listen to 'modern' women theologians or tv preachers and miss the wholeness of this Mystics thoughts.
Come and drink at the well.

Rob says

It's kind of a cheat to add this book to my list, but since it's the topic of my dissertation, I thought it would be a good thing to have on my site.

This is a wonderful translation of a difficult late-13th century French text, written by a woman who was later put to death for it. The book was translated into English, Latin, Italian, and perhaps German within a century or two of the author's demise. It is difficult in the sense that it deals with becoming one with God, directly and during one's life. Unlike many spiritual texts of the time, it discusses how one gets started through the Church and Christ, but then rockets past at least the Church in the fifth and sixth stages to work directly with God.

I am interested in this text because of the mystery surrounding its transmission into other languages. The English edition was translated by someone who left us only a set of initials to work with: M.N. But I am also interested in the spiritual notions of the 12th and 13th century expressed both in literature and in devotional texts such as the Mirror. It seems that this was a time of spiritual exploration that has been mostly lost to the modern world. And the Mirror is a marvelous example of a woman coming to terms with the difficult world around her despite the failings of her Church and political leadership. It may be a very useful text to the people of today.

Cait says

a life changer

Chris Schaeffer says

Porete is astonishing and strange. She's also a lot less like Schreber than I initially thought. I read this, slowly and in awe, for a paper from which I wound up cutting all Beghard thought. Oh well.
