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THE MAN WHO KNEW THE TRUTH

a novel by Claude Cohen

I. *"I know the secret of life"*

A few hundred years ago, in a place probably located a few thousand miles away from where you are reading this text, a man declared:

*"And immersed in God, I was shown what the secret of life is."*

Reading that sentence, chances are that you will react like all the scholars who came across this account and dismissed it as one irrelevant sentence uttered by an involuntary historical witness of the period nowadays called *the Middle-Ages*.

This man, Bérot, was an obscure priest with a Dominican background. His claim to fame was to have been in the sight of the pope of his time, John XXII. He was actually about to be judged as an heretic, certainly excommunicated and perhaps executed.

However, the heresy trial never took place and the name Bérot, or Bérot du Tertre de Carces, disappeared almost completely from the memory of men, with his secret.

Let's suppose for an instant that this very Bérot had actually discovered the secret of life. Wouldn't it be a riot that, for all these centuries, humanity erred blindly between scientific and technological progress, pointless wars, inane projects, genocides, concentration camps and other historical highlights, ignoring that the secret of life was there, all along?

Do you remember, back in your schooldays, when you had fun asking around the "genie question": *What would you say if you could request one wish, and only one?*

Your friends wanted games, fame, wealth, etc. You may have leaned towards romance or just plain, unadulterated sex.

Someone, no doubt, made you feel guilty by praying for the health of a sick parent, while another one went overboard, putting everyone to shame with a wish for world peace.

Of course, nobody asked for *wisdom*... or the secret of life.

Honestly, what would you do with it? You would not be able to claim that you knew it, as we saw very recently with Bérot's example: "Who does he think he is for claiming to know the secret of life?"

You would have just to enjoy the ultimate secret, somehow.

Let's revisit the previous questions, what could actually be the "secret of life," and what exactly could we do with it? Would it change our life at all? Would we only recognize it, or understand it?

Let's be curious and, through some historical investigating, invite Bérot to spell out what he meant. You are sure, indeed, to be discerning enough to know if his proclamations will sound true or naught, aren't you?

Our research of Bérot's claim has to start at the Vatican library, a prodigious source of documentation. Browsing through all the papal Bulls written between 1316 and 1334, the years of the John XXII papacy, we shall pause at the year 1320. That year, the pope wrote one of his main hits, a Bull requesting the burning of the Jewish *Talmud*. He started also quite a few other projects of interest. One of them was the first official mention of Master Eckhart as a potential heretic. Another one was the drafting of the Bull "*Faith and righteousness*", which was never finished. It is in these 17 pages that we can read Bérot's theories.

Now, here is a curious fact: all the other Bulls start with the same signatory: "*John, Bishop, Servant of the Servants of God,*" where John is of course Pope John XXII. But "*Faith and*

*righteousness*" opens with the sentence: "*Martin, Servant of John, Servant of the Servants of God.*"

Did you lose track of who was the servant of whom? Another peculiarity is that the Bull stopped abruptly after the Article XV, and fails to formally conclude on Bérot's guilt.

In these first fifteen articles, Bérot potentially heretic pages, "*Readings of the Bible on Truth and Grace*", were abundantly quoted, which is exactly what we wanted! That first shot in the dark appears to have hit the Bull's eye, if we may say so.

Then, we just have to examine the excerpts to see what Bérot's secret was.

As I mentioned, the articles are full of damning sentences, but Article 15 is quite striking because the author quotes at length the *filthy language of the cloaked heathen* (sic), but stops brusquely his work without even taking the time to refute them.

These lines are curiously the last ones in this unfinished Bull:

*"(The aforementioned Bérot du Tertre de Carces added these immoral words)*

*'In the shade of the nightly  
prayer, pronounced in complete  
solitude, an angel sang for me a*

song without words. It is what I  
have learned after going there at  
times: an abyss always awaits the  
man seeking God.

It is faith, the steed that  
allowed me to enter the darker  
forest where highest trees lose  
their shapes.

They are battered by high winds  
and the devout man does remain  
startled.

I would have stayed many nights  
and days. But it was, as always,  
time to wed an unfathomable  
statue.

My bride's dress was of the finest  
silk, with shades of clouds and  
ice and water in winter, with  
stained-glass colors.

This is the Presence of our Lord,  
as I see it.

Before the bell tolled for me to  
leave, since no mortal may stay  
there more than a few heartbeats,  
God Himself showed me what the

secret of life is.'"

At that point, the drafting of the Bull "*Faith and righteousness*," stopped. I am not sure we are at once enlightened about the secret of life, but isn't it puzzling to think that this "*Martin, Servant of John*" did not write immediately any vitriolic refutation and a total condemnation of the text?

After all, this man Bérot was shamelessly boasting that "*an angel sang for him*." Worse, the monk was fantasizing about wedding creatures dressed in silk and, even more damning, claiming he saw the "Presence of God!" And, of course, he was mad - or possessed - enough to declare that "*God Himself showed him the ultimate secret!*"

What on earth could have prevented the author of the Bull to complete his censure? Maybe all these anathemas were too much and the cardinal overdosed and passed out cold? Perhaps it made his heart fail?

As long as we are at the Vatican's library, let us try to figure out what happened to that cardinal, before examining the previous fourteen articles of the Bull in order to see, hopefully, if we can shed some more light on Bérot's "*secret*."

## II. Of cardinals and heretics

The cardinal Martin De Lleda was this "*Martin, Servant of John*", the man who was drafting the Bull for the Pope John XXII, when he suddenly disappeared from Avignon.

Now, in a normal book of this type, the reader may find a footnote explaining that from 1309 to 1377, the popes chose to reside in Avignon, a city in the South of France, and not in Rome. But for pathological reasons that may or may not be revealed later, the use of footnotes has been solemnly banned, which means that the reader's intelligence will be regularly insulted by laborious and almost always ill-timed explanations.

The cardinal Martin De Lleda was one of the most trusted counselors of the pope John XXII. His origins are not easy to trace. Officially, his family was from the nobility of Murcia. However, the city's archives do not mention his ancestors. But



his life is relatively easy to follow after he left his native Spain.

Still in his teens, he accompanied the son of a wealthy merchant from Castile to the University of Toulouse. Along with his rich protector, Martin was accepted to attend the University. He happened to be an extraordinary student and became the youngest Doctor in Theology of his time.

We can read, among other theological works, five long commentaries entitled "*Sentences to Apostles, Saints and Prophets,*" that he wrote while in Toulouse. They are included in the recently published "*The Idea of Salvation in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Century*" by Martha Gröning (Tübingen University Press.)

After Toulouse, Martin traveled north, to Paris. He was 26 years old when the Duke of Senez named him vicar-general of his province. This nobleman and landlord actually put to profit Martin's cunning intelligence for financial and juridical matters, more than for his theological excellence.

Under Martin's discreet and efficient management, the Duke's coffers filled up quite rapidly and Senez became somewhat important in the early part of the 14<sup>th</sup> Century.

Martin de Lleda stayed three years in Senez. Then he resumed his traveling and eventually chose to visit Avignon in 1316. He worked as a secretary for the Dean of the Sacred College of Cardinals of the time, and excelled in his position

so well that, after eighteen months in Avignon, Martin De Lleda was named cardinal, by Avignon's second Pope, John XXII. The diocese of Murcia was arbitrarily given to him, as a title and not as a real office. His missions were first in the fields of management and diplomacy.

Jean XXII is usually recognized as an excellent administrator. He improved the taxation system, fully exploited the *collatio* method, which was to bestow certain ecclesiastic positions or responsibilities for a fee, etc. It is probable that his counsel, Martin De Lleda, designed a great number of these profitable structures.

However, maybe more than his predecessors, John XXII had a great talent to feud with all kinds of people, including kings and emperors. Involuntarily placed in the forefront of these meddling with the world powers, Martin became progressively weary of his functions.

A text he wrote in Avignon stressed the importance of peace in divine and mundane endeavors. One may see it as a backhanded criticism of his maniacal superior. But Jean (John) was not about to expel one of his favorite cardinals for a questionable letter. He honored him even more, entrusting him with what was for the pope a great passion, almost a hobby if you will: excommunication cases and heresy trials.

John kept for himself the mouth-watering case of the famous Magister Eckhart, and gave to Martin the easier Bérot file.

Placed on a sort of sabbatical from his usual functions, Martin De Lleda had to gather some information, and draft a papal condemnation. There were some procedures to follow, but for the most part, condemnation was supposed to be the norm, and absolution, the rarest of exceptions.

Martin reluctantly listened to the official complains against Bérot. Perhaps bored, perhaps curious, he took the time to read at length the mendacious "*Readings of the Bible on Truth and Grace.*"

He took in fact so much time that his illustrious boss eventually showed some displeasure and wondered about the causes of the incomprehensible delay. By then, the heretic should have been burnt, or at least already in the torture chamber. After all, after these "vacations," the cardinal had to resume his most important managerial activities for the Vatican.

As we have mentioned, in 1321, His Grace the cardinal Martin De Lleda vanished from the Avignon Palace. There was no obituary, no letter, nor allusion anywhere of what had happened to him.

One official record does mention in passing that the cardinal Martin De Lleda had been sent on a diplomatic mission, without any specifics.

In her introduction to "*Sentences to Apostles, Saints and*

*Prophets*," Martha Gröning echoes the opinion of most scholars: Martin's sudden and total disappearance certainly meant some type of disgrace. She speculates that Martin may have been assassinated.

It just so happened that, in 1321, a few months after the cardinal of Murcia vanished, the Book of Hours at the monastery of Le Tertre de Carces mentioned for the first time a certain Brother Martin, or Martin de Castille. There was no reference to a title higher than "Brother".

Would we dare linking the disappearance of a "Martin" and the sudden appearance of another one, perhaps a mere homonym, somewhere else? Could we even consider that a bishop could renounce a life of comfort and prestige for the precarious existence of a monk in the middle of nowhere?

We can at least explore the possibility. Suppose for one second that the inquisitor found something of interest in the file he was studying, something pertaining to Bérot's *secret*. Suppose that he went down to visit the defendant in order to clarify the text he had examined.

If we could follow the prosecutor, we may actually have a better understanding of that "ultimate *secret*."

Nowadays, the village of Le Tertre de Carces figures in tour books for its picturesque old houses and its convenient camping

site.

The monastery itself had been abandoned and partially destroyed in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. It became a farm, then a storage compound.

Today, you can stay there rather comfortably, since it has been recently rebuilt as a modern and spacious Bed and Breakfast (*Gîte du Tertre*).

From your window, you can see at a distance some soft hills, on the other side of which spreads the vast and still wild *garrigue du Tertre*.

Just to spare you a little search, *garrigue* is defined in your dictionary as "scrubland."

I wish more historians could take the time to daydream their topics.

For instance, isn't it lovely to imagine what could have been the Dominican monastery of Le Tertre de Carces in the 14<sup>th</sup> century?

Daydreaming is not formally recommended in the academic cursus, but it should, especially when you are lucky enough to be in the setting of the topic you are studying. It gives a certain dimension, a depth that escapes the usual research, maybe even a particular understanding of its inhabitants.

However, we all like to think that there is a unique component to our personality, something beyond all the

biographical facts, an element that could be called our specific sensitivity, our own *poetry*, if you will.

As historians, how can we appreciate that quality in the person we are studying and who may have left very few traces?

My personal answer would be to *daydream*.

Whenever I have mentioned this possible solution to my students, they thought I was joshing and decided, by the same token, that my sense of humor left to be desired.

But if I may ask you a serious question or at least a facetious question uttered in a serious tone of voice: how can one know poetry without contemplation? And how can one contemplate without daydreaming?

Is it enough daydreaming for a chapter? Then, let's go back to some semi-hard facts. The history of Le Tertre de Carces itself is quite remarkable.

But for our purpose, we shall just remark that the monastery was already almost 200 years old when Bérot was ordained priest there, in 1304.

It does not seem possible for us to know Bérot's origins and background. As a seminarian, he was an average student and it seems that without a certain Father Garné, he may have not been ordained Dominican priest so soon.

Bérot left the monastery in 1304. In 1307, he became the abbot of Esperron, a big village, about 150 miles North of Le

Tertre de Carces. It is possible that Esperron was his village of birth, but once again, we have no document that proves it.

We know that Bérot was not the best educated Dominican priest. But curiously, within three years, he transformed into a charismatic, popular preacher. Soon, many inhabitants of neighboring villages and hamlets came to his Sunday masses.

At some point, the Count of Gréoux heard about this man whose reputation as a local prophet was spreading fast. He was intrigued enough to invite or rather to summon him to his castle.

There is no direct account of the meeting, but the folklore of the region and of that particular time, gave a few versions of the following story:

"The nobleman (a Count, a Duke, or a King..)  
asked to see the wise man that had performed  
many marvelous deeds. When the man was  
before him, the nobleman demanded that he  
performed a miracle.

The wise man did not or could not.

His host took it as an affront and he threw  
him in jail:

"If you do not show me some miracle,  
you will rot here forever."

The wise man had some disciples who tried to  
convince their master to do something to get

out of this predicament. He replied:

"I am a man of God. God does what He wants. As for me, I only pray and speak of Him."

But that very night, the nobleman had a dream. In this dream, he was completely naked and the court was looking at him with contempt.

The next morning, the nobleman went to see his prisoner and told him his dream. He asked:

"What does it mean?"

The wise man answered:

"A man can find shelter from the cold and the rain. But can he order the cold and the rain to stop?"

Such is the will of men in front of the great hazards of fate. You can protect yourself, my lord. But you cannot stop what must happen."

The nobleman thought for a while. He eventually understood that the wise man was warning him.

His nudity in the dream surely meant that on Judgment Day, his ermine coat and his



scepter would be worth less than a small  
copper coin.

The nobleman freed the wise man at once,  
saying to the court:

"He performed a miracle for me. He  
convinced me to free him without ever  
asking me to."

These tales were speaking of Bérot, whose popularity can also be detected, under different names, in a few regional songs.

However, in a ten year period, the Bérot's character reflected in all these texts changed dramatically, because of the evolving "Zeitgeist". He had first appeared as an irreverent, ambiguous figure, then as a strange prophet, an equivalent of a spiritual idiot-savant, as in the story we just examined. But after the multiple accusations of heresy he had to endure, his name was eventually understood as a synonym of "hypocrite", "dangerous" and "malicious".

At the end of the 1310's, Bérot became a wandering monk. His reputation as a preacher had grown so much that he had a rather large following. But, this popularity triggered some jealousy and mistrust from the local clergy. It seems that the secular authorities were also antagonistic towards him for more or less plausible reasons, like his refusal to enter at the service of

the Count of Gréoux. The story of the nobleman and the wise man illustrates such an arbitrary feeling of impatience and exasperation toward the religious man.

In the tale, a dream saved him. In real life, it was not very good for your health to have a nobleman against you, if you were of a lower class.

So, in the beginning, the people held Bérot in high esteem and believed he was a godsend, so to speak. The malevolent alliance against him turned this fact around and claimed that it was Bérot who was professing to be a prophet or, God forbid, an angel sent by God.

A certain Guilhem, abbot of Le Bessilon, a village close to Esperron, went to Avignon to describe the heresy dangerously brewing in his region. He had with him some very damning excerpts of *Readings of the Bible on Truth and Grace*.

It was this very Guilhem who was received by Martin de Lleda, boring him to the point that the cardinal developed a liking for his adversary, Bérot.

In the meantime, Bérot realized that his negative notoriety was getting out of hand. Obviously, his message had been distorted at some point.

He spent quite a bit of time wondering where the misunderstandings came from. His personal beliefs rested on an enchanted universe solely occupied by God, the Unique, the

Almighty, the Omnipresent... and His creation. In this cosmogony, the seeker of God had to only confront ignorance as the sole real source of evil.

Facing suddenly an incomprehensibly antagonist coalition, Bérot had to introduce in his private metaphysics the more traditional concept of an actual, hostile evil that had been awakened by Bérot's original blend of truth. That evil had predictably reacted in a violent manner, falsely denigrating the preacher's reputation.

Thus, unsurprisingly, Bérot started to see the opposition to his ideas as the proof of their validity.

However, Bérot fathomed that standing in public places and defending himself could quickly make him a martyr. He eventually came to the conclusion that he was not quite ready for martyrdom.

Consequently, Bérot retreated. He vanished from his zealous flock and sneaked back to Le Tertre de Carces, accompanied only by Brasquet de Laons, his friend and the actual scribe of the *Readings of the Bible on Truth and Grace*, falsely attributed to Bérot.

His reputation as a heretic had preceded the prodigal son, and he was less than welcome in his old Dominican monastery. A majority of monks did not care to have a rebel in their midst, especially if the papal wrath would strike Bérot and very

likely, everything and everybody around him.

The older, benevolent Father Garné, who had actually ordained Bérot priest, some fifteen years earlier, tried to calm that prudent and hostile faction. But Garné was among a very thin minority.

At that time precisely, some contagious pulmonary disease, not the Black Death that had not landed on the shores of France just yet, stroke a few monks, notably the most opposed to Bérot's return. That triggered a great panic in the monastery.

While joining their voices for the Inquisition to come and restore some order, most of the monks were confronted to the undeniable sulfuric powers of Bérot.

What were they to do? Hardly lifting a little finger, or uttering a word of protest, their undesirable guest had sent to a coughing death three elders and to a realm of shivers and convulsions five more.

The opposition decided that any action against Bérot should come from Avignon and, for the time being, they chose to go back to the original Dominican tradition of teaching and preaching, spreading the Good Word towards the North-West.

In brief, they chose to flee.

Only Father Garné, the Gratien brothers, and a number of novices who had nowhere to go, stayed in the monastery.

Father Garné did not seem to believe there was a link between the disease and the presence of Bérot and Brasquet at Le

Tertre de Carces. He even quipped that if the hostile monks were struck, the cause was not to be interpreted as the Devil protecting Bérot, but more likely as God's impatience before the great stupidity of the unsympathetic faction.

So, one day of May 1321, Father Garné greeted in this rather depopulated monastery, a certain Martin, a religious traveler who was on his way to Toulouse and who asked, as in passing, if the famous preacher Bérot was still in the monastery.

III Where the narrator, trying on several hats,  
found very becoming a buffoon bonnet

A few years ago, a collection of venerable manuscripts from the 12<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> centuries were gathered with various artifacts, paintings and tapestries to be part of a grand exhibit entitled "*Elevated Middle-Ages*," that traveled throughout Europe. Many pages, written and illuminated by the brothers Gratien, were admired for their calligraphy, their colors, and the bursting imagination of their illustrations. But nobody, even among the scholars who could decipher Latin, actually read the text with great care.

Here is one story, very beautifully illustrated by the Gratien brothers. The setting is the Old Testament Land of Uz, where Job was soon going to take center stage. Since the anonymous author of the tale chose a biblical setting, but did not want to appear to be giving some apocryphal account, he

chose his hero to be Job's father, who is not mentioned by name in the Bible.

In this story, a group of anonymous angels debate among themselves about the lack of integrity, compassion and faith shown by humans. One of them proposes to visit the inhabitants of Uz, in order to see whether they "deserve to figure in the Book and live for the posterity," or to perish as useless, ingrate beings.

"That day, there was a great celebration in the land, with an abundance of food and wine.

The angel came disguised as a traveler and appeared weary and famished. The father of Job invited him, but the other people gave the angel some crumbs and some water, saying:

"This is a feast just for us. We live in this region. We obey its traditions. You are a stranger. You do not belong here. Rest a moment if you must, remain outside of our gathering, and then, leave."

The angel pleaded:

"I can entertain you."

He started to sing with a voice never heard

before, that charmed everyone.

But the father of Job listened carefully to the lyrics of the song. They warned against greed and selfishness.

The people of Uz said:

“You have a nice voice, but you do not sing our hymns, so do leave.”

The angel claimed he could do magic tricks. He took some sand in his hands and threw it up in the air. The sand went high above the heads of the people and froze in midair.

The father of Job could see that it had formed characters of warning against God’s wrath.

The people at the grand feast applauded the trick, but the sand fell back on their heads and on their tables.

Angry, they chased the angel away.

The father of Job ran after him and addressed him with humility:

“Forgive us. What can I do to make up for our ways?”

The angel appeared to him in his glory and answered:

“Because of you, they are spared for



today. Go back to your home. Your house  
is blessed."

We may assimilate the illuminated manuscripts from the exhibit to a beautiful voice or the grain of sand levitating in the air: what about the meaning they carry? What if these exquisitely adorned parchments actually contained the teaching of *the secret of life* itself? What if that secret was indeed spelled out in clear view of the visitors of the exhibit? Imagine these crowds marveling before the lapis lazuli and turning a blind eye to the essential message about the secret of their own existence.

Now, you must protest, you saw some translation underneath the illuminated pages put on display. You do not remember reading anything about Job's father. They were, if you recall, pages of the Bible or prayers.

Indeed, the curators of the exhibit showed only the more visually striking works by the Gratien brothers, among others, leaving perhaps other most interesting pages to be dissected solely by members of the Academic race who, as we know, have given up discovering the secret of life by their junior year in college at the latest.

The "*Elevated Middle-Ages*" exhibit had only two volumes of "Books of Hours" from Le Tertre de Carces.

Now may be the time for us to get better acquainted.

Let me go first, it will be easier. I happen to know a couple of things on these particular manuscripts. I actually wrote a book entitled "*The Library of Le Tertre de Carces in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century.*"

Understandably, you are about to rush to your local bookstore and purchase or order one copy, thinking it would be an ideal retirement gift for a colleague you have secretly hated all these years.

Not so fast, my impulsive friend! Let me first share with you one of the great intellectual, cultural, humane scandals of this century.

A well-established university press, showing great insight, considered publishing "*The Library of the Tertre de Carces in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century.*" In my detailed outline, I had mentioned having close to three thousand pages already written. Far from impressing the editors, the figure seemed to frighten them. They could envision a two hundred page book, but even that number was a stretch (sic).

I argued with obvious comparisons: condensing my work was like asking Michelangelo to paint the fresco of the Sistine Chapel on a stamp; or Beethoven to reduce his symphonies to a three minute song.

The publishing house answered coldly and inappropriately that my book on Le Tertre de Carces library had more pages than

the whole library itself during its most glorious days.

So, for the next couple of years, I attempted to prune my *opera magna*. After much agony, I got it down to sixteen hundred pages and stalled for good.

But these years had a perplexing effect on me. Previously, I had spent already a few years collecting all the pertinent information available on the library. I had, of course, to translate some important passages, sometimes very substantial. You may know from experience that the relationship between a text, especially a subjective one, poetical or abstract, and its translator, is very personal. In this very case, such intimacy was multiplied to a level bordering a pathological obsession.

Imagine the painstaking work of gathering back the multiple pieces of a library that had literally exploded, sending years after years, century after century, its chapters on improbable journeys to others libraries, cellars, attics, shops, collectors dens, stores, and ending up in libraries and museums in Paris, Rome, London, Cambridge, Leningrad, New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, etc.

One has to identify each page, reference it, catalog it, analyze it, comment it and eventually incorporate it in the project.

Moreover, let's not forget that I was also supposed to trim about 93% of my work. I could do it solely by dividing it in different possible books. A first intuitive division obviously

consisted in partitioning the pages chronologically.

The monastery of Le Tertre de Carces began as early as in the early 1240's to collect and copy manuscripts at a sustained pace. In the late 13<sup>th</sup> century, especially under the guidance of Father Garné, this manual "printing house" diversified its production and added to Bibles, liturgical and devotional texts, some very peculiar Books of Hours and even the copying of a few "scientific" treatises (astronomy and medicine).

As you may know, Books of Hours derived from more typical books of prayers used by monks and nuns. Each "hour" or each devotional period of time was punctuated by the recitation of a prayer, a psalm, a hymn... Such a book, with its particular selection of liturgical texts could be personalized to the point that many Books of Hours were commissioned by influential laypeople.

Father Garné had the Books of Hours he supervised enriched with calendars, practical advices, ethical maxims, etc.

When the Gratien brothers arrived at Le Tertre de Carces, they went beyond Garné's modifications. Soon, illustrating the simple prayers did not seem enough for the brothers' creativity. They began to gather popular regional secular stories, always carefully concluding them with a prayer or a religious saying.

Their illustrations were increasingly imaginative. Farmers, donkeys, hens, wolves, snakes and monsters, etc. started to

appear in their texts.

When Bérot and especially his unofficial biographer and exegete, Brasquet de Laons, moved to Le Tertre de Carces, the style of the Books of Hours kept in the monastery, opposed to the ones ordered by the local nobility, changed even more drastically. The regular prayers were followed by short religious commentaries. The regional tales featured fewer anthropomorphic animals, and some new characters: martyrs and saints, actually quite obscure for the time, or even apocryphal, reflecting Brasquet's hazy style and peculiar propensity for linking some current events to a Bérot-like, spiritual interpretation.

Finally, when Martin de Lleda became a resident of the monastery, the Books of Hours changed again. They became a unique fabric of prayers and spiritual dialogues, while the number of illustrations diminished and the calligraphy was plainer, as if the scribes had less time to illuminate the very abundant texts they were transcribing.

After Martin de Lleda left Le Tertre de Carces, the library's own production of manuscripts shifted again. Esthetically, a new artistic blood was instilled when two companions of the famous Jean Pucelle - not to be confused with *Jeanne la pucelle*, as my freshmen students would typically giggle - settled for good in the monastery in 1329. They restored the importance of formal calligraphy, with incredible

decorated initials, and lavish illustrations, rather than original texts.

As a historian who is supposed to cover a whole century through a library, but under two hundred pages, I had to delineate the main transformations of the religious and cultural institution.

However, I must confess that at that point, analyzing more than 90 years of my topic seemed suddenly to be a really dry labor, while the years that I could call the "Martin period at Le Tertre de Carce," were for me a source of great intellectual, and even, if I dare to say so, of spiritual excitement.

Consequently, instead of cutting into my mammoth volume to make it publishable, I started to write more new pages, this time solely about the curious relationship between Bérot, the man who claimed to have found a divine truth, and Martin, his inquisitor.

And this sort of appendix, you guessed it, are the very pages you are reading.

My first version of *The Man Who Knew The Truth* was drafted in an academic style where, basically, a quote is supposed to be followed with an analysis. Each quote must have an exact reference. In this case I worked mainly with the monastery's Books of Hours written between 1320 and 1326, plus a few other sources that I had to describe in details, even if it increased

the volume of my work by a few dozen pages. Moreover, each analysis had to be rhetorically stable, impregnable by the reader, always a potentially harsh critic, as it is most common in the Academic realm.

This rather heavy, bombastic way of writing had to be used to support any hypothesis slightly vehement or unconventional, each daring extrapolation. A first intuitive thought had to be defended by a battalion of quotes from other medievalists or theoreticians in the fields of History, Sociology, or even Psychology...

You may be familiar with this paranoiac style, which tries to prevent and fend off any possible condemnation coming from colleagues and critics, often the same people, in our blessed, elitist sphere.

I do not know if you find these types of texts pleasurable or even legible, but writing them is now for me, in my older age, an exhausting exercise, not to say a rather futile one.

One day, as I was invited to present a paper on the translation and the interpretation of ancient literatures, a fellow lecturer, Pr. Matt Brown from Webster-Floyd College, enumerated nine different translations/interpretations for a simple fragment attributed to Heraclites.

Here is one translation of the fragment:

"God is day and night, winter and summer,

war and peace, surfeit and hunger; but he takes various shapes, just as fire, when it is mingled with spices, and he is named according to the savour of each."

After reading all nine different versions, written in a span of about two millenniums, Pr. Brown concluded that each one had certain qualities, but philologically speaking, one was better than all the others.

Then, he voiced a few reflections that I would like to copy in almost their entirety- with his permission - because they reach beyond a narrow academic field and touch on the notion of communication in general:

"If we had asked two contemporaries of Heraclites what the illustrious philosopher meant, they could have said something outrageously wrong. Interpretation is of course infinitely more important than translation. These two people spoke Heraclites' mother tongue, but maybe not his language.

This is the paradigm of a certain level of communication, and the actual law of poetry: what is genius for one person may leave completely indifferent another.

For a translator, the most troublesome



question is the most basic one: would the historical, the real author, here Heraclites, be in agreement with what the best translator and philologist of our century wrote and signed under the name *Heraclites*?

Even the most optimistic person in our profession must have some doubts about answering positively such a question.

Then, why are we spending so much energy on a single sentence if we know in advance the precariousness of the result?

The answer may be simply that it is our turn to transmit to the world the name Heraclites and some extremely valuable ideas.

Even if we can be accused of having merely "regurgitated" these ideas, humanity will always be better off thinking and discussing Heraclites.

Our error is often to hold on for dear life to his "signature"; to define an "orthodoxy" we feel compelled to attach to his name. It is a slippery slope that may lead us to promote perhaps too vehemently that "orthodoxy," rather than teaching, which is

enjoying, what Heraclites has to offer us.

Our scholarly work will always be an educated fiction.

We should have the humility and the great pride to acknowledge that it is an educated fiction, no more, no less."

I must admit that Pr. Brown's conclusion constituted an epiphany of sort for me. Of course, his open-mindedness is quite commendable. But most importantly, the word "fiction" had jolted me, triggering what could be called an illumination.

Instead of pretending to achieve a scientific objectivity, I just had to acknowledge that I could connect the dots between all the documents at my disposal with a subjective but, in my mind, a very powerful cement. I am speaking of my familiarity with the characters that I have researched, followed, copied, translated... This familiarity painted them with hues, shapes and depths that did not come only from the mere sentences I had painstakingly gathered.

How could I defend such a biased approach of real, historical protagonists?

I could not. I was placed in the schizophrenic position to have the obligation of presenting straight facts and specific texts, while caring in a very personal way for these characters.

Suddenly, the word "fiction" presented me with the

incredible license to give them a voice. As a matter of fact, they could have also very particular inflections whit these voices. And from that point, it would be quite easy to go one step further and depict their mannerisms, their quirks, their contradictions... all features literally absent from the manuscripts where they appeared quite "unidimensionally."

In his conclusion that we have extensively quoted above, Pr. Brown remarked "the actual law of poetry: what is genius for one person may leave the other completely indifferent."

I would like to comment it with a truism that is often forgotten: readers have medium-like qualities. They can vividly feel their favorite author's voice in them, in spite of the distance in place and time separating the author from the reader.

Here is an anecdote which should fulfill a double goal: illustrate the previous idea and show me as an admired poet.

It pains me to have recourse to such loathsome self-promotion, but it may constitute a substantial side benefit of writing one's own book.

In my youth, I published a few poems in my native country.

Would it be good taste, original and even mysterious not to name my birthplace?

I might as well try anything at this point, to appear

having good taste, and being original and even mysterious.

Anyway, twenty years later, as I went back there to do some research, I ran into a lady who may have been my only reader, apart from my parents and an ex-girlfriend, who were, almost by law, required to faithfully encourage me.

The lady could still recite one entire poem I had written, which was a mind-blowing feat for me, especially after all this time.

"Did I write that?"

The question I had uttered was not only a laughable attempt to appear vaguely modest. The poem did not sound like mine, especially after I translated into English for your amusement or even your emotion, since it will undoubtedly remind you of your favorite nephew who wrote something similar in eighth grade.

*"Love welded my heart like a piece of copper  
It melted my resistance as if I had no tears  
My life counted its plane by eons of ten  
On its wrinkled fingers  
Childish anguish and hope  
For an instant, I had a soul of tender gold,  
Eternal whiffs of past springs  
Float around my friends and foes  
They deserted of a certain shipwreck the  
desolated shores  
All I have are ghosts of smiles and laughter*

*For I am an heir of higher fortunes  
And Love has welded my heart like a piece of  
copper  
It melted my resistance as if I had no tears  
left"*

I did remember writing this poem after a common heartbreak, while I was in my "German Romantic" period, influenced by Novalis, Hölderlin, Rilke also, and visually, by Caspar David Friedrich.

My effusive and only fan in the whole world, spent a great deal of time, describing how mystical my poem was.

That was mind-boggling! How could this poem be "mystical," if I only wanted to depict the shipwreck that was my life after my sentimental misadventure had left me without a girlfriend and without my good friends, since I had foolishly neglected them during my disastrous affair?

To my great surprise, my fan claimed I had inspired her with my "*vibrant faith on the edges of which all passes except our refuge in the Eternal and our Love for Him.*"

I thanked the good lady. Of course, I did not disabuse her.

Why! She was comparing my poem to the *Song of Songs*. I was not about to tell her that my inspiration came from being dumped.

But I was also genuinely fascinated by that glorious

misunderstanding. Listening to her, I kept on wondering about the true authorship of the poem.

Even if I had physically strung together these lines, this one reader had put her unique stamp of recognition on it. She had in a way used my words and re-created the poem according to her own sensitivity and need. It had hit her in an angle that I could not foresee.

In a way, I had to conclude that she was almost totally the author of "my" poem. And if I had to choose, I believe I would prefer her interpretation over the banal and less than glorious circumstances leading to the drafting of my original text.

Hopefully, the previous anecdote has illustrated how powerful the reader's subjectivity really is, in the literary process.

The ties between the written work and the person who receives it can be even more complex. We have mentioned earlier the intimacy existing between a researcher/translator and the studied texts.

This multifaceted, intricate relationship can lead to a curious osmosis that occurs when someone is so immersed in a certain universe that his/her present is filled with allusions and reflections seemingly coming from it. There is a live dialogue, an interaction, if you will, between "the subject" and "the object."

You can measure how the terms "subjectivity," "intimacy"

and "osmosis" could conflict with the rigorous academic restrictions a historian should be observing.

This is why the word "fiction" seemed like the key to all my problems. When I attached it to my research, I felt an odd freedom, filled with relief, elation, excitement, without forgetting guilt, since I have a Judeo-Christian background.

I became like a convalescent realizing that he could suddenly walk, run, dance, etc. instead of being timidly bedridden.

I was going to let go of all the academic commonplaces, turning my back on its jargon and its tics. In a symbolic act of defiance, I vowed to write this book without adding a formal bibliography and even without a single footnote, which is for me an excruciating torture, by the way.

I can hear you smirk, drooling with sarcasm:

"Oh, stop, you beast! You are so daring,  
you, incendiary revolutionary, you! Some die  
in the barricades for freedom and justice.  
You boycott some Academia trademarks like  
footnotes. We should erect a statue to your  
temerity!"

I shall ignore your ill willed irony and reply with my wiser aphorism to date, in a desperate attempt to have the last word, which is somewhat easier since I am holding the pen:

Sometimes, I guess, History needs to be  
scientifically evaluated.

Sometimes, perhaps, it needs to be dreamed.



IV Martin De Lleda and Bérot *du Tertre de Carces*

Of course, we have no visual representation of Martin De Lleda, but before his disappearance from the papal castle in Avignon, a few letters mention him explicitly.

He had very appealing qualities and could charm and finagle his way to the top. Bright, witty, ambitious, he knew the ways of the world.

Among the songs and tales that depicted famous local figures of the time, I have found a dozen about a certain "Martin," libertine priest, monk, or bishop, who "*made his nest like a cuckoo bird, making cuckold more than a trusting merchant*".

Here is a fragment of one of these songs, this one quite interesting because it mentions "Senez," an important stage in Martin De Lleda's life:

*Beware of the pastor*

*Beware of the cleric*

*In Senez, the Duke snores*

*Ends up sore*

*His heavy horns make him sour*

In these irreverent traditions, our cardinal was said to disregard the pledge of chastity; in the verse we have quoted, it was with a noblewoman, the Duke's wife, no less.

A couple of other tales allude to him in kinky situations with women of lesser ranks.

Did these snapshots reflect some popular fantasies of the time, or real facts?

All in all, we have the portrait of a man of obscure origins, most certainly not noble, who succeeded through some type of deception in being admitted in the University of Toulouse, where he graduated with honors. This adventurer, and perhaps great womanizer, combined the careers of religious leader, politician, financial strategist, and jurist.

Are you thinking of writing the screenplay of the scandalous and untold story of a 14<sup>th</sup> Century Casanova, wearing the religious robe of a cardinal? Your movie would have a little of everything. Maybe, your hero could have mastered also a unique swordsmanship reminiscent of the samurai's way? How about making him the inventor of the French art of kickboxing that

will become the 19<sup>th</sup> Century *savate*? Could he be singing or maybe playing drums for a key sequence of *The Man Who Knew the Secret of Life, the Musical*?

In the meantime, the actual Martin de Lleda had another dimension to his personality, a quality making him more than a fairly colorful but anecdotal character.

He truly yearned for something else, for a truth of a spiritual nature. In his "*Sentences to Apostles, Saints and Prophets*," written at a young age, he displayed of course an academic knowledge of the Bible and of the Church Fathers, and a sophisticated scholastic style. But he also asked striking questions about the benevolence of the Creation, God, the nature of evil, what makes a true human being, the causes and reasons of the Divine Grace, and the End of Times. In his essay, the answers had to be orthodox in their tone. However, Martin had a cunning way of leaving a virtual blank after a pointed question, filling it subtly with well-phrased mentions of what "heretics and ignorant people" dared to say in that regard.

We saw that later, in his draft of the Papal Bull against Bérot, Martin used the same technique, presenting at length the heretic texts, but framing them with terse formulas of general condemnation.

So, Martin was asking himself important philosophical questions that the Church he knew very well from the inside, was

not able to fully answer; hence, his visit to Le Tertre de Carces where he wanted to meet the much less colorful Bérot.

We only know that Bérot was of modest origins. Brasquet de Laons, his intellectual and spiritual biographer, did not spend any time describing Bérot's early years.

Little is known about his arrival at the monastery and his training. His main instructor seemed to have been Father Garné, who ordained him priest in 1304.

Bérot did not seem to be an extraordinarily brilliant student. In any case, he did not leave any trace of revolutionary religious writings before the infamous *Readings of the Bible on Truth and Grace*, wrongly attributed to him.

After his ordination, Bérot did a little traveling, stopping at various places of pilgrimage, before settling in Esperron.

Seen from our century, it is difficult to imagine how an ordinary monk became a preacher, famous enough to be in the Pope's sight. We are not aware of any striking "revelation" or "apparition" that led Bérot to a different religious path.

Obviously, Bérot was also searching metaphysical answers. Did he find them reading or copying a certain influential book in the library?

There is unfortunately no tangible clue about what made him stray from the established, traditional ways.

Eventually, Bérot expressed whatever he had found "*in the secret of his heart*" in sermons that touched his flock.

When exactly, how and why did he become this magnetic figure? Here again, we have no clear answer to these questions, other than the conviction that the process did not start instantly.

He was named abbot of Esperron in 1306. The first text mentioning Bérot as an extraordinary preacher came in 1310. In 1311, Brasquet de Laons began to write the fateful manuscript that would serve to indict Bérot of heresy. We do not know either when exactly Brasquet joined Bérot's unofficial fan club.

How did Bérot develop his skills as an orator? How did the little abbot become somewhat of a local prophet for a few years?

Your guess is as good as mine. Are you refining your historical daydreaming skills, yet? Are you perhaps enjoying the picture of Bérot stumbling upon a burning bush while on a small journey to administer the last rites to an old mountain dweller?

Whatever hits your fancy!

Personally, I prefer the idea of a natural progression for this truly spiritual man, who did not particularly excel in school, but who stubbornly cultivated his intuition, his inner search.

After all, in the field of spirituality, the knowledge of Greek and Latin, a special gift of eloquence, or even an

exceptional IQ are not always conducive to understanding "*the secret truth.*"

We may not know the development of Bérot's mysticism but, luckily, we have a major source of information on his appearance and behavior before his return to Le Tertre de Carces. It is the written testimony of Jan Amoulet, an odd philosopher-merchant, actually so interesting that later, if we have some ink left, we should say a few words about his own biography.

Amoulet was a singular fellow who, after some wavering, ended up entering Le Tertre de Carces as a novice at a rather mature age. But the following account dates from an earlier time, while Amoulet was still a curious wanderer.

According to Jan Amoulet, Bérot was a small and skinny man with "a gaze of fire".

When Bérot came back to Esperron for a short stay in 1319, a few months before the Pope started the inquisition case against him, Jan Amoulet went to one of Bérot's sermons and wrote about it.

Amoulet's style being typically full of long, rather dreary ellipses, I will only paraphrase his text. Thus, for the time being, the lucky reader will sample, again, my own style rather than Amoulet's.

A big crowd had gathered in the small

church, that Sunday. Bérot, who was no longer the parish's abbot, was deferring to a certain Father Paul, who served the mass. At the end, Bérot joined him at the pulpit, and the parishioners came out of their Sunday stupor.

Some shouted their excitement, others their mistrust.

Amoulet was not used to such turbulence at the end of a mass and he found this spectacle rather entertaining.

For a few long minutes, Bérot remained silent, while Paul tried to reason with the crowd.

Finally, Bérot spoke. He was a short person with a booming, penetrating voice that startled everyone.

That day, Bérot started with the familiar tale of "God's Messengers," and using his dramatic voice and expressivity, he progressively brought the parishioners to a complete and horrified silence.

After the sermon, Jan Amoulet noted:

*"Never have I heard such an intense and elevated "Osanna" from*

*an assembly of believers. The fear of God had entered the Church and was palpable from St John's altar to Marie's altar.*

*It blew through the porch where a beggar claimed later that he heard a voice from the Great Beyond that joined the human voices at the end of the hymn."*

Before delving into Bérot's possible technique as an inspired speaker, let's take the time to summarize the universal tale of the *Messengers of God* (or of the Judge), one of Bérot's favorite oratorical warhorses:

At Judgment Day, a recalcitrant soul protests that, for the livings, there is no sign indicating there would be a trial after the passage to "the other side."

Of course, we all know the lugubrious warnings of the Church. But quite frankly, with all its contradictions, the Church was not totally convincing, argued the soul.

Moreover, even famous eminent prelates did not follow virtuous sets of rules while alive!

And, speaking of rules, what are they



supposed to be, exactly?

Considering all that haziness, it would be rather unfair to judge her, concludes the soul.

The Judge replies:

“Have you ever seen a newborn screaming as he comes into your world?

Have you ever seen the most robust man or woman suddenly scythed, becoming a pathetic cripple?

Have you ever seen the most seductive man or woman after a few years, all wrinkled and slouched, becoming the laughing stock for the youth?

Have you ever seen a dying man or woman gasping for air?

Have you ever seen the cadaver of the wealthiest man or woman decomposing?

Then, you saw my messengers.

Then, you had to answer my riddle.

It is time to use our imagination in trying to reconstitute what followed the story and Bérot's ways of winning his

audience.

In modern terms, the sermon may have gone a little bit like this:

**Bérot:** "Dust we are and dust shall we become."

**Voice in the crowd:** "To hell you can go, Bérot!"

**Bérot:** "That means we will die, and you too, my friend. You will die and your body will be dust.

As for your soul...

What will happen to your soul?"

**Another voice in the crowd:** "Jehan has a soul?"

(Laughter)

**Bérot:** "Your soul will go before the Throne and it will shiver, like a lone wing in the winter wind."

**Another voice in the crowd:** "We'll all die, Bérot."

**Bérot:** "When our dear Simeon died, some eight years ago, I was the one who gave him the last rites of our Mother the Church. Simeon appeared to me more than once, in very vivid dreams, sometime after his death,

and for a while.

Who knew Simeon?"

**Many voices:** "We did"!

**Bérot:** "I said: 'Simeon? Where are you?'

And I saw where he was, but not with my eyes, but with my trembling soul.

He was in a patch of fertile, red ground.

And Gardeners were working on the patch, two or three of them, with long beaks and wearing strange clothes, their fixed stare on their task.

Their cold metal picks were entering Simeon's soul.

He said, and I heard him in my own soul:

"Let it be a lesson for the one who are still alive. Be ready. Be aware'."

(Progressive silence)

**Bérot:** "And Simeon will eventually come to the Throne. So will you. What will you say, then?"

**A female voice in the crowd:** "I'll say 'Why didn't you intervene, my Lord, when my husband was randomly killed by some soldiers and when my two children disappeared one day, from our poor farm in Esperron'?"

**Bérot:** "No, you wouldn't."

**Other voices in the crowd:** "Yes! We would ask about diseases, and starvation, and drought, and injustice".

**Bérot:** "No, you wouldn't.

You will be dead. Everything, good and bad, will be vanished.

All your concerns, which used to thunder in your mind, will be dead silent.

The biggest and the smallest things will float somewhere at a distance.

But life, suddenly the treasure of all treasures, where will it be?

You will not know.

Life will not be there.

Shouldn't you have thought about that matter beforehand?

You wouldn't even recall all your qualms about your neighbor stealing an apple from you; your outrage about what your cousin said about you; your dream of buying a calf this year; your regret about the wine which was not as good as some other years...

Even the pain you had in your knee...

All that belonged to the realm of life.

But life would be missing altogether.

Life! Good and bad, life will have been taken away and you would miss it like the shriveled grass misses a drop of water.

At that point, life, the very life that is no longer yours, would shine like the summer sun and you would be in the depth of the coldest winter night.

And when the Judge will ask you "What did you do?" you will understand.

Life was much more than a stolen apple, more than what they said about you, more than what you wanted to buy, or even more than pain and grief.

Death is everywhere, and for a brief instant, you were given life, a life, a mind, a soul, a heart.

You were different. You were a creature. You were unique. You were a knight of God, entrusted with a Mission.

You could ask questions. You could wonder.

You could marvel. You could observe and answer."

(Silence)

**Bérot:** (to the woman who objected about

unjust deaths) "And the Judge will tell you:  
"I gave you life and its wonders. They were  
engraved with a question.

I wove the fabric of the whole Creation for  
you and only for you.

And I gave you a heart to feel it.

I made sure to leave plenty of space between  
the stitches for you to write and paint  
whatever you wanted.

But you did not pay attention.

I blessed you with love.

However, I know that you were in a land of  
roaring lions and howling wolves. So, you  
had to stand tall and call: "What is behind  
all this?"

But you took the blessing for granted.

When love left, what did you do?

Did you wonder what was in all this?

No. You complained bitterly and turned a  
blind eye, a deaf ear to My Secret.

Why didn't you say "What is behind beauty  
and sorrow? What is Your Secret, my Lord?"

Bérot, then, would talk about the Secret.

V The first meeting

At the end of his sermon, when his public was more or less reduced to putty, Bérot would talk about the "secret of God."

Now, we may be able to fathom that a simple priest found such secret. After all, religious people are meant to do just that: finding God's messages to men.

Knowing how difficult is any spiritual communication, how did Bérot share that "secret" with his rather plebeian public? How did his parishioners perceive that "secret" and how far did it traveled in their souls?

Sadly, Jan Amoulet remains mum on all these questions.

Let's go back to the exhibit "*Elevated Middle-Ages*," this time with a translator on our side. Let's imagine for a minute that an illuminated manuscript is open at the right page, where Bérot has enunciated the secret that was revealed to him.

Our translator reads it out loud, pronouncing a noun, a verb, a direct object festooned with outdated adjectives.

Nothing worth getting into a frenzy or an ecstasy.

When someone claims *I know the secret of life*, his or her listener usually understands that a revelation is coming:

*I know the secret of life, and here it is: (...)*

Now, suppose that, instead of the typographic colon preceding the revelation, we see a stern closing period.

In other words, Bérot may have said: "Oh, yes, this secret of life? I know it. Now, we can talk about something else. A little windy for this time of year, isn't it?"

So, we may hypothesize that, instead of unveiling the secret, Bérot only testified that something was revealed to him. Since each revelation is individual, he could only encourage his flock to ask the right questions.

Was what he had transmitted in his sermons the secret, or the confidence that there was a divine secret awaiting individually each one of them?

It took a few weeks for Martin De Lleda to cover what was usually a three day walking trip separating Avignon from Le Tertre de Carces.

He may have had to see some people along the way. More likely, he wanted to scramble his tracks, in case the Pope would have looked for him.



Martin was indeed curious to see the person who could declare *I know the secret of life*. Moreover, he had been intrigued by certain expressions from the "*Readings of the Bible on Truth and Grace*." Also, perhaps he wanted an intellectual excuse to flee the papal court.

Whatever were the reasons for this visit to Le Tertre de Carces, he truly did not expect Bérot to communicate any supernatural formula that could have been mysteriously given to him. The meeting with Bérot had the potential to hopefully open new intellectual or spiritual horizons for him.

It is more or less what happened.

The first person Martin De Lleda saw at Le Tertre de Carces was Father Garné. In front of the affable old priest, Martin hid his real identity. After all, had he admitted to be the cardinal in charge of the heresy case against Bérot, we can assume that a few doors may have shut right away before him. So, Martin lied with his usual ease, and he was invited to stay the time he wanted on "his way to Toulouse."

More than two weeks elapsed before Martin could find the ideal circumstances to have a real conversation with Bérot. During these two weeks, Martin got acquainted with the monastery other residents, a rather interesting group of characters, as we shall see.

But the one who intrigued Martin the most was by far Father

Garné.

Once, in the refectory, Garné cracked, out of the blue, a joke about a bishop who pretended to be a simple vicar. The joke was not very funny but the old man asked Martin specifically:

"Don't you find this hilarious?"

Martin was startled. He had not seen this coming. But Garné did not seem to care for Martin's reaction, and without transition, he asked the same question to a novice.

Did the old man guess the truth? But how could he have seen through Martin's sophisticated excuses and alibis?

Who was this Father Garné? It is likely that Martin knew very little about him when he came at Tertre de Carces. As for us, with the distance and the means of modern research, we are able to gather some information about him, even though Garné never wrote anything and even though the local colporteurs of songs and stories did not use him as a character.

He spent his whole life at Le Tertre de Carces and died there, at the tender age of 86. Of course, his name was mentioned in quite a few documents, for he baptized, married, buried several generations of the people of the region.

Before Bérot's return to the monastery, Garné had never been the Father-Abbot in charge. He seemed to have been content to always occupy a subordinate position. Afterwards, since most of the monks had died or fled after the local epidemic, or

Bérot's satanic curse, if you would rather believe that hypothesis, he became the dean in charge almost by default.

Garné is mentioned several times by name in the monastery's Books of Hours. The Gratien brothers depicted him in very respectful terms as a soft-spoken, benevolent man.

Another source of information comes from one of four thin manuscripts without a formal title, most probably written by Brasquet de Laons. These enigmatic booklets evoke an imaginary Apostles era and describe four disciples who became instructors of the "Good Word."

In these pages, the disciples were shown preaching and working, attending official reunions and family gatherings.

The scholars who have studied these stern pages, not illuminated and written with the compact calligraphy of "*Readings of the Bible on Truth and Grace*," had no opinion on these non-epic, spiritually predictable pieces.

However, one of the booklets was about a certain Master Genar. We know that Brasquet de Laons did not feel too good when he saw that the Inquisition used his *Readings of the Bible on Truth and Grace* to harass his spiritual master and friend Bérot. Thus, he was not about to unwillingly incriminate again anybody by name in any of his writings.

Could he have devoted one of these booklets to Father Garné, transposing his character to another era and adopting for him a simple acronym of his name?

Let's explore this possibility and quote a passage of the few pages devoted to Master Genar transformed, according to our hypothesis, into Garné.

"Master Genar/Garné used to sigh and smile.

One day, he saw a small child trampled by an ox. The boy was saved and lived, but he remained in such poor condition that no one thought he could walk ever again.

Garné held him and stayed with him, as his mother and father could not.

Little by little, he cured the young boy who became Arnault, and smiled and sighed.

Arnault asked Father Garné to become like him, a man of God.

"We shall see," replied the priest.

Years past, and Garné was the priest who married Arnault. He christened his children.

Later, when it was time to administer the last rites of the Church, Arnault asked on his death bed:

"Father, why didn't you want me to become a man of God, like you?"

Garné answered:

"God is better served by good men who respect his Commandments and are

pillars of thoughtfulness, rather than  
by men of ignorance who happen to wear  
the habit and the tonsure".

During the religious and philosophical debates that were taking place at Le Tertre de Carces, and that were duly recorded in its volumes of Books of Hours, Garné's voice was scarce and pragmatic; so pragmatic in fact, that one may wonder if he was serious in his commentaries or just facetious, or even if he understood anything at all.

I am well aware that this chapter is about the first encounter between Bérot and Martin, and that one more digression may lose my reader(s) for good. But the following anecdote is typical of Garné's confusing personality and I cannot resist presenting it here, as to illustrate Martin's puzzlement before the dean of the monastery.

One day, Gratien l'Ancien, the elder of the two brothers, copied this sentence from "*The Book of Mirrors*," a famous 12<sup>th</sup> Century anonymous spiritual poem":

*"And I saw ferocious men attacking the meek  
and the weak, and the defenseless. And I  
turned to God and asked him why".*

"*The Book of Mirrors*" does not elaborate on any answer and just continues its litany of questions to God until it reaches a

lyrical and stoic prayer "*Hosanna, blessed be the one who rejoices*"

Gratien l'Ancien seemed to have been intrigued by the quote, and he submitted it to the other monks, asking them:

"In your eyes, what would be God's answer to the question of the violence existing in these ferocious men?"

Gratien reported carefully their answers. Bérot and Martin started an animated exchange on who were the men unjustly attacking the weaker ones and what motivated them to act in such a way. Was it an evil tendency or was it sheer ignorance?

Other voices called Job to the witness stand.

Then, it was Garné's turn to express an opinion. He waited for a complete silence from the others and uttered in an exaggeratedly solemn voice:

"That is why, at the noble assembly of the Lord's knights, there are no meek souls. If a lion succumbs, it is still a lion and his roar of agony resembles its cry of triumph."

Gratien l'Ancien, after noting Garné's answer to his spiritual riddle, concluded seriously, apparently totally satisfied:

"And so, some nights, from fruitful exchanges, the mind gets warm and ready, full of reflective energy."

So, Martin De Lleda was more intrigued by the peculiar residents at Le Tertre de Carces than by all the inhabitants of the papal palace in Avignon.

He was in this monastery for a couple of weeks when Bérot had to go down to the village. Nonchalantly, Martin decided to accompany him. Brasquet de Laons, as a true ancestor of modern journalists, felt intuitively that the short journey could be interesting and joined the two men, thus allowing us to peek at the first encounter between the (pseudo) heretic and his (secret) inquisitor.

Starting the conversation directly was not an easy task. During these two weeks, Bérot never articulated a sentence of metaphysical interest. He was in fact quite self-effacing and used a disproportionate amount of platitudes when expressing himself.

During mass, Bérot sang poorly and seemed tone deaf, remarked Martin, who was an accomplished vocalist among his many virtues.

On the way to the village, Martin De Lleda could not acknowledge having read the *Readings of the Bible on Truth and Grace*," since very few people knew about it, and it was unlikely that a random traveler on his route to Toulouse could have ever heard about it. He chose to boast:

"I wrote at the University "*Sentences to Apostles, Saints and Prophets,*" and I would like the library of Le Tertre de Carces to keep a copy of the manuscript. What do you think of the idea?"

Bérot inquired politely about the book and the theories it contained. Martin summarized them before placing his attack:

"It is a reflection on the nature of divine attributes, such as omnipotence and grace."

Martin set up a strategic silence. Surely Bérot was going to bite and start talking about Truth and Grace, and their synonymy, according to his writings, or his sayings reported by Brasquet de Laons.

But the silence lasted. Bérot, who was famous for his inspiration and his eloquence in public, turned out to be rather gauche and slightly inarticulate in a one on one conversation, especially with an apparently eminent scholar.

Eventually, Martin asked more directly the monk's opinion on the topic of divine grace.

Bérot gave a non committal answer:

"Our library should have a doctoral book on this complex subject, indeed".

Martin turned towards Brasquet and, at long last, he got an opening. Brasquet, who was frank to a fault, explained:

"Father Bérot claims that all the elevated



concepts, such as the *divine attributes*, are indescribable. Truth and Grace are different for each man. But for God, it is one movement, one action. In the divine realm, they are synonym."

How difficult was it for Martin not to reply curtly:

"And you know this after a personal stay in the divine realm, don't you?"

He censured his vitriolic retort and enticed Brasquet to the following dialogue, proudly reconstituted by you-guessed-who, and with the integrity you can imagine:

**Martin:** God does not need to describe anything. Men do. Thus, *divine attributes* cannot be synonyms of each other.

**Brasquet:** Men are speaking of experiences. If a man has a spiritual experience, it constitutes truly a dialogue with God. The words of men always fall short.

**Martin:** What is the nature of your spiritual experiences?

**Brasquet:** How can we define them? Father Bérot is known for experiencing such special dialogues without words. In its source, did the Lord reveal him His Truth or His Grace? Or was it another Virtue? If I ask Father

Bérot what it was, he would answer with beautiful sentences, but confusing or even contradictory.

It is not that he does not want to be clearer, but he must resign himself: the words of men are very vague and inept."

**Martin:** Then, why did the prophets and the saints ever spoke? Why did Saint Paul and the Fathers ever write anything?

**Brasquet:** That is why Father Bérot is one among us and never pretended to be a prophet or a saint.

**Martin:** And you, Brother Brasquet, have you ever written? Did you ever use words you knew so as being "vague and inept?"

**Brasquet:** Yes, I did, alas. For it is my mission, I think, to keep Bérot's words for other men to see. As you said, Brother Martin, the Holly Book is indeed a book.

It may have been a bit disconcerting for Bérot to listen to the debate as if he were not there, while having his own name bounced around in all directions.

But he did not utter any comment or protest.

Once in the village, as they were conducting their benevolent

business, Martin de Lleda considered the pale personality of Bérot. During his lifetime, Martin had met a number of imposing religious men. They all had an appearance of great self-importance. They had the beard, the gaze and the tone of voice of wise men, not to mention, sometimes, the rich robes. Martin himself knew how to conduct himself as a cardinal and how to impress noblemen as well as plebeians.

But Bérot was a small, skinny, at times fidgety person. He had nothing of the classical image of a man even remotely wise, or mysterious. The only intriguing thing about him was a sudden, feverish stare that appeared and disappeared at once. He used an average vocabulary. His knowledge of Latin was flawed, to say the least.

Martin De Lleda had come to Le Tertre de Carces to see what was behind a mysterious, sectarian booklet. But that book seemed to have no true author.

Had Martin made a mistake in leaving his extremely affluent and comfortable position in Avignon in order to come to that strange place?

In the meantime, Bérot may have felt Martin's hesitations. For the first time, he had a long, direct stare at the bright but preoccupied stranger, who was resting on a stoop, waiting for the small group to be ready to hike back to the monastery.

Bérot sat across from Martin. When he spoke, Bérot's soft,

slightly stuttering voice was replaced by a firmer and, at the same time, more intense and melodic tone.

Martin, who naturally loved the art of public speaking and debating, appreciated the sudden change of voice as an unusual and very powerful tool to startle the listener. At that point, Bérot could have given a recipe to cook garden mushrooms, his listener would have heard the words as highly fascinating.

Bérot told the following story:

"Four priests, equally competent, were vying to become the bishop of Ashdod, where Saint Cyril had been sent in exile.

They asked Cyril to look into their souls, and determine who was spiritually the most apt for this eminent position.

Cyril gave the four priests one sentence to comment:

*"The trinity is not three, not two, nor one".*

The first father answered:

*"A sentence with that many comas and only one verb, is awkward and therefore does not merit any attention."*

The second father replied:

*"The sentence is indeed awkward, but not for grammatical reasons. I reckon*

*it is a poor imitation of the famous  
and infinitely more powerful adage:*

*"The Trinity is not three  
distinct entities. There lays  
its mystery."*

The third father shrugged:

*"What is the use of commenting at  
length a sentence that a little child  
could see as absurd? If the Trinity was  
not three, but not even one, it would  
not exist. But the Trinity is the heart  
of our Church. Therefore, no one should  
even consider that fallacious  
sentence."*

The fourth father nodded:

*"The sentence means that if the Trinity  
is not a number, it transcends all  
numbers. Its mystery is too immense to  
be simply accounted."*

*Cyril knew that the fourth father was ready.  
Not because he had studied more or was more  
intelligent. None of that! The fourth father  
could have written the sentence. He could  
have invented it. And maybe, he did."*

There was a short silence and Martin De Lleda smiled:

"I believe that Saint Cyril never went to  
Ashdod."

The answer startled Bérot so much that he opened his eyes very wide. At that very moment, Martin realized that his impulsive and self-serving answer mirrored the first father of Bérot's tale, the one who was haggling for grammar or punctuation. Martin may have been as ridiculous and irrelevant.

Instead of blushing and showing how embarrassed he was, the ex-cardinal Martin burst into laughter.

Bérot said admiringly, and maybe mistakenly:

"You are very witty."

From that meeting, the two men, of such different backgrounds and sensitivities, became friends.

VI The secret is revealed, or is it?

You may wonder why on earth we are following a cardinal on a quest for answers about "*Readings of the Bible on Truth and Grace*," rather than presenting a simple translation of the text, maybe accompanied with a few notes or a commentary.

Didn't I mention that the original manuscript was lost? Surely, I would not have omitted such an important detail. It would be very unprofessional from my part, and would exhibit some regrettable, bizarre mental lapses for an otherwise reputable History professor.

The fact is that there is no remaining copy of the Bérot/Brasquet theories to date. We can reconstitute less than half of the text by searching through the unfinished 1320 papal Bull, "*Faith and righteousness*," drafted by Martin De Lleda.

We can also look in the monastery Books of Hours. There, the "*Readings of the Bible on Truth and Grace*" is not quoted

directly, in part because of the fear of the Inquisition. But there are obvious mentions of it. It is then up to the researcher to determine which lines refer to Bérot's "secret."

Brasquer de Laons has entitled his account of Bérot's teachings "*Readings of the Bible on Truth and Grace*" because they were first and foremost Sunday sermons to the public, hence based on readings of the Bible.

We can remark that the passage we have copied from the papal Bull and which starts with the long sentence "*In the shade of the nightly prayer, pronounced in complete solitude, an angel sang for me a song without words, for a deepest night always awaits the man of God,*" does not seem very well suited for an illiterate public.

We must remember that the author was not Bérot, but Brasquet. The written text was not a faithful word per word transcription, but a presentation to another type of audience. Brasquet inversed the popularization process in his attempt to transform Bérot's digressions, pronounced in everyday vernacular, into an academically viable religious treaty, for the higher clergy.

We can marvel before the alterations Bérot's ultimate secret must have gone through. Initially, there was this moment of grace where this *ultimate truth* was revealed to Bérot, who was,



we must repeat, a monk of Dominican background, although not the most apt scholar.

As Brasquet himself noted, Bérot's transcendental experience was indeed beyond the breadth of the words. But as it is natural for most human beings, Bérot did try to communicate it. He did so, using indeed his specific cultural background rich of terms such as "Holly Ghost," "Grace," "Divine Mystery," where others could have said "ecstasy," "nirvana" and more exotic Sanskrit nouns.

Moreover, Bérot did not relate his experience to fellow monks and more educated noblemen, but to commoners. He used everyday comparisons, tales and metaphors. He wanted to touch his flock, inspire them, console them, make them aware that there was another dimension to their lives. He chose specific promises to entice his listeners to look for the secret by themselves, within themselves.

This may have been, by the way, his most disturbing message, in the eyes of the official clergy. At a time when the king and the pope were superior human beings while the peasant's ontological position was just slightly above the animal realm, Bérot preached that there was a direct access to God for any believer, as socially destitute as he or she may have been.

So, here is the subtle secret of divine nature that Bérot had

first to put into words, words by essence imperfect. He had to somewhat dilute it a little more in order to make its search appealing by his particular audience. He had most certainly to resort to images, parables, comparisons and what the modern scholars would call "myths."

This spiritual material would eventually laid on a parchment by Brasquet, who felt compelled to cover it with a rather opacifying layer of verbiage. In his mind, this type of varnishing was a condition to make Bérot's *secret* remarkable to the religious elite.

Curiously, while Bérot could care less about these venerable members of the Catholic Church, Brasquet wanted the teaching of the man he admired so, to be acknowledged by them.

In retrospect, we know that, ironically, his efforts only attracted too much their vindictive interest.

After all the changes endured by Bérot's *ultimate secret*, from a subtle feeling to becoming "*Readings of the Bible on Truth and Grace*," it is quite doubtful that, even if we had found the entire manuscript, we would have understood or merely glanced at that secret.

However, as I had to comb through Le Tertre de Carces library in search of references to the Bérot/Brasquet's text, I found many indirect commentaries of the work. I have detailed them in "*The Library of Tertre de Carces in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century*,"

which I invite you to read at your leisure, and you will need quite a bit of leisure to do so.

Now, if by the time you come across these lines, my laudable reference book on medieval literature is still not published, I do not see how I could stop you from demonstrating peacefully in front of your local university press with signs showing your legitimate outrage. I only wish that you keep them clean.

In the meantime, here is what we can gather about the *secret* through all the fragments and commentaries available to us.

First, Bérot insists on its simplicity:

"In one blink of my eye, He breathes, and  
all transforms into Him

(...)

I heard a noise coming from the path and I  
turned my head. Was He gone? No, for He was  
in my joy, like a candle that will  
eventually dim away."

(...)

(Your Voice is) the spring air and the water  
of the spring at noon, the reflection of the  
sun on the lake, the thinness of the  
lightening in the soundless sky..."

Bérot laments often:

"Brother, if He is here, why don't you see Him? Blind, we must be. It is the nature of our inferior condition. If we would see Him, we would suspend all our activities".

And Brasquer de Laons wrote in his curious chronicles without a formal title:

"He is here. Do you still want to see Him? Do not attempt to open your eyes wider. Nod and smile, shake your head and grin, open your heart and stop the noise of your prayers, bend your head and reach for the clouds."

This is of course a classical technique: in order to conjure up what is essentially unspeakable, the author links paradoxical, sometimes opposing concepts, with the hope that the reader's mind could comprehend that way what is "beyond" them.

The theme that a necessary spiritual blindness could be lifted at times but always bound to return, is developed and illustrated in several parts of Le Tertre de Carces Books of Hours.

In a sort of compendium of "*spiritual chivalry*" quoted at length in one of these books, we find a classical comparison used to address the notion of spiritual blindness:

Two knights were summoned in the Higher

Court, where they were told:

"According to the Chivalry Code, you must embark in a grand journey and conquer savage nations for the love of your Dame."

Both knights knew that, at the end of their journey, the Gentle Dame was awaiting one of them. But only one of them had seen her, and for a very brief moment, he had been able to admire her great beauty. Also, now and then, her image could come back to his mind.

This knight fought much harder and better than the other one.

We can surmise that the image of the Dame is a metaphor for the whiff of the *secret*.

Elsewhere, the Books of Hours consider again these two knights. This time, one of them sees the Dame briefly before starting his heroic odyssey, while the other can see her every day, as long as he wishes. The first one conquers valiantly the savage lands, while the second knight, never satiated of the presence of the Dame, is simply not able to leave for his crusade. Thus, he loses his knighthood.

Here again, the whiff of the *secret*, for the religious seeker, is assimilated to the glance of the Dame for the knight. Its brevity is proven necessary in the cited examples.

If the seeker were to remain too long in the *secret*, chances are that he would stay immobile. He would not have any need to act.

Bérot insisted heavily on the fact that the secret could be lost for extended periods of time. Contrary to the concept of nirvana as it is conventionally understood, a permanent realization of what the ultimate reality is, Bérot's secret seemed much more volatile, unpredictable, capricious...

This aspect led to the ambiguous concept of *grace* that we should study a little later.

When "Grace vanishes," Bérot's laments announced the beautiful poems of the Absence, by Theresa de Avila or San Juan de la Cruz.

Bérot reluctantly admitted that some chosen souls or some more spiritually accomplished human beings ought to be able to never lose the secret AND to continue acting in the world of men.

Thus, only saints, prophets were spiritually evolved enough to always keep the secret in their minds and their souls, while subtlety transforming the world around them.

The "hidden prophets" were also an important category of religious men, apt to keep the secret for extended periods of time.

To summarize, we know now that not only *Bérot's secret* would not provide us with special superhuman powers or even a seat in the Heavens after our death, but for Bérot himself, it was incredibly simple, extremely fickle and always on the verge of vanishing.

At this point, we may comprehend it as much as Martin de Lleda after his first month at Le Tertre de Carces. Luckily for us, this knowledge was not sufficient for him, either. He wanted to learn more, to understand Bérot better.

So, he stayed in the monastery. Thus, we can continue to examine his own analyses and conclusions, as he carried on his investigation on the nature of Bérot's secret.

## VII THE HIDDEN PROPHETS

In many cultures, we find the tale of a prince or a king, who suddenly comes in contact with a mysterious poor man who befuddles him. Such an occurrence is rather improbable in reality, since the lord tends to believe his race and the plebeian's race are a few species apart. But in these stories, not only there is a communication between the two characters, but the king is saved or is helped by the mysterious fellow of lower condition.

Angels, prophets and saints take often ragged disguises appear to human societies. Bérot used them a lot in his Sunday sermons, with prophets and saints lecturing the rich and powerful.

But Bérot often added the following twist: he asked where did prophets and saints come from? And he provided this incredible answer: they had to come from "our midst."



How come nobody seemed to be aware of them, was he asked?

Simple: because they had no choice but to live in hiding.

Bérot's parishioners were always quite intrigued by the idea that some prophets could "come from their midst," and he was thus able to take them on the following type of demonstration:

**Bérot:** Let's say that one of you, during a silent prayer, asks the correct question and is suddenly entrusted with a secret.

**A voice:** Like how to erase our sins and get to Heaven when we die?

**Bérot:** Maybe. But a question for the living seems more appropriate. Like knowing why we have been created.

**Another voice:** What do we do with knowing that?

**Bérot:** I'm asking you.

**Another voice:** I'd repeat it to everyone, so they know what I know.

**Bérot:** They will believe you?

**Another voice:** Why not?

**Bérot:** Why would they believe you now? They know you for who you are and you are not a famous prophet, are you?

**Another voice:** I would show them the secret.

**Bérot:** You can't.

**Another voice:** Why not?

**Bérot:** You see, it is like certain days, you look around and everything seems beautiful and joyful. You are full of energy and hope. A little event, that you hardly notice usually, like a flower, the song of a bird, makes you smile.

You cannot show that, can you? It is in your soul only.

**Another voice:** Then, people around me will notice that I have changed, that I'm always in a good mood.

**Bérot:** They will think you fell on your head.

**Another voice:** So, what do we do?

**Bérot:** Nothing. You only know that you cannot show your secret to others. You have no visible sign, no stigmas, no miracle you can perform.

You only look at things differently, like a sick person who suddenly recovers his health. There is a peace in you.

**Another voice:** What is it worth, really?

**Bérot:** It is extremely valuable, because

this vision and this peace were lacking before and you were much more miserable without it.

**Another voice:** Yeah, I guess it's not bad not to feel miserable.

**Another voice:** So, we just have to enjoy it?

**Bérot:** Yes. Even if you wanted to alleviate the weight of the days for the people around you who may feel miserable, what would you say?

Something like:

"I know something that will change everything. You see, life is wonderful."

They would examine you carefully and, if they determine that you are not drunk, they would shrug and ask if you became suddenly a bishop or something.

Truly, they would not think you know anything about how wonderful life really is, because they would remember you yelling and cursing when small things did not go your way.

They would conclude that you are not wise enough to know how to see things

differently, anyway.

And if you insisted, they could even ask:

“Stop talking like that. Is the devil  
in your soul?”

Consequently, you would have to hide what  
you know.

In a way, you would have to hide your  
spirit.

You would, as I see it, be forced to be “a  
hidden prophet.”

**Another voice:** So, nobody will ever know?

**Bérot:** At times, you will be asked.

Curiously, Bérot never fully endorsed Brasquet’s attempt to explain his “secret,” even before the Inquisition took aim at the manuscript.

Of course, Bérot did not trust that the written words could fully transmit what he meant. Also, we saw that Bérot was a less than average student, which is not excessively important in the realm of spirituality. Consequently, he did not give any particular value to books. For him, the *secret* had to be transmitted through direct questions. As he said:

“At times, you will be asked.”

Then, the secret could be passed to someone else if the right question arose. That question, which was truly the key to

open any spiritual dialogue, could come from another parishioner, or even from a Prince or a King, if you are a folktale hero. Then, in a rare moment of thorough exchange, the other inquiring mind catches a glimpse of the secret, or perhaps simply the will to look for it.

One can see a certain contradiction between that theory and the fact that Bérot was a preacher, someone who was not waiting for a question but volunteered to offer more or less forcefully what he knew on his public.

Brasquet answered that very claim in one of his "anonymous" texts kept in the library. According to him, a preacher was a man whose mission was to praise God and help His Name be present in the parishioners' minds.

In other words, the preacher could say "There is a Secret," without being able to ever approach the nature of this Secret in any form of preaching.

In a typical folktale, during the exceptional communication between the king and the poor, wise man, usually the roles are rapidly reversed: the nobleman begs for more wisdom, while the poor man shows some frustration towards the high ranked ignorant.

But the cause of this awkward reversal is less a karmic cycle of social revenge than the unspeakable nature of the secret.

If the secret resists the transmission to a beloved who is suffering, it will be very much opaque for instance, to a courtesan who knows truly very little about things of the soul and whose everyday concerns are essentially material or even at times, purely greedy.

If the "hidden prophets are in our midst," we can say that Bérot democratizes prophecy. However, he would not compare a "hidden prophets," a mere accomplished man of sorts, to a biblical prophet.

But, in our dejected world, "hidden prophets" were supposed to have some importance for the religious souls. They were a "bridge."

Bérot claimed that these "prophets" were not scarce. Then, it was natural for his listeners to ask him: was he, Bérot, one of them?

Bérot did not mind answering this question somewhat affirmatively. Yes, he had resigned himself to be one anonymous prophet in some ways. But he would add quickly the words: *At times*. And even more rapidly: *"As much as the next person."*

Imagining Bérot as a "hidden prophets" is easier for us. We can form a certain idea of him through his sayings, and lend him more or less consciously, a certain Socratic appearance.

For his contemporaries, that was more of a stretch. At first glance, this small and skinny person with a sickly look,

maybe a twitch in his eyes and, oddly enough, an apparent lack of confidence when he would not speak publicly, did not inspire awe and admiration.

At Le Tertre de Carces monastery, Bérot elaborated on the comparisons between "hidden prophets" and "biblical prophets."

The nature of their messages was quite dissimilar. One warned the people to change their ways, or else the consequences would be quite harrowing. The other one dealt solely with an individual and his relationship to the world around him (i.e., to God, for the monk Bérot).

The first one was chosen by God. He had no choice but to obey. He remained a man of God and was given some means to prove who he was in the eyes of their contemporaries. The other was a seeker. His prophecy was not bestowed on him at once. He had to willingly enter a certain path. Of course, he may also have felt he had been chosen (the concept of *grace*), but, in any case, he had to actively search God. His message was, once again, a new appreciation of life rather than a purely eschatological one. But it was prophetic in the sense that it conveyed a message from God (the Truth):

"Obey the Truth in order to achieve the  
Truth."

Also, the "hidden prophets" could lose this grace. In the poems of love and loss, when the mystique loses temporarily this

*secret*, he or she laments the abandonment by the Beloved, like the forlorn voice in the Song of Songs. For Bérot/Brasquet, the abandonment was triggered by the seeker's own lack of strength or faith. It was, in a way, self-inflicted, because of the inherent frailty of the seeker's willpower.

It is apparent that Bérot confused constantly many terms, like "hidden prophets" and "seekers," or elsewhere "men of prayer," as well as *grace, prophecy, truth, knowledge, etc.* He was aware that muddling all these words could be detrimental to a solid communication with his peers and disciples, but he resigned himself to being seldom understood, thanks to the flawed nature of words.

That observation did not stop him from taking quite a bit of time, before each sermon, to choose different biblical sources, linking them arbitrarily in order to equate certain terms, such as *grace, truth, secret, etc.*, with a seal of orthodoxy, as to validate his deductions.

Martin De Lleda was much more reticent to mix up words and concepts. The cardinal and the Dominican abbot had many discussions on that topic, as we can see indirectly reported in the monastery Books of Hours.

Because of Martin's probing, Bérot had to refine somewhat his formulations. It is a shame that Martin and Bérot did not eventually sit down to write a new version of *Readings of the*



*Bible on Truth and Grace*. We could have had, possibly, an outstanding spiritual work.

The concept of "hidden prophet" became a commonplace at Le Tertre de Carces. One day, the Books of Hours reported that Father Garné asked:

"Is Aquelhom a hidden prophet?"

Aquelhom was a peculiar man who had an ambiguous reputation in the region. An anchorite monk, he lived in the Northern high hills, at least a whole traveling day from Le Tertre de Carces. He would come several times a year to the monastery to get some food, not even bothering to stop and beg in the closer hamlets.

During his stay at the monastery, Aquelhom used a minimum of words, and he was not about to waste them on politeness and thanks. His halts were as short as possible. He never ate with the monks, but took time to bundle methodically, for hours, his provisions, before leaving without a goodbye.

The villagers feared him instinctively. He was not one of these weak-minded monks that young people could mock. He genuinely avoided human company. When he crossed path with a peasant or a man of elevated social status, he would pass as if they were invisible.

If anybody bothered him, he blasted without ever slowing down, a sudden, thunderous and chilling "What!" or "What do you want!" that was less of a question than the ominous threat of a

damning curse.

Bérot thought that Aquelhom was a hidden prophet. He could not justify clearly why. Maybe he admired secretly Aquelhom's disdain for common rules. Perhaps he wished to have more of the anchorite's unyielding demeanor?

Martin de Lleda was of course more skeptical. Seemingly oblivious to where he was staying, Martin would habitually criticize the monachal way of life. He repeated that seeking God in the comfort of the cell, surrounded and protected by people of the same faith, was much less difficult than keeping God while struggling in the mundane life.

For him, anchorites were even more mistaken than regular monks who were themselves inferior to the religious men seeking God within the secular, trivial world; or to put it more bluntly, "in the society of sinners."

*"Finding God in the company of sinners is more commendable than finding Him in the society of virtuous men,"* he liked to declare.

One may find these criticisms against monks and anchorites rather paradoxical, coming from Martin de Lleda. After all, the cardinal also benefited greatly from spiritual coziness, to say the least.

Martin had to acknowledge that "coziness" was a good synonym for the material comfort he has indeed enjoyed in

Avignon.

However, and he had some of his coded Avignon writings to prove it, he strongly denied he knew any type of "spiritual coziness" at the papal court.

In a passage where he described in subtle, concealed metaphors his life as a cardinal, Martin claimed that being in the company of the Church principal "Commanders" (sic) was "spiritually strenuous."

Father Garné's question about Aquelhom ended up curiously being determinant for Martin de Lleda's personal spiritual route.

After his criticism of monachal and anchorite way of life, he had to logically take himself as a model in the search for "virtue in the forest of sin."

Martin considered himself, like many in his days, a wandering, spiritual knight. In the papal palace or on the road, he saw himself as a seeker of the Truth. That trait was, indeed, what had brought him at Le Tertre de Carces.

Actually, long before his visit to Le Tertre de Carces, a certain period of Martin de Lleda's life puzzled greatly this particular "spiritual knight": his prolonged stay in Senez

Speaking openly in a monastery about complex, puzzling situations taking place in a profane court, was somewhat tricky. Martin could not use concrete terms, but vague transpositions of

a few interesting adventures illustrating his own, genuine quest for the divine, in a most mundane realm.

Obviously, the peculiar nature of certain details could have been misconstrued. Thus, Martin had to dilute greatly these all-important cases in point. He was, so to speak, reduced to beat about the bush

But, thanks to our modern historical tools and resources, we can reconstruct approximately what Senez meant for Martin de Lleda and why it was, in his mind, a compelling illustration of his technique of searching "virtue in the forest of sin."

Actually, if we think about it, in front of our incredulous eyes, Martin is walking the tightrope that, (blasphemy of all blasphemies), strangely links sins and virtues.

Martin de Lleda had been named at a rather young age, the vicar-general for the Duke of Senez. He became actually his *éminence grise*.

In Senez as much as in Avignon, a few years later, Martin was attending very mundane affairs. However, there, his eternal quest for God and the Truth shone in a peculiar way.

Several times, in his letters to an ex-fellow student who had stayed in Toulouse, Martin claimed that those days in Senez were "his most glorious spiritual adventure!"

Let me repeat that astonishing sentence. At a time when he was not yet a cardinal, but had already met a few of the most

influential Christian theoreticians of his century, and traveled extensively from Spain to Belgium, via Paris, Martin wrote that his stay in Senez was "his most glorious spiritual adventure!"

Here is an illustration of this feat. The following lyrical poem, dating from the Senez period, is so different from anything Martin de Lleda ever wrote that I have wondered if he was its actual author, or if he was just quoting some anonymous, religious poet.

"If I am lying down, Thou show me the  
Creation Adam could name;  
If I walk, Thou recite the litany of all the  
glorious angels crossing our path;  
If I sit down, Thou invite ethereal voices  
to sing the praises of Your pilgrims  
If I eat, Thou provide what is in my plate;  
If I suffer, Thou smile as the Mother who  
found the long lost child  
If I die, Thou dispose the smooth sand among  
all the black pebbles for my bare feet to  
follow Your Path..."

What did trigger Martin's spiritual bliss?

He resided in a castle where he was honored and, according to some vicious, but wide-spread rumors, where he could pursue with impunity a discreet and astonishing exploration of carnal

knowledge.

Many researchers before us have studied the exact functions of Martin, his power and his relationships to various members of the Senez court. In this instance, the historians dispose of several independently concurring sources, including records and the invaluable poems of the troubadour Escoubou d'Aligres, who was a protégé of the Duke.

Loved and pampered, Martin was indeed... in heaven.

During a discussion, Bérot stated that

"Heaven is when God opens our spiritual sight."

Martin marveled at the expression "to be in Heaven" and asserted that he had been there, almost literally. Then, he asked Bérot, his supposedly heretic friend, what made his spiritual bliss superior to Martin's more "worldly," all encompassing paradise, encountered in Senez? Weren't they equally gifts from God?

Of course, Martin did not clearly enumerate all the ingredients that composed his personal slice of Eden.

Nonetheless, Bérot was baffled by the question.

From a distance, we may again wonder who was truly the "heretic" or the blasphemer, and who was the more conservative of the two?

Brasquet de Laons, recorded the exchange between Bérot and Martin about the expression "being in Heaven."

In response to Brother Martin's question about the nature of bliss, Bérot uttered:

"Spiritual bliss does not need an external source, like warmth, physical contentment, or praises. It comes within the soul and ends in the soul".

To which, Martin quipped:

"Isn't any pure joy, any feeling of elation, when properly acknowledged as coming from God, a satisfactory prayer to Him?"

And he quoted a Psalm that Brasquet scrupulously copied:

"Praise Him with the sounding of the trumpet  
Praise Him with the harp and lyre  
Praise Him with tambourine and dancing,  
Praise Him with the strings and flute,  
Praise Him with resounding cymbals.  
Let everything that has breath praise Him"

Another voice, perhaps one of the Gratien brothers, asked Brother Martin if he considered himself to be a "hidden prophet."

Martin answered unequivocally "No."

Bérot, faithful to his own theory, had to add:

"At times, of course you are."

The story did not say whether Martin laughed, shrugged or  
nodded.



VIII Of Camels and Regrets

The National Library of Russia in Saint Petersburg has a treasure of medieval manuscripts. If you are so inclined, you may ask to see the Guiart des Moulins collection. For reference, Guiart or Guyart was the first translator of the Bible into French, in 1294. You may then browse through a few samples of the precious Historical Bible of Guyart, and various Catalan and Vaudois Bibles.

There is also a series of other texts from various origins grouped together under a rather general and slightly anomalous title: "*Post Guiart des Moulins School, 14<sup>th</sup> Century, France*".

A study of the parchment on which they were written shows that it was made either by the monks at Le Tertre de Carces, or from an amazingly similar recipe.

If we trace these pages back to *our* library, there is little doubt that these "anonymous letters" were in fact written

by Martin De Lleda, during his stay at Le Tertre de Carces.

These letters have a vague dedication, "*To my lords and protectors,*" and a signature as indistinguishable "*Your servant,*" but they were sent to nobody in particular.

We surmise that they were most certainly topics for reflections and debates in the monastery.

Before giving an example of these "letters," we should answer a remark that some yawning but astute reader may conceive, while staring at the excerpts:

"How come this pseudo "reflection letter" looks like the previous text I just read, which was supposed to be "*so different from anything Martin ever wrote.*"

Moreover, is there any distinction between these two passages, considered to be the same voice at different times, and all the various voices quoted so far?"

You can imagine that, if I allow such a pointed criticism to hit these pages, it is because I believe to have some type of answer, or at least, an excuse.

The problem with these quotes is that the narrator and the translator of all these different sources are the same person.

Ideally, the style should change with each quote to adequately render the particular expressions of each writer or

speaker. But that would require some authentic literary skills, which may be in very small supply in this book.

On the bright side, these literally monotonous quotes do challenge the reader's imagination and creativity and consequently, do provide a test of sort.

Here is a typical page from these "*Post Guiart des Moulins School*," that we believe to be have been written by Martin de Lleda during his Tertre de Carces period:

"I fought great battles within myself and against elevated and demonic foes. It was said that I was a knight with a black velvet robe and a walking stick, and that I won often.

I was wearing a splendid, shining armor, as light as silk, stronger than the heaviest metal.

Wounded at times, even my scars are of pleasant vermilion lines.

Now, I must follow an ancient path in the hope to strike down the ultimate dragon.

I look around and nothing seems familiar. Nothing is recognizable.

If my King sent me in exile, why didn't He warn me?

I am alone and I cry my past glory.

Age must have weakened my sight, for I do  
not see my friends and my allies no longer  
are there. My sword is rust heavy."

We find here obviously the theme of the spiritual knight,  
so dear to Martin and to medieval literature in general.

Elsewhere in the manuscript, the same hand noted:

"Pierre de Vaux never gave up as much as I  
did".

The reader may have forgotten that Pierre de Vaux lived  
about one century before Martin. He was a rich merchant from  
Lyon, who gave away his wealth, to become a wandering preacher.  
He is said to be the founder of the Waldensians, a spiritual  
movement whose philosophy parallels Saint Francis's, but that was  
declared heretic for preaching without permission of the local  
clergy.

Popes never seem to work a lot on their religious open-  
mindedness, do they?

Martin De Lleda was actually not a great fan of Pierre de Vaux.  
As a matter of fact, he struggled mightily with the concept of  
poverty as a saintly virtue.

In all religions, there is a consensus that wealth and  
ultimate truth do not mesh very well.

Churches, needing money to be built and maintained, are

more lenient towards the rich: with a fair amount of good deeds and the right quantity of devotion, salvation may be within reach.

But the prevailing thought is that acquiring riches takes time and perhaps a certain amount of shrewdness and selfishness. It is difficult to picture Jesus, the model for all Christians, preaching for capital, plus value, productivity and exploitation of others. And of course, the famous episode when Jesus actually chased the merchants from the temple comes immediately to mind.

Since Pierre de Vaux was just mentioned, let us read a few passages on the topic, from "*The Knights of Poverty*," a document thought to be written by Pierre de Vaux himself, but that was in fact composed more than 50 years after his death.

Even apocryphal, it typifies the religious contempt for the riches. And please, do forgive, here also, the translator's typically monotonous style.

"The one who is tormented by his shop, his profit, his trade, can go to church and give alms to the poor... However, his torment is still his master, not God.

Perhaps will he be forgiven, for nobody knows how immense God's mercy is.

(...)

The one who gives away his shop, his profit,

his trade, has nothing left. He is like a young infant in his mother's arms. If not for his mother's love, he would die.

(...)

The man occupied by his torment hears many inharmonious voices. But God speaks very softly to His faithful listeners. How would His voice be heard by the tormented man?

(...)

And my (*female*) servant (*says Etienne Dinant, an epitomic rich merchant*) has no shop, no profit, no money. She is poor and she does not know God any better than I, rich and powerful."

To which, we answer: The one who knows, knows that being tormented by many things is the rule among men. The rich merchant sees more shadows dancing before his spiritual eyes, than the poor man who depends on simple life and God's good grace. Therefore, he has even less chances to see His Majesty than his poor servant.

(...)

And (a saint man) asked (Etienne Dinant):  
"How much of your day is devoted to the

Lord?"

The merchant answered: "My day is very full and complex. I must work a lot, so I can give a big purse to the poor on Sunday, in the name of our Lord."

But the saint man scolded him: "If your day is full, and complex thoughts turn around your head, how could you let the Lord in your heart?"

To which we add: for the good offering on Sunday, how many sins did the merchant commit during his week?

(...)

Without the Poor, the Rich can not be saved, for he would only accumulate his infernal wealth without being able to give the sacred alms.

If the Lord sees a glimmer of contempt as the Rich gives to the Poor, the Lord strikes the Rich to eternal Hell, for without the Poor allowing a good deed, the Rich would be more miserable than a beast.

This is why a man who gives one hundred gold coins to the poor will be sent to harsh Judgment if he told himself in his heart he

is superior to the poor.

And this is why if another man gives only one loaf of bread, begging the poor to accept it as a gift from the poor to him, that man will be lauded in the Heavens."

Curiously, the famous "*It is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God,*" which seems so intuitively obvious to most people, especially religious ones, troubled Martin De Lleda to no end.

He argued often that a poor monk preoccupied by his pittance is further from the Kingdom than a rich man who sees God in his wealth and gives Him thanks.

There is no doubt that on this topic as on many others, he locked horns with Bérot, whose predictable position followed Matthew (6:24): "*Material goods are your master. How can you obey two masters (Mammon and God)?*"

Let us go back to the "*Post Guiart des Moulins School, 14<sup>th</sup> Century, France*" parchments.

By the way, would it be interesting for anyone to know how on earth a few pages written in a Provencal monastery made their way to Russia?

I believe I have the information, ready to serve as material for a book or a movie a la "*The red violin,*" the 1998



feature film where the viewer could follow the peregrinations of a violin, built in Italy, transported to various countries before being sold, three hundred years later, in Canada.

In our case, we would marvel how the medieval letters were moved with a few other manuscripts to Apt in 1378, and then to Paris, St Denis, Versailles, Madrid (Spain), The Hague (Netherlands), Lille (France), Berlin and St Petersburg.

Here comes a momentous occurrence where the readers and their writer lament together, in a rare moment of communion, the regrettable absence of footnotes.

Where are we in the chapter, in the book, in the grand scheme of things?

No need to go back and try to make head or tail of our location, unless you have a taste for frustration and punishment.

Should we rather ask:

"Does it matter? Is life linear? Is your daily life flowing logically between point A and point B? Why would this book be organized, while chaos reigns outside?"

Of course, the answer to this iffy reasoning is precisely because "chaos reigns outside," that a book should be clean and organized.

Or should it?

The last letter of the St Petersburg collection, presumably written by Martin de Lleda toward the end of his stay at Le Tertre de Carces, had of course the same calligraphy as the others, but its tone was very different. It was not plaintive, acrimonious, or purely argumentative.

Martin, in the beginning of the letter, circled around the Gospel's famous Camel parable, voicing as usual his wariness before the affirmation of the sanctity of poverty, almost as if he wanted to understand poverty as a religious myth more than a literal quality.

However, his conclusion, that we are copying here, seems particularly astonishing. Martin shifts to a more colorful tone:

"One day, a very high bishop saved a poor man from an immense grief. One week later, he accused wrongfully an innocent girl and demanded for her to be burnt at stakes.

Was it the same bishop? Yes, it was.

This girl, who had been condemned, was brave and spirited. She was a heroin worthy of lyrical epics. But some knew she caused her mother's death.

Was it the same girl? Yes, it was.

Poor man, rich man, nobleman, commoner, how limpid is your heart?

You stagger forward for two steps and this  
is your life.

You claim and proclaim, and your words fly  
around, at times as proud birds of prey; at  
times, lighter than sparrows.

But your clothes and your flesh, even your  
bones will turn to dust. Your fortune or  
absence of fortune will not count any more  
than the flutter of a butterfly that has  
lived one day.

But did your heart remain limpid most of  
your day in this world?

This is why poor and rich, noblemen and  
commoners must watch their heart, not one  
day, one season, but at every moment.

None is exempt; all must care to have a  
limpid heart.

None is exempt; not even men with purple  
robes, not even men with scepters, not even  
men who lived in mud huts, or those who  
lived in caves."

The tedious translation fails certainly to show the  
difference of cadence and assonances adopted by the author in  
these lines.

In a way, this last letter shows how Martin de Lleda,

without ever admitting it outwardly, had to alter his very own intellectual positions and, maybe even his spirituality because of the monastery influence, especially Bérot's subtle affect.

Such a transformation could very well be one of the most difficult tasks for a human being, and especially a man of religion. Nothing is more devastating than to acknowledge that our faith was partially mistaken, in some way.

It is certain that the letter we just read actually reflected one of the conclusions of Martin de Lleda's stay at Le Tertre de Carces. Its Bérot-like, "prophetic" tone reflected Bérot's influence on the ex-cardinal of Murcia.

It was the first time that the question "Did your heart remain limpid most of your days in this world?" appeared in Martin de Lleda's religious work.

Isn't asking oneself new questions a sign of personal evolution?

### XIII Medieval anger management and revolutionary theories

Martin De Lleda has been indeed influenced by his stay at le Tertre de Carces at more than one level. For instance, it is well documented that he had a volatile temperament. This trait may have passed for some type of byproduct of leadership when he was a cardinal. But in a monastery, it was considered a very contemptible flaw.

Several times, Brother Martin brought up that topic to be debated with the other monks. He took some wise and noble resolutions, only to write later a contrition note, or a lament he probably sung with great sentiment after each bout of bad temper.

In medieval times, most monasteries were quite harsh on sinners in their midst. It was not rare to see some friar flagellating himself to the blood in front of the community for having made a mistake during mass.

Of course, at Le Tertre de Carces, under Father Garné's benevolent guidance, these spectacles would have seemed a bit odd. Nonetheless, the monks took their errors very seriously. And our ex-cardinal genuinely hated his temporary losses of self-control.

With his familiar ambiguous sense of humor (or was he serious?) Father Garné suggested that a discreet castration may remedy his problem:

"I know from experience that when you reach a certain age, some demons do not have access to you. Strangely, without these demons, one gets less upset, and remains very much calmer."

That quip stroke Martin as very insightful. Not that he envisioned any drastic surgery! Actually, the opposite was for him a hypothesis most interesting to consider. Martin remembered that during his blessed time in Senez, he was even tempered. Thus, there seemed to be indeed a correlation between his bad temper and the driest chastity he had to endure at Le Tertre de Carces.

Martin did not dare to voice the following conclusion in so many words: his experience proved that complete fulfillment of carnal craving had very much the same spiritual effect as castration. Moreover, this solution appeared to be way less painful and definitive than a dramatic organ removal.

If he could never utter this rather radical idea, Brother Martin could carefully bring to the attention of the other monks some theoretical questions about chastity.

One of the monastery's Book of Hours echoed one of the debates. The details were not given, but we have a few lines summarizing a conclusion. The tone leads us to believe it was probably pronounced by Bérot: celibacy was not only a command of the Holy Church, but it was a noble struggle against all sorts of inner demons, a war that the spiritual Knight had to wage.

Curiously, that rather orthodox conclusion did not frustrate Martin de Lleda. Understanding the correlation between his lack of control over his moods and complete chastity had somewhat appeased him.

A couple of weeks after this realization, Brother Martin went once again before his peers with a new argumentation:

"The same way a rich man can dedicate his wealth to the Lord, a man can dedicate the act of love and its happiness to the Lord, Who gave many great treasures to men."

"A grateful heart is a limpid heart", repeated Martin.

Of course, the thought was quickly rebuffed because it was found to be easily permeable to excess. This time again, Martin did not seem too insistent in defending his argument.

One may see Martin's reasoning as an attempt to promote unabashed permissiveness. But a closer look shows that little by little, the ex-cardinal was actually elaborating nothing less than a new spiritual theory.

In the region of Le Tertre de Carces, in the early 14<sup>th</sup> Century, Good and Evil, with all their dualistic manifestations, reigned over philosophy and spirituality.

The virtuous knight was supposed to fight his enemies with a heavy, sharp, merciless sword. Martin loved this combative image as much as the next son (or nephew) of the Inquisition.

But he progressively fathomed that by allowing his inner enemies to be "*named, addressed, acknowledged as creations of the Lord Himself, sent for the betterment of the human soul,*" he could overcome them much better than with an "inner blade" that always seem to allow for this hydra to grow new heads and tentacles.

In other words, Martin de Lleda conceived the spiritual strategy of carefully yielding without breaking. Or, as a strange passage of the monastery's Book of Hours, likely echoing Brother Martin's arguments, puts it:

"Strong enemies, blindly fought, may very well defeat us.

Why would a man believe he is stronger than his own dark passions?

That is why the wise prince sends his best



diplomats with precious gifts to speak to his enemies.

The prince's emissaries salute the dreaded adversaries as they must, and say:

"Won't you join our prince in his crusade?"

So, instead of fighting the prince, the enemies consider the proposal and understand what the crusade truly is and all the benefits they can harvest from joining the prince, and they become enthralled by the glorious project.

And so, the wise man does not rush blindly against his most insidious weaknesses. He prays his Protector and with Him in his heart, descends to their caves and addresses them:

"Won't you join me to give thanks to the Lord?"

And the deformed affinities, who would have laughed if the wise soul would have dared to battle them, must bow before the Lord."

If we think about it, such a message was again much more "heretical" than any of Bérot's reflections about Grace, Truth

or the Holly Spirit.

To illustrate that great originality, let us examine the inhabitants of the monastery reactions to Martin's spiritual explorations.

First, who were these residents?

We mentioned that when Bérot came back to Le Tertre de Carces, most of the monks left, in a strange example of "human connected vessels."

But most of the novices stayed, because of Father Garné's personal charisma, we may assume. Truth must be told however, that the great majority of them did not have any choice but to stay. They came as oblates at a young age and, ill-equipped to confront the external world, they found more comfortable to remain in the friendly confines they had known their whole lives.

All in all, there were close to fifteen novices who spent their days doing chores and going to masses. Garné insisted they also spent some time writing and reading in the excellent monastery library.

They also attended the monks' deliberations and debates called in this particular monastery "*Perambulations*," although the novices could not directly voice their opinions.

Almost everyday, monks and novices gathered after the prayer of Vespers, and walk back and forth in the forecourt.

In the begining of the monastery, the Dominicans used these

"*Perambulations*" to recite from memory the quotes of the Fathers of the Church they thought appropriate for the day or around certain circumstances.

When he became Father Abbot, Garné transformed these practices, albeit healthy from the memory, into discussions.

By their time Martin came to visit Bérot, the "*Perambulations*" were the most important event of the day. Everyone debated. Since the rule prohibited the novices from intervening directly, they would write notes and questions at the end of the "*Perambulations*" in a special page placed next to the current Book of Hours. The next day, one of the monks would read these notes during the new *Perambulation*.

The event became basically quite static. Instead of walking back and forth, everybody stood in front of the church or in the refectory when the weather was inclement.

Luckily, we have some of the pages submitted by the novices. They provide us some precious supplementary information about the discussions between Bérot and Martin.

They also show that when Brother Martin first came at Le Tertre de Carces, the novices were very much under his charm. They were smitten by Martin's erudition and his talent to irrepressibly make his point. Conversely, they took Bérot's statements with more than a grain of salt.

But as time went on, and as Martin started to bring up his newest cogitations, the great majority of the novices grew very

uncomfortable with his unusual and often contradictory ideas. Then, they more or less counted on Bérot to oppose in their names, Martin's rather radical thinking.

The resistance of these young medieval minds to fairly innovative concepts is quite interesting. We must first notice that Martin did not bully his ideas on his peers or on the novices. As an ex-tenant of the Church orthodoxy, he knew very well he was walking on dangerous grounds. That is why he was extremely careful to use only general formulations, as if he was merely toying with hypotheses.

He would typically preface his reasoning with this type of sentence:

"Now, for the sake of resolving arduous philosophical and religious matters, let's suppose that someone would say..."

But, as we have just mentioned, even with these precautions, the novices grew more and more wary towards the bright and mysterious traveling friar.

In the meanwhile, as another example of "human connected vessels," Bérot's popularity among the novices rose. Our hypothetical heretic appeared like a mildly conservative priest compared to the ex-cardinal who, as we know, was supposed to judge him in the name of the Church.

In short, Martin started to spook everybody with his

deductions.

At that point, Bérot began to fear that another schism was going to erupt at Le Tertre de Carces. He even voiced the concern that, through Bérot's numerous personal enemies, the Pope could hear about Martin's own reasoning and link very unfavorably both of them. That possibility could lead to extremely inconvenient consequences for everybody's well-being in the monastery.

Bérot decided to act swiftly and, with Father Garné's blessing, he called the community to gather for a formal sermon to be delivered on Easter Sunday 1324, after the Offices and the grand mass.

Bérot prepared very carefully his sermon. He asked his friend Brasquet de Laons, to research in the Fathers Texts and in the Scriptures all the quotes he needed.

Shall I toot my own horn? Since nobody else would, I must indicate that one can find that sermon in its integrality, in the thorough but still unobtainable "*The Library of Tertre de Carces in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century*" (Addendum; Ms. CCXVI).

I will just summarize that sermon here.

Brasquet's research for the sermon was a rather succinct, compact compendium that constituted in fact one of a three part address. This purely academic element was named "*the recitato*". The second part was Bérot's inspired improvisations (*exposito*)

on the theme, and the third part was the "respons" that saw Martin's intervention.

That dialectical pattern was suggested by Martin, who apparently also fretted a division among the novices, and maybe the subsequent intervention of the Pope.

In the texts found in the Books of Hours, we can have glimpses of many friendly but often vehement exchanges between Martin and Bérot. But in this very instance, we witness a close cooperation between the two religious men, in order to try to prevent further turmoil at Le Tertre de Carces.

Bérot's Easter Sunday reconciliatory sermon in three complex parts was an application of a peculiar technique conceived by no other than Martin himself. He had elaborated that dialectical tool to convince other members of the high clergy, when he was in Avignon.

In the following paragraph, we will examine its blueprint. So, the reader who would be, unbelievably, completely uninterested by rhetorical strategies, can rejoin our (electrifying) story, around the following paragraph.

Let's say that the Cardinal Martin de Lleda wanted to convince the Church to buy a certain property. Let's also imagine that this particular expense was widely unpopular among the other Pope's counselors.

First, Martin de Lleda would gather several inspiring, well-chosen scholarly references to convince the assembly. Then, he would give his reasons for the potential transaction, making his point, but also quoting almost timidly a much higher price than the one he wanted to pay for the said property. He would utter it in a deliberately hesitant and humble tone, as if he had some doubt.

At that point, he would have an acolyte, another esteemed bishop he trusted, intervene as an "impartial voice," pointing in an exaggerated manner at the proposed amount. This "adversary" would also enumerate some minor flaws in the cardinal's exposé or in his past questionable decisions.

Eventually, Martin would alter his position, first reluctantly, and then wholeheartedly, full of loving contrition. He would sidetrack into a juicy but ambiguous *mea culpa*, ending up explaining at length the past misunderstandings.

In his triumphant conclusion, the cardinal, certainly touched by his audience's righteousness, wanted to make amends. Among his concessions, he would pay for the property a price that would be highly satisfactory for the Church, thus saving a great sum, which could be used for many good deeds.

So, to the satisfaction of everyone, the motion to buy the litigious property would be then unanimously adopted.

Some readers will see in the process nothing but a vulgar scam,

elaborated with fancy Latin words.

Others will indeed acknowledge the relative dishonesty of the stratagem, but without forgetting to admire its three parts, almost its three movements, *recitato, exposito, respons*, like in a musical composition. Besides, Martin's swindling ways were directed at cardinals and other dignitaries of the Church, which makes the offense somewhat forgivable, in some eyes.

At another level, it is interesting to examine Bérot's willingness to borrow Martin's dialectical technique in order to convince the novices at Le Tertre, rather than to rely on his usual own inspiration.

In a next life, wouldn't you like to write a two-character play, of Tony Award or Pulitzer caliber, between a potential heretic and his inquisitor, showing their burgeoning trust toward each other, leading to a solid friendship, while somehow influencing each other to an improbable reversal of philosophy?

Personally, I find their exchange quite exceptional. I do not really recall the last time I saw, in our glorious, technologically advanced century, anybody considering attentively a religious (philosophical, political) position opposite to his or her own, and open enough to admit the relative validity of these opposite views.

I must marvel again that it is quite a feat to imagine Bérot and Martin conversing and considering with respect the other one's position.



If you think about it, it is not that easy to have behind you many years of faith, sacrifices, prayers, time, energy, tears, will, efforts, etc. for your God, only to be confronted by another religious approach, somewhat contradicting yours.

Now, if you open yourself to the possibility that this other system is superior, or has qualities ignored by yours, all your years of efforts and sacrifice may seem suddenly vain.

What could be more unacceptable than that feeling? Can anyone let such doubt eat up one's personal past, one spiritual "identity"?

That is why it is usually much more convenient for your well-being to hermetically close yourself to the other approach, treat it as wrong, dangerous and, why not, evil.

In Medieval times, when a bout of misfortune fell on a region, all eyes stared at the stranger or the one who was different, the *other*. Then, some preventive or reactionary measures were taken, like a pogrom or the burning of a local witch.

You, my contemporary, enlightened friend, and me, would not do this, of course, would we? However, don't we have a certain propensity to judge quite negatively someone from another background, culture, social status, taste, etc.? Essentially, aren't we perhaps closer than we think to our medieval ancestors?

There is a direct filiation going from a sightless

inquisitor burning a stranger, to a Nazi during World War II, to a relatively mild mannered, well-dressed fellow citizen among you and me, who believes in his heart that all the woes of our society are caused by this or that minority. A brusque change in the political climate and the "zeitgeist," the spirit of the times, and our dear neighbor Jekyll transforms swiftly into a fascist Hyde.

It is a truism to affirm that, more often than not, very little usually separates the inquisitor from the heretic he is bound to condemn. They are both equally entrenched in their beliefs, both completely certain that they know the reality of things and that the other one is at best a lost sheep, if not an execrable fiend.

In the Roman days, Christians were forced to convert or to be killed. A few decades later, Christians forgot they were victims of blind intolerance, and forced others to convert or to be killed.

But at Le Tertre de Carces, two men had discovered that the other one was sincere in his search. Their paths were in no way similar, not even seemingly parallel. But neither one felt compelled to drag the other away from his personal course.

And as we analyze the texts the monastery library has left us, we can find amazing that some of Martin's discoveries entered Bérot's spirituality, and vice-versa.

Now, if we go back to the question of understanding what made Bérot decide to adopt and adapt Martin's elaborate argumentative stratagem rather than his own inspired "prophetic style," we may hypothesize that Martin persuaded him that his rhetorical technique was simply proven and superior, because it could convince without dividing.

With Bérot's mode for persuading others, some novices would most certainly take side for him while others would remain more critical. But with the ex-cardinal verbal choreography, everyone could approve the conclusion subtly pressed onto their minds.

Personally, I like to think that Bérot was simply curious to try something so completely different from his usual *modus operandi*.

Anyway, here is what we can reconstitute of the Easter Sunday sermon that sealed the monastery union, preventing any type of schism among the novices.

In this passage, I did not include the details of the *recitato*, nor Bérot's long introduction that exposed in general terms, the dangers of miscommunication.

*Recitato* (with references to *Barnabas*,  
*Epistle*, 4, 5 etc.; *Samuel I*, 9, 10, etc.)

**Bérot:** (...) and this why the wise man  
denounces the turmoil that rocks our soul  
when Pride reigns upon it.

What makes you speak up, Brother, if it is not Pride?

**Martin:** I went to explore my soul and yes, the most obnoxious Pride reigned upon it.

**Bérot:** But did you descend there in the name of the Lord?

**Martin:** I did. In the name of the Lord, as every action we try to pursue, as men of God.

**Bérot:** Pride is for merchants and lower men of weaponry.

Pride is for idle women whose sons can joust. But how can they end up but wounded or dead?

Pride is for men of high lineage who are about to be struck by misfortune.

**Martin:** I thank you all for hearing my testimony. As I confessed it earlier, I went in my inner sanctum with all the humility could muster. And there, I saw Pride as a statue. However, I did not bow down before this statue as a worshiper of the Golden Calf would have done.

**Bérot:** But you bowed down, nonetheless?

**Martin:** I saluted it. As a man who finds

himself helpless before the great abysses of men; as a poor man who is not a saint.

Who am I to think that I can triumph of the demons that threaten the soul, just because I was baptized; because I have received the sacraments; because I pronounce the name of our Lord?

**Bérot:** Indeed. We will not forget that the apostles, who all knew our Lord personally, who could talk to Him, whose ranks among men are the highest, all of them denied the Lord.

If the apostles themselves denied Him, what could be the true strength of you and me, men of this Century?

**Martin:** This is how I went to see Pride. My intention was not to befriend it, but to look up and down, without fear or horror or contempt. I looked straight and saw how vast is the true size of my enemy.

**Bérot:** Pride is indeed like the Golden Calf, a great object of idolatry, the cult of our own importance.

And we are mere mortals who just sin a few times before their last breath.

I always marvel: why do we ever think know anything at all?

**Martin:** I can only kneel down and pray.

**Bérot:** To whom?

**Martin:** To the One Who is unique.

**Bérot:** Is there anything God has not created?

**Martin:** No. That is why I can rejoice: all has been made by our Lord.

**Bérot:** He created also the trials for the soul.

**Martin:** As such, the trials are creations, just as we are.

**Bérot:** Are you saying that you must respect Pride and other ills of the soul, as children of God?

**Martin:** Once the man of God sees Pride and other ills of the soul as creations, they lose their malevolence.

At this point, Bérot addressed directly the assembly, with one of his patented tirades.

He ventured to affirm that understanding others was more difficult, but infinitely more virtuous, than blindly, ignorantly condemning them:

"It is paramount to patiently inquire, in

the Spirit of the Lord, in the respect of men, His Creation.

As we communicate with others, as we consider the depths of our own souls, we must always remember that to respect God is respect His creation, outside of ourselves and inside of ourselves."

Bérot repeated deliberately several times the same conclusion: what seemed inappropriate, such as apparently fraternizing with Pride and other prejudices of the soul (as Saint Jane Austen would have said), was in fact a cunning technique to fight the terrible enemies of the soul.

Proceeding that way, the sensible monk was not rushing blindly to a spiritual hazard, since so many before him had failed miserably. Wearing "the Saint Name of the Lord" to the Battle, the wise monk was choosing a more subtle approach, so he could truly fulfill his mission as a Knight of God.

Was it the end of the sermon? My readers hope so. The novices thought so. After all these rather abstruse rationalizations, they relaxed a little.

But after a long silence, Bérot addressed the novices in a casual tone of voice. As to reward them for their attention, he told the dramatic tale of a soldier.

First, he painted with gory touches, the background of a

bloody battle. When night fell, the hero of the story found himself isolated from his camp. His mission was to attack the enemy relentlessly, even by night. But he could not see anything. All of a sudden, he felt some presences. He yelled, grabbed his sword, twirled it with all his strength, increased tenfold by his terror, and killed all the shadows surrounding him, only to realize in the morning, that he had slaughtered his own friends.

There was then a new round of *respons* between Bérot and Martin. That time, I will spare you the details used by the two men to confront Fear, and loss of inner control, instead of Pride.

Aren't you sorry that you will miss some of the following?

**Bérot:** What is Fear for the Spiritual Knight?

**Martin:** It is the groom of the Spiritual Knight...

At the end, Bérot reiterated that Brother Martin merely taught not new, but rather ancient and sadly forgotten techniques, all solely destined to defeat ruthless enemies of the soul, such as Pride, Fear, Lust, etc.

Nothing in his philosophy was contrary to a man of God's vocation.

The reader may have absorbed the previous exchange with some



perplexity. How could this *Easter Sunday sermon* convince truly anyone that Martin's reflections were orthodox? Wasn't its purpose to exculpate Martin De Lleda from flirting shamelessly with heresy?

And what about this vaunted masterfully planned three voiced rhetorical coup? Before our incredulous eyes, it was nothing more than a rambling duet, wasn't it?

We can actually imagine the confused looks on the novices' faces after that very sermon: "*What happened, here, exactly?*"

One of them may have nodded and others chose to imitate him. Or, not knowing what to think or do, the novices elected to trust Bérot and especially Garné, who approved of Brother Martin's spiritual meanderings.

They may have appeared very much like some visitors in a modern art gallery, who stare, befuddled, at a piece they do not understand, until someone yells "*How genius!*"

Only then, their artistic eyes open unexpectedly and they end up cheering and applauding the work, testifying later they had witnessed sheer brilliance.

Another explanation for the *Easter Sunday sermon* great success is that what you have just read does not give justice to what had really happened.

After all, it is highly probable that the text I have painstakingly reconstituted, more than six hundred years after

the fact, has very little semblance with Bérot and Martin's joint charisma.

Anyway, after that day and that sermon, Le Tertre de Carces monastery remained unified. And as early as the following week, Martin de Lleda did not even bother muting his spiritual cogitations and unpredictable conclusions, if we judge by the Books of Hours and other documents recounting his vehement participation to the *Perambulations* from Easter Sunday 1324 to the day of his departure.

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#### XIV The Samurai Monk

If you were to survey your friends on what century they would have liked to live in, if they had the choice, I assume that medieval times would not be very high on their list. When I give such informal, playful survey, my undergraduate students elect a variety of imaginative periods ranging from Classical, Socratic Greece to the Hippy Years in San Francisco in the Sixties.

Medieval times come slightly ahead of Europe during World War II. Images of huts with mud floor, rampant poverty, women and innocents burnt at stakes, soldiers' violence, inane crusades, cities destroyed by the plague, etc. do not seem to color favorably that time period.

Speaking of World War II, I collected the image of a Jewish gentleman, perhaps the French philosopher Vladimir Jankélévitch,

who was supposed to meet in secrecy a man from the French Resistance during the German occupation of France. The danger was enormous. If the Nazis were to spot them, they would either be shot or sent to die in a concentration camp.

Our man was indeed deeply preoccupied and on a nervous lookout.

He turned around at some point and saw the sky, the ocean afar, and the beautiful summer day overwhelmed his senses.

The universe was continuing its course, with its stream of beauty and endless surprises. Men with all their nightmarish games did not affect the azure or the mild breeze.

I forgot whether our philosopher had only a nostalgic sigh at the realization that in the past and in the future, freedom and splendor existed and will continue to exist. Other generations had thoroughly enjoyed them and will relish in them again, in a few years or in a few months.

Maybe his sigh punctuated the sudden recognition that beauty was there, period.

Curiously, this image of the Jewish gentleman emerging from his anguish to savor life's wonders, flowing oblivious to men's distress, is in my mind linked to another memory, of a personal nature.

Yes indeed, reading these memories could be a bit tedious, if the writer's craft is not positively Proustian. Since I can hardly be confused with Marcel Proust, I shall try to entice my

readers not to give up by promising at least some exoticism:  
Slovenia is the background of my short story.

Do you know Slovenia? The name does roll under the tongue, doesn't it? Be reassured, though. Its description will be succinct.

I was visiting Ljubljana, the capital of Slovenia for a very good reason. May I brag that I had achieved some professional milestone, or so I thought?

Still very excited, I had the impulse to walk at a brisk pace around the conference facility where I had just given a lecture that had been exceptionally well received.

After a stroll of only a few hundred feet, I suddenly heard a beautiful voice rising above the street noises.

About twenty persons were gathered on a narrow sidewalk, just in front of an austere residential apartment building. They were surrounding a female singer, a lady in her forties, well dressed, who was singing *acapella*, like an angel, an old and poignant ballad.

That was indeed an unexpected sight. I could have been understandably curious. But all of a sudden, I, the short, chubby scholar from abroad, got transported in this abnormally cold late afternoon of April, between white skies and grey-rusty stones, to another dimension, the mysterious and moving world of a 19<sup>th</sup> Century street singer, a beggar who repeated in his chorus:

"Prince, I am.

My friends are gargoyles that watch me sleep  
a smiling baker gives me a loaf of bread  
and a daughter listens to my songs and  
cries."

When the slow and sad song ended, the singer and her public remained motionless for a few seconds. Then, she smiled and her fans yelled in an idiom I was surprised not to know. That was when the identity I seemed to have lost for a few seconds came back to me, as well as all my personal and predictably selfish preoccupations.

The summer day in occupied France of the previous anecdote, like my cold spring day in Ljubljana, had pierced through normal, busied consciousnesses.

And I wondered at length, after billions of people before me, what was the nature of these minutes of "rapture."

Was it a peek into a permanent layer of concealed reality, perhaps always running around us? After all, we can naively add that we are not consciously aware of many vital biochemical and electromagnetic phenomenon occurring all around and inside us.

Or was this "rapture" just secreted by our own consciousness, when placed in unusual circumstances, such as a horrendous danger for the Jewish author; stress, fatigue, elation, and other ingredients that had bombarded in a

particular way my own frail sensitivity?

It is certainly for more erudite thinkers to answer these fundamental questions. Let's just say, without forgetting to exhale again a conventional, loud and pseudo philosophical sigh, that during the medieval times, or in your days and mine, in the South of France in the 1940's as well as one day in the cold streets of Ljubljana, wonderment has a way of sipping through.

In a text found in Le Tertre de Carces Book of Hours, and dated March 1324, we can read:

"Between the vegetable garden and the creek, there is a little clearing where some monks like to stay and pray Sext and None, for the light seems more beautiful than through the finest stained glass window of the most imposing cathedral."

For your average inquisitor, such a text could be easily condemned as defiantly naturalistic, and perhaps even animist.

But that particular Books of Hours was not exceptionally subversive and we can see in the passage, rather than a diminutive comparison denigrating a monument of the Church, an attempt to compare a magical light to a glow wrought by men who worshiped God through their art.

A doubt may creep in some readers' minds. Surreptitiously, the

supposedly trustworthy narrator may have infiltrated the "action" he is describing, not only with his inopportune ramblings, but also with his personal philosophic or "spiritual" agenda.

Isn't he attempting to equate his characters' sacred search of the divine to a romantic interpretation of personal incidents during which the everyday consciousness is abducted for a brief moment toward another "reality"? Isn't this for him a way to inconspicuously present his very own definition of the "secret," claiming roughly that it is a mere alteration of consciousness?

Those are valid doubts, and I should honestly try to answer them.

But before, let's suppose, for a split second, that the patient and, by now fatalistic readers are already way past any doubt, and did not even think once about the ulterior motives their confused author may have fomented. The latter would look quite entangled in a very schizoid web, wouldn't he?

Imagine that: a schizoid writer!

In theory, it is plausible to think that "wonderment has a way to sip through" in any circumstances, at any moment, thus in any century. Practically, if we are given the choice to pick a time period to visit, only a genuine saint would choose catastrophic times.

But contrary to my students and because of my avid



curiosity for my topic of predilection, I would have undoubtedly elected to travel back to the early 14<sup>th</sup> Century.

However, if I could help it at all, I would rather avoid landing in a cramped hut, wearing a smelly tunic, looking with disbelief at a ragout of some brown tuber cooked in black goo, while getting ready to plough a field behind an irascible and disobedient buffalo on the verge of goring me.

I would prefer by far to arrive specifically and quite predictably at Le Tertre de Carces, just when Bérot was trying to find inventive approaches to make his ecstasies palatable and perhaps even enviable to his listeners; when Martin de Lleda explored new conciliatory ways to lead a spiritual life, but in doing so, was stumbling upon a few revolutionary deductions; when the Gratien brothers selected and illuminated their sacred texts with some irreverence; when Father Garné became the unwilling apostle of a simpler, quasi-hedonistic monastic existence; when Brasquet de Laons attempted to transmute words and ideas into potent messages...

Magically transported there, I would not only be able to meet these most remarkable personalities, but I could also browse through the incredible illuminated volumes of Le Tertre de Carces wonderful library, where one could study Abélard and perhaps Héloïse, Saint Francis, Saint Dominique, quite likely even Master Eckhart and Hildegard von Bingen, etc. There, one could also decipher in deceptive books of anathema, generous

quotes of Aristotle, of Ovid, of the Greek Stoics, and even of Averroes.

Since I would have loved to be a visitor or a novice at Le Tertre de Carces between 1320 and 1330, I naturally examined the people who actually soaked in all these marvelous influences of that time, the real novices, to see how they were transformed by their stay in the monastery, during what I consider to be its golden age.

I must acknowledge that what I could find hardly matched my expectations. Although at least eight illuminators spread the Gratiens techniques throughout France and Belgium in the 1330-1350's, I could not find any trace of authors, religious leaders, masters, troubadours... who were formally educated at Le Tertre de Carces.

It seems that the one notable medieval figure, besides the confusing Jan Amoulet, who had spent his formative years in the monastery, was Pierre de Lusignes.

Until fairly recently, Pierre de Lusignes was a name famous not for his religion but for his brutality.

Since I could not follow the career of any intellectual or spiritual disciple of Martin-Bérot-Garné, I resigned myself to examine that Pierre de Lusignes, recipient of a mere fifty erudite articles published in academic journals.

And I must say that I discovered yet another outstanding character well worth to be transposed at least into an action movie hero!

The documents we can gather in order to learn about this man are not very abundant but quite diverse as we will see.

First, there are of course the records kept at Le Tertre de Carces. There are also some regional songs and tales. These allusions are mostly nominative and do not tell us much about Pierre's character other than the name "De Lusignes" was used with a mixture of horror and admiration, as a synonym of exceptional brute force.

Fortunately, we have found a few more sources of more or less direct information on our new hero.

There is for instance an interesting text written more than 200 years after our man's death, "*La vie des chevaliers sans écuysers*," ("Of the Lives of Knights without Squires"). It is an epic poem signed in 1571 by Pierre de Sponde, who devoted about thirty lines to "De Lusignes, the outlaw who

*"encountered an angel (...)*

He converted and was sworn like a divine knight.

(...) Born to fight and handy with the sword, he accomplished many feats."

Among these feats, he cleaned his parish of villains,

demons and fierce animals. The local nobility wanted to have him killed, but all the peasants in the country hid him and he was never caught.

It seems that another literary work may have escaped the authors who have studied Pierre de Lusignes. In my opinion, this important text gives a new, heroic dimension to our ex-novice from Le Tertre de Carces.

For a long time, the poem "*Cuidas, cuidas ai compaignier*" was attributed to the famous troubadour Marcabrun.

As usual, the reader will have to put up with my own translation of the center part of this long poem. Of course, it was impossible for me to follow the specific meter (8/8/8/5/5/8/8/8).

(...) In the Eastern region, they still sing  
 Ebrart the Red  
 They talk in the inns and at the towns'  
 entrances  
 Of Eisius the Rotten, and most often  
 They tremble if one says  
 The name of Pierre le Défroqué (*The  
 Defrocked*)  
 With an army  
 Of grubby heathens,  
 He bloodied Chailloux the Fort

Killing his powerful lord, many pure  
noblemen and the castle's devout chaplain  
(...)

Pierre du Mont Pieux was an oak of a man  
A fierce raven and a wolf among men  
If he saw a velvet sleeve, a silver chain  
Blood had to flow  
His blade he had to draw  
The religion that once brought him up to be  
human

Suddenly made him foam at the chops, as a  
mad dog

In his cave, no one ever saw  
A crucifix, a wooden cross, a pious image  
(...)

Tall and strong was the one destined to be a  
monk

He was taught Latin and was read the Bible  
until he knew it by heart

But when it was time to be ordained

He took a dagger

And jumped on the Bishop

He gathered a strong army

Of grubby heathens,

And as Marcabrun sings from castle to castle

He plundered the whole region onto the  
seashore (...)

Can we believe our weary eyes? Did the poem speak explicitly of "*Pierre le Défroqué*" and "*Pierre du Mont Pieux*"? Let's remember that Le Mont Pieux means literally *the Pious Mount*. And we know that the word "*tertre*" is also a little mount!

There is a reason why my honorable colleagues did not link the character mentioned in that poem and Pierre de Lusignes. "*Cuidas, cuidas ai compaignier*" was in the center of a relatively significant controversy. When the dust settled, the poem was considered apocryphal and exuded a bad stench, academically speaking, of course.

In 1962, Frank Neville, the famous medievalist, found that Ebrart the Red, Eisius Bellenoi and a few other names cited in the poem "*Cuidas, cuidas ai compaignier*" were all references to facts and people from the early part of the 14<sup>th</sup> Century. Therefore, this poem was a "false Marcabrun," since the real one lived in the 12<sup>th</sup> Century. So, as a reliable mirror of the 12<sup>th</sup> Century, the poem was discredited and thrown in academic purgatory.

Now, it is not lost on us that a fake 12<sup>th</sup> Century text may become a useful 14<sup>th</sup> Century source.

Our anonymous forger lived at the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> Century. He was most certainly himself an ex-traveling storyteller who

may have settled in Aire sur l'Adour, where the poem was found.

The other parts of his epic piece are filled with orthodox religious references. Our false Marcabrun was a devout Christian when he wrote this poem that reflected a conservative vision that may have stained his recollection of a legend born a few decades before him: the extraordinary life of the real Pierre de Lusignes, also known, we assume boldly, as *Pierre le Défroqué* and *Pierre du Mont Pieux*.

Now, we can finally display what we have learned of the biography of our new hero.

Pierre de Lusignes was one of the many bastard sons of the powerful Lord of Lusignac. Being bothersome to his father's purer lineage, he was sent away to Le Tertre de Carces when he was a child. Pierre knew all along he had some noble blood running through his veins. This knowledge was not a source of pride or confusion, but of immense rancor.

Contrary to what the pseudo-Marcabrun sang, he was actually ordained priest at a young age and soon after, left Le Tertre de Carces to be the abbot of Chaix de Carpentras, which is undoubtedly Chailloux in the poem.

The Comte Jehan de Sarians was then the lord of the region. We know now that feudal society took many forms and variations during the Middle-Ages and in different areas. Jehan de Sarians was a master of the worse type.

The nobility was supposed to have many propriety rights in exchange for its protection of the other two classes: the huge working class and the Church. Jehan de Sarians had inherited a stable domain and, through marriage, his borders were secure. So, he used his army against his own people, squeezing them of their goods and labor.

A perfect villain, he promoted the *droit de cuissage* for him and his most trusted knights. It was not a *jus primæ noctis* (right to have the first night with a virgin getting married), a written law per say. But it was nonetheless a rape he declared perfectly admissable.

Jehan de Sarians claimed to be "a cathedral builder whose ancestors went to the Crusades." So, he knew how to keep the Church on his side, even though he was not the best Christian and he occasionally confiscated some of the Church's possessions.

The abbot Pierre de Lusignes witnessed many injustices. He eventually organized a form of passive resistance against the tremendous taxes that were reducing poor people to a level of complete misery and dejection.

When Jehan de Sarians' lieutenants discovered the discreet defiance of the abbot, they punished a few innocent people, letting the priest know what to expect in the future if he persisted.



We will see later how we came across another key source of information on Pierre de Lusignes. That particular biographical piece claimed that, when he was a small child, probably still in the Lusignac domain, the future abbot of Chaix de Carpentras was exposed to some intense fighting drills. A knight in the entourage of his father, *Coutdou de Bearn*, gave the child the rudiments and the taste for swordsmanship.

After Jehan de Sarians' first direct intimidation of the young abbot, the latter received the visit of a very old but distinguished traveler who was, you guess it, no other than *Coutdou de Bearn*.

It was then obviously time to resume Pierre's training.

The legend does not say if the old master nicknamed his disciple "grasshopper."

Pierre de Lusignes was gifted. He was convinced that his genes gave him naturally a warrior's heart under his frock.

Actually, his genes may have been responsible, chiefly but quite importantly, for his athleticism. He was famous for his size and his strength even at Le Tertre de Carces.

So, Pierre learned the old knight's secrets in the art of swordsmanship.

It would be interesting to know the intellectual and spiritual itinerary that led Pierre to take time off the church's cycle of devotion and pious activities, to embark on a mundane, political

and social resistance; and also to yield to what seems like bursts of pure, unadulterated rage.

The very beginnings of the Chaix de Carpentras uprising are not well documented. We know that Pierre arranged, or accepted to participate in the organization of a sort of militia that attacked soldiers at night, ambushed officials and noblemen who had to venture outside of their homes.

These rogues stole shamelessly anything they could.

Originally, it seemed that this army was just a band of particularly poor seasonal field workers. After one year of skirmishes against the Comte and his regime, they became a disciplined and efficient bunch that counted more than three dozens men in their ranks. During that time, none of them was caught, thus nobody really knew much about them, except that they were deadly and merciless.

A great fear spread across the region among the nobility, the Church and some of the most opulent merchants. Misinformed, the rest of the population started also to panic.

Of course, Jehan de Sarians tried his tactic of arbitrary and bloody retaliations, only to discover that his army, confronted to even more violent reprisals, started to be reluctant to go one up on an elusive and pitiless enemy.

Pierre de Lusignes was not only an efficient, hidden general, a real *eminence grise*. There are many testimonies

claiming he was taking part to the carnage, fearlessly and brutally!

Eventually, a couple of soldiers, who survived an attack, described the leader of the bandits who assaulted them as a monk possessed, who had no fear, the strength of a thousand knights and a savagery unfathomable for a man of the robe.

There has been innumerable debates among religious people about a violence that could be justifiable. For instance, is there a historical figure more puzzling than Bernard de Clairvaux whose impassioned sermons sent Christians to bloody crusades against the Muslims and the Cathars, but also defended the Jews against anti-Semitism, and preached inner peace?

Popes and inquisitors, as bloodthirsty as they may have been, did not take the sword in their own hands in a literal way.

Then, what possessed Pierre, a man of the robe, religiously trained at Le Tertre de Carces, under the pacific and calm tutelage of Father Garné, and blessed by the man (or the men) who "*knew the divine Truth*," to shed so much blood?

Did he think that protecting the poor any way he could was a Christian deed, or that the soldiers he hit were not Christians, even though they were all baptized and went to church?

When Jehan de Sarians learned that the head of the resistance against him was an abbot, we may assume that it was going to be the end of Pierre de Lusignes. Being the only physical specimen corresponding to the description, and wearing the ecclesiastic habit, Pierre became of course instantly the nobleman's prime suspect.

But, curiously, instead of sending all his army to Chaix de Carpentras, Jehan de Sarians tried to plead with the religious authorities to have Pierre de Lusignes condemned or, better, excommunicated, which could naturally lead to a legal execution.

The reasons behind this unexpected attempt to find a non-violent solution are not clear. It is possible that the attacks had taken a toll on his soldiers who, for years, had not been confronted to any opposition and who were not quite ready for these violent guerilla techniques.

Also, looking carefully at the Comte Jehan de Sarians, one gets the sense that he was cruel and sadistic, but he was not much of a valiant warrior. Physically, he was on the scrawny side, and we have a few documented instances where he acted in an extremely prudent, almost cowardly way.

Moreover, even in his court, there was some pervading fear that the count's excesses were being metaphysically remunerated by an angel of God, wearing symbolically an abbot's robe, and the count may have hesitated to make any move towards an enemy he did not know and who could be of supernatural origin.

Not able to raid Chaix de Carpentras at once, Jehan de Sarians put some pressure on the local bishop who started the process of questioning Pierre de Lusignes.

We have an ironic letter from Pierre de Lusignes to his bishop:

"As for our lord's accusation, Your Grace knows too well that days and nights, a priest who has to watch over all the souls from five parishes and who helps the Poor and the Sick, can not possibly be roaming the roads, looking to sin by committing the murders of other Christians.

It is possible that a bandit has disguised himself as a priest in order to fool the soldiers of our lord, the Count. And he has fully succeeded in fooling them, as if it were child's play, so it seems.

Our lord the Count should have his captains look into the matter, rather than sending these incongruous accusations to Your Grace, who could not possibly take them seriously."

The indirect attacks against the abbot of Chaix de Carpentras appeared to be a little counterproductive, as Jehan de Sarians saw a multiplication of aggressions against his men.

His tax collectors refused to travel anywhere and his soldiers started to defect. Weakened, he called some political allies for help, and eventually could not find any other recourse but to saddle an army of 150 mercenaries to arrest Pierre de Lusignes.

The abbot escaped rather nonchalantly before the arrival of the troop. But his men seemed to have been waiting for this moment to storm swiftly Jehan de Sarians castle. Somehow, some of Pierre's men had infiltrated the place beforehand, and when the bold counterattack took everyone by surprise, the men in the inside wiped promptly the guards.

The result was the massacre of a few noblemen and the kidnapping of the count's children.

A few days later, a secret truce was reached. There is no conclusive document left on the exact conditions of this truce, but we can observe that six months later, the Count of Saint Didier, Jehan de Sarians' own father-in-law, took over until Arnaut, Jehan's son, was old enough to reign.

As if he had discover the exhilaration of battling, Pierre de Lusignes could not stand the era of peace that he brought to the region, and soon he left Chaix de Carpentras.

We can follow his path, as he traveled toward Spain.

The eminent medievalist Paul Keller, a specialist in the field of the cultural exchanges between various regions of

Europe, discovered and studied a most remarkable anonymous text:  
*Lo cavalièr de piscoalha*. This manuscript was written circa  
1352, in the Occitan language.

Mr. Paul Keller uses it as a chronological and cultural  
landmark in several of his publications.

However, in our humble opinion, this text is truly mostly  
about Pierre de Lusignes.

*Lo cavalièr de piscoalha* (The knight of the Poor) is the  
first line of a 12 page, coarsely illustrated booklet. Before  
drawing any conclusion, I would like to submit to my readers a  
montage of this dense text, hard to decipher, written almost  
phonetically, with very loose rhymes and no discernible meter.

"Pierre de Grandabravaire was a monk from  
the Eastern Hills, where they speak like dry  
rocks coming down a valley

(...)

He saw maids being savagely soiled; he saw  
plowmen whipped to the blood; he saw  
clergymen humiliated; he saw fathers begging  
for their progeny; he saw mothers paying  
taxes with their womb (...) to an evil  
nobleman, named Jehan who cursed his  
province so, that I shall not reveal its  
name.

(...)

Pierre de Grandabravaire went to a pit where men were condemned to work from sunset to sundown without food. Many died and many more lost their minds.

He said to the guards, watching the poor men bend and fall:

“Why! I see these Christians work like oxen.”

He was answered:

“They have wronged our lord Jehan and they must justly pay.”

Pierre de Grandabravaire said loudly: “

Your lord believes he can punish the loyal subjects of my Lord, Who reigns in the Heavens?”

And he became so enraged that he subdued all the guards by himself

(...)

The poor workers were free to go, but they looked at their savior with amazement, for none of them had ever seen such a great strength.

They said:

“Surely, this monk is inhabited by the Holly Ghost.”



And, instead of running away, they begged Pierre de Grandabravaire to accept their company.

They wanted to stay with him and to serve him. They said:

"We are weak and we fear the guards, the soldiers and the knights with their armors and powerful horses and chariots. How can we ever help you?"

Pierre de Grandabravaire said:

"You must find one weapon and know it well. It could be a cane, or a knife or a hammer, or a slingshot, or a bow. But whatever it is, you must know it very well.

However, even if you have the mastery of your weapon, you will be defeated at once if you do not purify yourself first; and then, as well as you chose a weapon, you must choose your Lord

(...)

Pierre de Grandabravaire taught this prayer:

"If you recognize how puny and miserable your life is, when your Lord does not inhabit it, this is called

"purifying your heart."

See how your enemies take themselves so seriously. They examine their weapons, their strength, and they boast like toads that want to mate.

But look at them with the eyes from above and the more they swank, the punier and the more miserable they become."

(...)

Pierre de Grandabravaire was fearless. He treated fear as if fear was a hunting dog. He yelled:

"Go and fetch the enemy's flesh!"

And fear obeyed, leaving the hearts of his companions to enter the enemy's.

Pierre de Grandabravaire taught this prayer to his men:

"When fear and terror appear before you, and they will, be certain not to flee. Greet them into your heart. Aren't you the ones with pure hearts? Haven't I taught you how to purify your hearts?"

(...)

Pierre de Grandabravaire said this prayer:

"The Lord knows my time of death. He has decided when He will call me to His Side. But my Lord is a God Who gives Life.

He promised me life and I purified my heart for this life.

My Lord gave His Son to our people, not to the kingdom of the Dead.

That is why the Lord Who is the Lord of Life is on my side. I am the living one and I sing and fight with Him on my side."

(...)

Pierre de Grandabravaire said to his men:

"Who is your Father?

Answer, for I am your brother and I know Who my Father is.

Does a small child know he is playing?

He does not.

He plays until he is too tired, and then, he falls asleep."

(...)

Pierre de Grandabravaire gathered the poor the bullied, the frustrated, the humiliated,

the frightened.

They straightened their backs and gazed up,  
for God lives in Heaven, higher than the  
sky..."

Mr. Paul Keller wrote, among many outstanding essays, a remarkable commentary on the philological implications of the poem.

His research on the verse "*where they speak like dry rocks coming down a valley*" is masterly and his retracing of the expression "*I see these Christians work like oxen*" is a model of etymological investigation.

But there is another, more literal dimension to the text. I quoted so much of it as to give to my readers a sense of déjà-vu. The long poem does seem like another version, in a foreign dialect, of the philosophy circulating at Le Tertre de Carces in the days of Bérot, and more specifically of Martin De Lleda, whose ideas can be clearly recognized.

Whoever wrote *Lo cavalièr de piscoalha* was, in my humble opinion, someone close to Pierre de Lusignes. And here is another excerpt from the same poem to illustrate this estimation:

"Greet (fright) in your heart and suddenly  
press it, as an offering to your Lord; burn  
it with the incense of your total trust in

your Lord."

Also, the way "He treated fear as if fear was a hunting dog," is very reminiscent of Martin De Lleda's imagery.

Let me highlight the already partially quoted passage from one of the Tertre de Carces Books of Hours:

"Be certain not to run for cover, nor to chase fear away. Greet it in your heart and suddenly press it, as an offering to your Lord; burn it with the incense of your total trust in your Lord."

We see that these sentences could have been written by Martin de Lleda or by the author of *Lo cavalièr de piscoalha*. Their similarity could hardly be a coincidence, given the peculiarity of the concept of "greeting fear one's heart" at that time and that part of Europe.

*Lo cavalièr de piscoalha* has been rather abundantly studied. Dr. Max Eilman, the publisher of Mr. Paul Keller's work, justly remarked in his introduction of Keller's findings that

"Medieval religious writers use often *knighthood as a metaphor for the spiritual man's journey. However, Lo cavalièr de piscoalha appears to take the reverse approach, as it uses the spiritual journey to describe the perfect knighthood.*"

The long poem has of course some undeniable religious undertones, but it does also describe the perfect warrior, here an actual fighter, not only a spiritual one. It deals with training and concentration, discipline of the mind, overcoming fear, etc...

This anonymous text is, we believe, the closest description we have of Pierre de Lusignes's personal philosophy. If its inspiration seems familiar, its style is a complete departure from anything written at Le Tertre de Carces. Thus, it is tempting to imagine an aging Pierre de Lusignes dictating it or rather, influencing one of his local younger disciples to write it.

#

Let's imagine that Pierre de Lusignes had left either a real autobiography or some explicit treaty, like a medieval, European version of Musashi's "*Book of five rings*." We can wonder if, in such a book, Pierre would have spoken at length of his formative years at Le Tertre de Carces; if the spiritual debates between the monks still inhabited him... Or if he had forgotten all about them, maybe because he was completely immersed in a life of action and the sheer discipline of swordsmanship?

A few scholars thought they recognized Pierre de Lusignes in some legends from the South of France or from Spain. I even received an article from an ex-student of mine, with the curious

story of a French abbot, calligrapher and illuminator, exiled in England, and that bore some of Pierre's traits.

Unfortunately, as compelling as all these anecdotes may be, they are not supported by any definitive identifying argument and I could not really use them.

If we have to choose arbitrarily what happened to the ex-novice from Le Tertre de Carces, we might as well write our own version, a samurai-like odyssey full of colorful adventures, easily transmutable into a series of blockbuster movies or television series; or, if we have any intellectual scruples, a long, introverted reflection on the existential dichotomy between meditation and action.

XV The apostle of a simple life

Bérot du Tertre de Carces and Martin De Lleda talked a lot, indeed, but not only to each other. In this monastery, the community of monks and novices was very tight. Bérot and Martin were not only influenced by each other, but by all their companions with whom they shared daily chores, prayers, hymns, debates, festivities, etc. Therefore, it seems logical to consider more carefully all these significant influences.

Father Garné never wrote anything. Earlier, I compiled everything I could gather from the documents found in the library of Le Tertre de Carces, to paint the portrait of the affable and original father abbot.

Now, let me ask you a question. Take your time to respond, since I may not get to your answer for some time. Did you ever open a book when your mind was filled with some pressing, personal concern that had nothing to do with what you were about



to read? You may have actually chosen that text in order to calm you down, or to distract you from the bothersome matter haunting you.

If you answer with a resounding "no," just wait for us at the next paragraph, if you don't mind.

For those who can identify with this situation, let me ask you another question: as you were scanning through the written lines, your mind still very preoccupied, did it ever happen that you suddenly had to stop, thoroughly startled? You may have blinked incredulously a few times, because you had just realized that the text was addressing precisely the very concern that was occupying your thoughts.

If you had already felt this, were you spooked? Did you start singing "Hosanna in excelsis?" Did you calculate the probabilities for such an event to occur?

It happened to me, in regard to Father Garné.

I am not sure that the anecdote leading to the new, unforeseen portrait of Garné is worth telling in details. On the other hand, if you wandered that far into this book, chances are that you will not mind too much taking the slow, winding route to describe it.

I do ask for your indulgence, though. If I may illustrate my excuse for writing in such a disgraceful fashion, it could be that, after decades of stern academic composition, I am like the

dumb person who discovers all of a sudden he has a voice and starts breaking everybody's eardrums with his uncontrollable new singing and shouting.

By the way, I actually never fully realized before how demiurgic lining up words could be! You should try it some time.

After these many pages of pseudo-analyses about the 14<sup>th</sup> century, we might as well stretch, figuratively speaking, and take our sweet time to get to the improbable encounter with a text that depicts unexpectedly well the Father Abbot Garné.

Stretching could mean in this instance changing centuries. Let's paint the portrait of a contemporary fellow, Philippe DeVeer.

About five years ago, Philippe DeVeer was a History teacher in a Parisian high school. I met him through some colleagues of mine, while I was in one of my frequent research journeys to France.

His master degree thesis was on the French Wars of Religion and he claimed to be one of the most thorough specialists in that field. Philippe has never been very modest. Gifted with the innate arrogance that comes from being a French intellectual, he was exceptionally argumentative, and endearingly snobbish.

In school, his dealings with Parisian teenagers, who could care less about History, embittered his life quite a bit.

I have this image of him sitting at a small table in his

living/dining room, correcting very dreary 9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> grade papers, with John Coltrane in the background, soothing the arduous operation. He was, among many other things, a fanatical collector of jazz and opera recordings.

Thanks to a Belgium father and an Austrian mother who met in Paris, some thirty five ago, Philippe could speak fluently four languages.

He wrote in French, German and English countless articles in his specialty, 16th Century France, certainly to fulfill his passion for History, but also as a mean to escape his salaried profession.

One of DeVeer's favorite pet peeves in life was the "intellectuals who sell their soul for a political or a financial advantage." He had a few eloquent, vehement, acerbic tirades on bestsellers authors in literature or in the movies. He hated their shameless use of History as an exotic background, always poorly researched and rich in clichés. He liked to label all of them, without exception, "the lower form of intellectual prostitution and spiritual destitution."

As always, destiny or fate or whatever you wish to call "the wheel of fortune," had a way to wink with a sharp sense of irony.

Philippe entered that year in a significant sentimental relationship. The chosen one, who happened to be working for a

publishing company, guided the History teacher into writing a novel that he could help editing, publishing and promoting.

"*L'année commence le premier janvier*," was that first novel. It received a prestigious French literary award, became a best seller, and was translated, among other languages, into English under the title "*Love in 1564*"!

Living in a blessed country where historians are not lower class citizens, like in others I will not name, and where History is a topic still rather popular among the population, Philippe was at last able to say goodbye to his dreaded daytime job. He could devote himself to writing historical novels for a living, and academic articles for his pleasure.

Actually, he could hardly keep this noble hobby, not because of a busier schedule, but for more confusing reasons. The karmic irony I was alluding to, hit Philippe DeVeer head on. He had predictably become "a sellout" in the eyes of the French intelligentsia, perhaps even an "intellectual prostitute and a spiritual destitute." It got very difficult for him to have his detractors understand that he could be a fiction writer as well as the passionate and serious researcher he always was.

He even wrote an article in a literary magazine where he complained vigorously about the "*segregation of success among the French intellectuals*" (sic), accusing his former colleagues of being jealous, envious and "*narrow-minded to the point of not being able to fathom that the same person can kneel down and*

*pray at Church and also, later, dance at the bal."*

His protest did not have any immediate, measurable result. However, the last time I saw him, my friend Philippe DeVeer was coping much better with the problem. He laughed about it.

Besides, the negative reactions against him ended up subsiding almost completely. Time has that effect on everything.

The oddly tautological title of Philippe's bestseller, "*L'année commence le premier janvier*", literally "The year starts on January First," was a reference to Charles IX decision, in 1564, to have the year officially start on January 1<sup>st</sup>.

1564 France provided the historical background to a love triangle between a nobleman and two peasants at his service, a brother and a sister. I guess the sibylline English title, "*Love in 1564*," would have been more accurate and faithful to the storyline if it had been called "*Bisexual love in 1564*"!

Philippe DeVeer's second novel took place in Avignon and its plot spanned over four centuries. He did run by me a few questions about Avignon in the Late Middle Ages. This second book fell under the literary sophomore jinks, and did not fulfill his publisher's lofty expectations. However, the French intellectuals, being by definition contrarians, praised the author's "cultural and historical integrity". Thus, all was not lost!

Philippe sent me a few months ago a copy of his third novel

"*L'infirmière du Roi*" ("The King's nurse"). The cover promised the reader the most accomplished book of the celebrated, young Historian, "interlacing the most rigorous historical perspective and the wildest imagery, the most daring situations."

Selfishly immersed in my own projects, I was slightly reluctant to sample Philippe's latest product; but since I had to return to France a few weeks later and could very well see him, I chose to scan through the book in order to be able to talk about it.

Being more altruistic is still on the list of my New Year's resolution.

Halfheartedly, I opened the manuscript and, just to entertain myself a little, I elected to pick a chapter at random. And there it was!

Philippe was describing a mysterious fictitious character, Gilles d'Aucy, that the famous Jacques Amyot, a real historical figure, was supposed to have brought with him to the court of Charles IX. As I was going, rather absentmindedly, through this chapter, which slowly setting the stage for the famous king's nurse to appear, I had to suddenly stop and go back to the very beginning of that portrait, very much like a cartoon character a la Tex Avery doing an exaggerated double take, with my jaw dropping, my eyes bulging and a kazoo sound for a yelp.

The name "Father Garné" superimposed itself on "Gilles

d'Aucy" and replaced it in my mind. Before my incredulous eyes, I had what I believed to be the perfect picture of Garné!

How was it possible? This time, we shall use a metaphysical shrug, almost as impotent as our customary philosophical sigh, and continue.

With Philippe DeVeer's gracious authorization, I am copying here his portrayal of Gilles d'Aucy/Father Garné. Since the book is very recent, the reader will have to endure, once again, my amateurish excuse of a translation. This time, I can give another reason for my shortcomings: I have no experience with the translation of French contemporary literature.

Philippe did allow me, in this passage, to replace the name of his character with "Father Garné."

The first part of Philippe DeVeer's new novel is constituted by three introductory chapters that depict vividly the daily life of a very young Charles IX. Among all his tutors, the boy is drawn toward the enigmatic and benevolent Gilles d'Aucy more than toward the brilliant and strict Jacques Amyot, the future bishop of Auxerre. Amyot notices Gilles' growing influence on the young king and discreetly gets the Queen, Charles's mother, to remove him from the court.

Officially, Gilles d'Aucy is sent to become the prestigious Army Chaplain in Bourges.

"He refused to take his functions as First

Chaplain, humbly claiming that the charge has been occupied by a more deserving man for the past fifteen years.

Actually, even when he was in Tours and later, for about ten years in Melun, he never asked to be the chief abbot of his parish. It was not to avoid responsibility or by timidity. Taking important administrative decisions did not frighten him. In his life, D'Aucy/Garné had to make many vital choices for his community. But he would do it from the wings, not from center stage. His stance was simple:

"People in full sight had a hard time getting anything accomplished."

That is why, while many church officials of his days solicited, not so subtly, preeminent positions, D'Aucy/Garné ran away from them.

Moreover, he protected himself behind a mask of extreme simplicity. Shallow and gullible people may have underestimated him. Those who did not know him were lulled by his monotonous tone that could abruptly leap into an excited level for no discernable



reason.

He applied himself to pronounce banal sentences and commonplaces that had apparently nothing to do with the topic on hand.

Also, he had often on his face an incongruously frozen half-smile that did not disappear even while he was dealing with dramatic pronouncements.

This is what happened during the Duke of Richmond's first visit to the young king. While the Duke was waiting, D'Aucy/Garné started to discuss the motives of the official visit and soon, strayed to many more exotic topics, from the influence of bodily humors during the thinking process, to the affects of prayers on natural phenomenon. All these ramblings prompted the Duke to whisper of his counselor's ear:

"This man does not know what he's saying. I am wasting my time with him".

Just when the young king came in the room, D'Aucy/Garné launched a sharp remark that could have been taken as a strong accusation, leaving the Duke speechless,

wondering what had just happened; if D'Aucy/Garné's sentence was a strong criticism of him or some random raving of a lunatic that hit a target by accident. However, he had to alter his initial strategy and switch to a more forthright explanation for his visit.

(...)

D'Aucy/Garné spent countless hours in the small courtyard behind the church, seemingly lost in thoughts, with a beatific smile painted on his face.

Someone would ask:

"You haven't moved from here for a long time. What are you doing?"

To the younger people, he would answer:

"Isn't life beautiful? Isn't this glimmer of the sun on the wall especially exquisite?"

To noblemen, he would say:

"I am praying,"

and to fellow clergymen:

"I am counting my blessings."

We have to wait twelve chapters filled with many twists and turns, intrigues, seductions, compromising situations and

betrayals, to find another wonderful depiction of an older D'Aucy/Garné.

Here, Philippe DeVeer seems to take a breather from the frenetic pace of deceptions and revenges, and before the astonishing ending. He composes a more philosophical and lyrical scene.

The dying young King Charles IX sends a female emissary to D'Aucy/Garné. It is none other than his nurse herself. D'Aucy/Garné seems to understand her Machiavellian plans, but he does not speak up directly. The seductress asks the octogenarian to come with her to the king's bedside, as his wise and beloved tutor.

D'Aucy/Garné refuses because of some ailment and his advanced age. He has for the king an answer that will affect somehow the nurse's plans:

"Tell the king, that his functions make him unfortunately impervious to finding any true wisdom.

You said his Majesty is very sick. Then, relay to him this message: even though it is never a blessing to be sick, to say the least, in his case, he should wear this excuse like the pilgrims used to wear the cross of the crusaders for protection.

Tell him to feel that underneath his crown,

underneath his cape and royal garments,  
there is a life that flickers and still  
smiles the enduring smile hidden in every  
dawn and dusk.

Also, if the shadows cast by his fever  
surround him in great numbers, advise him to  
admire them in awe, like a simpler man, like  
a small child.

Finally, inform him that you saw me as a  
very old man, and that you could not even  
count all the wrinkles on my forehead and  
around my eyes. But do not forget to mention  
that, underneath, I am a small child who  
takes an immense enjoyment at following the  
game played by the rays of the sun against  
the walls of my church."

(...)

"Do remind him that, years ago, he  
translated from its original in Latin, a  
book, *"The Life of Francesco di Assisi."*

There was this image of the young Francesco  
before his father and the Bishop of the city  
of Assisi.

Francesco had to give up everything coming  
from his family and upbringing. He

surrendered the coat, the silk shirt, the robe with the chaperon, the linen chausses, and even the braies (his underwear).

Francesco stood naked in public.

Was he ashamed? No, he was not. He had rid himself, or we should say that his family and his bishop had allowed him to rid himself of everything that was not him, that belonged to generations and generations of merchants, of peasants maybe, of noblemen, perhaps; generations and generations of people not named Francesco and not having the particular relationship he had with God. Do tell his majesty that at the very end of life, a dying person is stripped naked.

Knowing that, we might as well rid ourselves of all the many layers of clothes, of masks, of sterile conventions we must wear in our daily lives.

We should do that, from time to time, before it is actually time to leave."

First of all, guess who was the unnamed source who gave Philippe DeVeer the inspiration and the interpretation of the Saint Francis's comparison?

Allow me to bow modestly.

Most importantly, Philippe has unwillingly given us a lyrical but, I believe, an excellent portrait of Father Garné.

Should I admit that I could never have captured so well Garné's spirit, so to speak? As you may have noticed, my forte is quoting and copying in order to illustrate my thoughts. A literary trailblazer, I am not, to say the least.

Actually, before reading and eventually embezzling Philippe DeVeer's text to describe Garné, I had spent many sleepless nights trying to paint such a portrait.

Pathetically, I got to the point where I could not find anything better than to draw a very rough comparison between Father Garné and Celestine V, this 13<sup>th</sup> Century hermit who was bombarded Pope against his will and who ended up renouncing his illustrious function after a few weeks.

The parallel was a bit awkward. In one way, it had a logical aspect, since both men were discreet leaders who did not like to be placed in the forefront. But there was certainly a difference of importance: their idea of themselves or the idea of themselves they projected.

Pietro da Morrone, the future Celestin V, was a stern, ascetic monk who took the rigorous Benedictine rules and topped them, making them even more draconian.

Le Tertre de Carces, in theory, was also run according to the Benedictine rules. However, by 1250, they were already quite looser than what St Benedict had in mind. And Garné softened them even more. Of course, he did not formally post new rules, making them explicitly laxer than the statutory ones. He simply did not seek the strict observance of the latter.

We have a written account where Father Garné, appeared rather surprised, almost admiring, congratulating warmly a novice for getting up for the Matins, Lauds and Prime, the very early services, starting at 2 am. This anecdote proves that an elementary Benedictne rule was obviously a rather exceptional feat at Le Tertre de Carces.

Pietro da Morrone was extraordinarily serious about the application of his new regulations in the monasteries he had founded, which will be known after his death as the monasteries of the Celestine Order.

Garné adopted the disguise of a slow-witted dilettante who loved to laugh and enjoy simple pleasures.

Honestly, the parallel between the two men would have been less a satisfactory simile, and more of an excuse for

writing about Celestin V, a very controversial and fascinating religious figure.

I must confess that I have in my drawers a synopsis for the libretto of a modern *cantata*, still titleless, centered on the reluctant Pope. The young French composer Jean Michel Eusèbes was apparently inspired by one of my lectures on Celestin. He asked me to write that detailed outline.

This work was supposed to be a contemporary counterpart to the beautiful *Lagrima di San Pietro*, by Orlando Lassus. But instead of the tragic lamentation of St Peter realizing he has denied Jesus three times, the text of our libretto was pronounced by the ex-pope Celestin V in the cell where he would die, perhaps killed by his successor, Boniface VIII.

Here is the summary of our synopsis. If you, dear reader, belong to the rare breed of *cantata* producers, do not hesitate to contact me or Jean Michel Eusèbes.

In the first part, Pietro wonders if the God he was praying, in the freedom of the beautifully luminous and savage Abruzzi, was different from the one he implores in his poor and dark cell-jail.

In the second part, after questioning God for not intervening to his defense, Pietro



ends up assuring Him he is ready to become another Job.

The last part is a prayer to men, to stop their corrupt ways, to open their hearts to the divine light, and to let go of their putrid personal ambitions.

You can see that Celestin V is another historical figure that has always fascinated me, and to prove it I devoted, besides this odd libretto, quite a few papers about him.

I always struggled with the fact that Dante, another one of my personal heroes, painted in his *Divine Comedy* the poor Pietro da Morrone as a shadow in the vestibule of Hell.

His major sin may have been that his abdication led to the election of Dante's personal enemy, Boniface VIII.

But Pietro da Morrone is in my eyes, and soon in yours I hope, an ambiguous and tragic figure, whose fate errs from the sacred search of God, to the absurd, almost comedic universe of human politics.

I feel for you, dear reader, imagining your frantic gesturing toward the topic on hand, Father Garné, and wondering how you got stuck with the unexpected biography of Celestin V.

Then again, didn't you shrug when I asserted that Pietro da Morrone was an ambiguous and tragic figure?

This needs some clarification, doesn't it?

Everything started when Pietro was already an older man, a well respected priest who had many followers and the great power to imprint his own ways of devotion as the governing rules in a multitude of monasteries.

At this apex of his religious life, he sent a letter to the College of Cardinals.

For more than two full years, their excellences of the College could not find an agreement and elect a pope.

Yes, the Church was then pope-less!

By addressing the cardinals, Pietro meant well. He remarked that the endless quarrelling of the Eminences did not do much for the Church's image, and he encouraged them to speed up the process of naming the successor of Nicholas IV.

Pietro did not have to send the fateful letter.

He did, though, and History took a strange turn.

The cardinals looked at the letter and yelled a common eureka: the author of the epistle, considered by many to be a saint, had to become the next pope!

And the rest is history, must I conclude to prove, as if we needed it one more time, that no cliché is too trite for me.

There is so much to say about Pietro da Morrone! Just imagine the various waves of emissaries sent to Pietro's cave, after his infamous 1292 letter.

All of them tried desperately to convince him to become the pope, while the old man always responded with a resounding and stubborn "No, thank you very much!"

Then, several cardinals came, as well as the kings of Naples and Hungary, to persuade him to follow them to Rome.

Imagine also the wonderful dialogues we could compose when reconstituting this episode of Pietro's life. Would we make them philosophical, tragic, or comedic? A la

"Father we beg you."

"No, I am the beggar, here."

"We all beg you, Pietro."

"I prefer to pray in my cave."

"We will build you a cave in the palace",

etc.

#

Luckily for you, Philippe DeVeer intervened with his description of Gilles d'Ancy, and spared you, for the most part, the fastidious comparison between Father Garné and Pietro Da Morrone.

XVI The Gratien brothers, a story of folly.

Gratien l'Ancien (the elder) and Gratien Le Gros (the fat) were born in a family of twelve, which was no small feat, considering that the mortality rate of newborns and infants in the Middle-Ages was close to 50%. When Gratien l'Ancien was eighteen years old, his youngest brother was born and his father died that very year. Could it be from exhaustion? If it was the case, what must have felt the mother who had twelve pregnancies and the task to care for that humongous tribe?

Thanks to Gratien l'Ancien who left indirect autobiographical notes, we actually know that the heroic lady lived quite old, since her elder son marveled that after being a mother all her life, she had to take care of some of her grandchildren also, and even of a couple of great-grand-daughters.

In any case, being blessed with the incredible good

fortune, for the time, to breed some healthy children had some disadvantages. The main one was that the parents could not feed them.

Gratien l'Ancien's early life was very eventful. We know that he was 8 when he ended up at Saint-Victor de Marseille, 300 miles away from his birthplace. He stayed there until he was ordained priest, moved to Silvacane, where he was reunited with his brother, the sixth older in the family, "Le Gros," who was paradoxically not fat at all.

It was in Silvacane, a famous Cistercian abbey located in Provence, that the brothers developed their distinctive style for illuminating the manuscripts.

From texts found in the abbey's archives, we can reconstitute the stern image of a stubborn, hard-working Gratien l'Ancien, while his brother was extraordinarily inventive and brilliant, but peculiar. His nickname should have been "Le Fou" (the mad), rather than this incongruous "Le Gros," for he was obviously much more unstable than big.

For some undisclosed, grave, wild behavior, Gratien le Gros was kicked out of Silvacane, and l'Ancien followed him, or rather did not abandon him.

After three years of peregrinations, they found their home in Le Terte de Carces, where the old regime at first appreciated their qualities of copyists and illuminators. But after another bout with delusion, Gratien Le Gros scared the Father Abbot of

the time.

Father Garné, you guessed it, tried to intervene on behalf of the talented brothers. He could only buy some time before their inevitable expulsion. But that delay happened to be enough for a drastic, unexpected twist of fate to take place: the return of Bérot, hence the departure of almost everybody else.

Did I ever mention that Father Garné was usually a very elusive man, hiding his real personality behind many confusing masks? That trait protected him efficiently from any unwanted attention, a la Celestin V. However, Garné never hesitated to state firmly an opinion and defend resolutely the people who were, in his mind, unjustly accused. So, he protected among others, the younger Gratien, the "madman," just before supporting Bérot with the same energy.

Garné was the decided champion of underdogs and lost causes.

I have insisted profusely on the ambiguity of Father Garné's character, appearing at times like a simpleton, and at other times, as a subtle, wise man. But it was obvious that this ambiguity did not really exist for the inhabitants of le Tertre de Carces in the 1320's, where everyone unconditionally respected Father Garné, even the sometimes haughty and temperamental ex-cardinal from Murcia, and even the unstable younger Gratien.

Gratien le Gros never left any piece of personal writing, as far as we know, except perhaps a little dedication that I shall bring up later.

I mentioned that we can find some indirect autobiographical information here and there, by Gratien l'Ancien. There are a few letters, addressed to different affluent people, mainly asking for material support. Also, he was in a sense an editor, maybe the chief-editor of the extraordinary rich volumes of the Book of Hours at Le Tertre de Carces. Thus, it is possible to decipher his particular "tone of voice" through his choices and his notes.

Gratien the elder was a complex man. At first very confident in his art, experience and culture, he learned humility more by following his brother in his ordeals than by observing exactly the rules of the Church.

With time, he became very conservative in his devotion. We know that he applied himself rather strictly the discipline that Garné was reluctant to impose in the monastery. However, he was far from being your typical narrow-minded traditionalist. Maybe having a brother so far outside the norms had been a good incentive to relax his too sanctimonious tendencies.

Almost all his life, L'Ancien had to convince others that what they took for a case of demonic possession in his brother was caused by something of a more benign nature. He understood instinctively that there was no devil involved in his brother's

condition. But he was almost the only one with this belief.

As for Garné, it is difficult to know exactly what he thought of Le Gros's madness. It is actually almost impossible to figure out what were the exact symptoms developed by the younger Gratien. We only know that the illuminator's outbursts were frightening for their witnesses.

We can speculate that, whether their causes were deemed demonic or coming from an obscure disease, Garné had the same calm and calming approach.

Was Gratien Le Gros's obvious improvement at Le Tertre de Carces due to Garné's mysterious therapeutic aura? Maybe he knew how to listen to the sick young man? On the other hand, maybe this recovery had nothing to do with the venerable abbot. But wouldn't you secretly like that there was some soothing, magnetic effects coming from Garné and his colleagues' spirituality?

Then again, what good would that do to us, if we do not know what their recipe for mental healing was, exactly?

This inopportune question makes me think of a passage from Bérot's *Readings of the Bible on Truth and Grace*:

If we know that Jesus appeared to the  
Apostles and taught them, what is it to us,  
if we do not become His apostles?

(...)

If we know that Jesus healed a blind man of



his blindness, what is it to us, if our soul  
does not miraculously open its eyes?"

We mentioned earlier that we believe we have found a small piece of writing by Gratien le Gros.

The monastery's Books of Hours compiled an outstanding variety of texts, themes, literary genres ranging from prayers to tales with philosophical commentaries, summaries or transcriptions of sermons or discussions, etc.

In these volumes, the reader can appreciate a great variety of rhythms, meter, illustrations, and even symbolic calligraphies.

There is, remarkably, no entire repetition of any text in the five volumes of Books of Hours that resisted the passage of time... at the exception of one sole story that has been integrally copied twice.

Its first version was obviously written by Brasquet de Laons. Two weeks later, Gracien Le Gros copied the text again in its entirety.

Usually, the bulk of the calligraphy was done by his brother, l'Ancien. But that one time, junior wrote solo. This copy was more than carefully crafted. It did not have the typical exuberance of Le Gros' illuminations, but an extraordinary thoughtfulness in the meticulous decoration of all the capital letters and of certain meaningful words.

The text itself was a transcription by Brasquet of an address that Bérot had pronounced during a visit to a local nunnery. The community had lost a despotic Mother Abbess who was not excessively liked by the nuns and the novices.

In his copy of Bérot's speech, Gratien Le Gros wrote these words:

"To our venerable and beloved Father Abbot,  
who was sent to us as our guide, with  
healing powers stemming from his goodness."

These two lines and the formal beauty of the copy of the text, as well as the fact that Le Gros chose it among hundreds of pages, are very telling of the profound respect that Gratien had for Father Garné.

Here is the translation of Bérot's address to the nuns.

"I wish you to have a mother who lets her  
children find their own steps in the  
orchard, in the poultry yard, in the woods.  
She is there, but they do not see her.  
They fall and she wrings her hands, but lets  
them stand up by themselves.  
She looks up, straight at the sky, her back  
erect and she asks and prays.  
I wish you to have a mother who knows how to  
dry her children's tears at night. She  
understands that their eyes will burn and

they will eventually fall in a sleep full of  
turmoil, threatening figures, rainbows and  
horizons so vast that they will wake up,  
panting from a great dizziness.

In the morning, she can notice that colors  
from the Orient stick to their eyes, and she  
recognizes that soon, they will leave home  
to discover the lands of her forefathers.

I wish you to have a queen who places her  
guards at a distance, so her subjects do not  
fear.

She gives to the poor, and the poor think  
they came across gold coins they have  
discovered by themselves.

I wish you to have an abbess who serves you  
as you serve the community.

She would know that you have placed her  
higher, so she will be a candle in your  
night, the moon that turns from behind the  
clouds to show you where you are.

And that is why I wish you to have  
continually, not the most radiant sunlight,  
but a glow, always there for those who look  
up."

Is there any doubt that for Gratien Le Gros, Bérot was

describing in his address to the nuns, the dear Father Garné, the perfect "glowing light of a religious community?"

Ideally, the reader would find at the end of this volume, some illustrations of the Gratiens' art of illumination.

Unfortunately, I cannot control how this book, actually labeled "a novel," will be published. And since nobody can confuse my literary style with Marcel Proust's, I shall spare you my wretched efforts to give you an idea of the two brothers' artistic genius.

However, I must mention at least one piece somewhat notorious. You may not have heard about it in the "Art and Entertainment" pages of your local newspaper, but the Gratiens brothers, and especially the younger one, were at the center of a virulent debate around the "*Gargoyle of the Cathedral in the Clouds*," a work you most likely know without recognizing its name.

The piece is an astounding 18X18 full page representing a hideous monster, with features of wolf, snake, dragon, on a giant bird skeleton in the forefront, and a stylized cathedral entrance in the background. It is now kept at the Cluny museum, in Paris.

The dispute started as soon as the drawing was discovered, in 1856, in Burgundy, by the Abbott Dumont, teacher of the French writer, Alphonse de Lamartine.

We will glide over the earlier theories about its hypothetical origins. Let's just mention that the most popular one assumed it dated from the biblical times, no less!

Mr. Dumont's personal opinion was that the work came from a certain French artist, Delaisne, who lived at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century and who was a notorious forger of art work sold to rich merchants and the nobility.

From 1896 to 1986, the wonderful drawing was "definitely" attributed to Tadeo the Illuminator. The title "*The Gargoyle of the Cathedral in the Clouds*" was actually given arbitrarily in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century by the curator of the Bibliothèque Nationale, who received it temporarily from Dumont. It was soon after transferred to Fontainebleau where it was on display with this caption:

"The gargoyle protects the entrance gate  
from the sin of greed."

For the record (no pun intended), if I said that you may very well know the piece, it is because the creature is so striking that it has decorated several rock-and-roll albums, notably the front cover of the hard-rock group "*Stalled Starship*" album, "*Beyond Darkness*".

Eventually, Martha Gröning demonstrated in her doctoral thesis that it was impossible for the Italian Tadeo to be the creator of the outstanding figure, since chemical analysis proved that the parchment was anterior to Tadeo's time, and that

its composition was typical of the South of France.

Since then, a couple of scholars hypothesized that the Gratien brothers, and more likely Gratien Le Gros, designed this monster, quite unique for the time and the region.

This theory is more than plausible. One of the later Tertre de Carces manuscripts had this very paper size, but no illuminations. In my own *"The Library of Tertre de Carces in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century,"* I argue that these loosely bound manuscripts have been stripped of all their illustrations, among which the famous *"Gargoyle of the Cathedral in the Clouds"* was the centerpiece.

It is also my opinion that the mysterious monster has actually illustrated a text found in one of these late Le Tertre de Carces anonymous manuscripts. Its first words, thus its title, are: *"The Message of Glory."* Its calligraphy is not typical of Gratien l'Ancien or the monastery's most talented novices. It would be interesting to analyze it thoroughly.

Wouldn't it be lovely if some new young scholars, with much grant money, researched who wrote it?

In the meantime, here is the chore of *The Message of Glory* that Gratien Le Gros has, so we claim, illustrated with his *Gargoyle of the Cathedral in the Clouds*.

I

"When the Angel went to announce to Mary she will bear the Son of the Lord, he traveled through eons and visited all the created

worlds to sing the glorious news, before he could eventually kneel down in front of the Glorious Virgin.

He went to the Seraphim, and they join their voices in amazement.

He went to the Cherubim, and they sang louder.

He went to the Thrones; the Dominations, the Virtues, the Powers; the Principalities, the Archangels, and all sang and asked many questions.

But the Angel said:

Further I must fly,  
For I am entrusted with a  
sacred mission.

The Angel traveled in all the different Spheres.

He passed an abyss where the Fallen Angel, henceforth reduced to discredit men in the eyes of the Lord, was plotting his dark designs.

And when the Fallen Angel heard the Announcement, he looked up. He nodded and asked a question.

He addressed directly the Messenger:

"How dare you appear before the  
chosen one, before the Virgin  
Mary? Have you no humility  
whatsoever?  
Or do you think that you,  
simple soldier of God, are His  
Voice?"

The Angel heard these words and did not know  
what to answer.

He felt much contrition.

He sat and thought:

"How can I appear indeed in  
front of the Mother of the Son  
of God?"

The cruel words of the Fallen Angel, also  
named the Calumniator, had created a  
humility that did not exist in the  
Messenger's soul.

Angels have no humility since they never  
distinguish their own will from the Lord's  
Commandments.

Angels are not comparable to men who see all  
in many colors. For angels, "me" does not  
exist; only "Him" does.

It is said that they are immersed in His



Service.

However, the Fallen Angel by the words he had malevolently chosen, had planted a seed of doubt for which the Messenger of the Announcement was not prepared.

Doubt always spreads in a soul like when a decade of drought on the land leaves no plant standing in its march.

At once, the Messenger lost his nature.

His wings became those of a dragon, his legs became the limbs of a goat, his smile became the rage of a wolf, his eyes and his tongue were those of a snake, his beauty became a decayed skeleton.

He could travel only by night, hiding from the light.

He appeared in the village where Mary lived. All its inhabitants fled in distress and horror.

A priest and Mary were summoned to run away with all the others.

The priest said:

“It is a demon, to be sure. We must leave.”

But Mary had always in her eyes, by day or

by night, a quiet light of merriment. In it,  
the monster was not terrifying.

She said:

“I do not understand. Are you  
looking for me?”

II

When a creature loses the message it bears,  
it loses its purpose, hence its nature.  
It becomes what it was not conceived to be.  
Its attributes are then its purpose.  
Compared to what it was, its transformation  
is monstrous.

The Messenger heard Mary's question,

“Are you looking for me?”  
and he saw himself in her calm, fearless  
eyes.

He saw who he was and remembered promptly  
his message, therefore his nature.

He transformed immediately into an Angel,  
kneeled down and sang the good news.

And no sound had been so beautiful in the  
history of the world.”

The first time I read carefully this “Message of Glory,” I was  
elated: the description of the Messenger who lost his nature

matched extremely well the characteristics of the *Gargoyle of the Cathedral in the Clouds*.

Mission accomplished! The thrilling ending of another episode of perfect academic inquiry! The masked scholar could ride in the sunset, to new speculative adventures!

One graduate student was so impressed with my accomplishment that she asked me if she could write a paper on "The Message of Glory."

I believed that I had said all that could be said on the text, but who am I to discourage anyone to study the precious manuscripts from Le Tertre de Carces? The more people write about them, the better it is for their dissemination and, if I were to be cynically truthful, for my own reputation, as a specialist of the topic.

So, with my blessing, Mrs. Marie Diawara wrote a 90 page paper on *The Message of Glory*. After her introduction, I was only expecting an analysis of the symbols attached to the angel's transformation, with the medieval meaning of the dragon wings, the goat, the wolf, the snake, and the "decayed bird skeleton."

And Mrs. Diawara obliged, writing a brilliant chapter on these symbols, with a neo-Freudian interpretations to boot: a textbook study, indeed.

But that was only one of six chapters. She also researched what exactly meant for a 14<sup>th</sup> Century author the structure of the

heavenly spheres, with Thrones; Dominations, Virtues, Powers; Principalities, Archangels...

Mrs. Marie Diawara proceeded to devote four ambitious chapters on the various aspects of the anonymous author's spirituality. For instance, she wondered why the Messenger would communicate the glorious news to all parts of the Creation before relaying it to the chosen one, Jesus' mother, who appears only at the very end. Mrs. Diawara ventured to claim that the Messenger stood, in the mind of the author, as the symbolic representation of the human being during his passage on Earth.

In her daring estimation, the text reflected that the author believed that each born soul loses right away its angelic perfection, which is to know and recognize only God's Will, not its own. The transformation into a monster is then automatically realized, as doubt is bestowed upon the soul by the Fallen Angel.

Following this theory, how would you like to get closer to the mirror, dear reader, and contemplate your spiritual self in it? Here is the image of Gratien's *gargoyle* before your incredulous eyes.

You and I are then natural monsters of essential ignorance. Our only hope should be to acquire *the quiet light of merriment* that would allow us to realize what our true nature is.

The theoretical beauty of this odyssey is that the Virgin Mary is the goal - the perfection toward which men can aspire -

and the mean of salvation at the same time.

Once we get the hint (*"Aren't you supposed to look for me,"* asks the Virgin Mary) we see ourselves in the light of merriment, remember the message we are carrying, thus our nature.

Mrs. Marie Diawara considered that the philosophical backbone of the tale is the sentence *"When a creature loses the message it bears, it loses its purpose, hence its nature."*

I provided Mrs. Diawara with the constructive comments you can imagine. At some point, my young disciple confided what was especially troubling her. She could not figure out why the ultimate weapon of evil - the Fallen Angel of the story - was to create "a humility that did not exist." That concept seemed to puzzle her to no end.

Suddenly, a strange thought came to my mind: what would Bérot have answered to the young woman? He would have surely said that a humility conscious of itself is the exact opposite of humility.

Before delivering this answer to the inquisitive graduate student, another question popped in my deliquescent brain: what would Martin de Lleda have answered her? He would have probably talked her into sleeping with him. The incongruity of this thought made me laugh with a nervous, probably slightly guilty laughter.

Mrs. Marie Diawara thought that my apparently amused response was very Zen-like.

XVII Plato and Brasquet de Laons in the same sentence

As we examine as thoroughly as we can all the members of the religious community in and around Le Tertre de Carces, soon we have to stumble upon the enigmatic figure of Brasquet de Laons.

The man was a prolific "compiler." Besides the infamous *Readings of the Bible on Truth and Grace* attributed to Bérot, we can recognize his hand in many pages of Le Tertre's Books of Hours. Also, when I copied some excerpts of *Master Genar's* life, I mentioned that Brasquet de Laons probably wrote the four "anonymous" booklets on the idealized, imaginary disciples of the original Apostles.

Brasquet never refers to himself in his writings, even indirectly. Mentioned by the other monks and by Martin de Lleda, Brasquet appears as an honest and direct man, quite tenacious, but open to new ideas.

We do not have any formal evidence he was ever ordained

priest. The fact that he was referred in the monastery as "Brother Brasquet" is actually not conclusive. We do not know anything about his background. From his writings, we can deduct he was educated and that his knowledge of classical Latin, if far from being perfect, was indeed superior to Bérot's. His imitations of classical religious treaties were somewhat courageous but fell a bit short of his intellectual goals. Some of his literary attempts, including certain passages of *Readings of the Bible on Truth and Grace*, were sometimes a rather confusing and clumsy in their formulation.

The relationship between Brasquet and Bérot is also shadowy. Brasquet, certainly followed Bérot to acquire a certain spiritual knowledge. He did not use Bérot as Plato for instance used Socrates, to present and expend his own deductions. Brasquet really thought that his role in life was to put Bérot's sayings in a written form, so that the Church could somehow incorporate their excellence in its official collection of elevated writings.

We know of course how this attempt backfired in a grand way!

Curiously, Bérot showed a strange ambivalence towards the "*Readings of the Bible on Truth and Grace*" he was supposed to have pronounced. He never disavowed them, but he never fully endorsed them either.



An illustration of this paradox can be found in one of the many discussions on grace reported in the Tertre de Carces' Books of Hours

When the Cardinal Martin De Lleda started to read the writings attributed to Bérot, the heretic in the making, he stumbled upon a paragraph so convoluted that he did not know exactly what to do with it. It would have been easy for a more cynical inquisitor to twist ever so slightly the words in order to color them in a malicious hue. But Martin did not use them in the drafting of the Papal Bull he was supposed to compose.

However, Martin had not forgotten these puzzling lines, and a few years later, he managed to show them to his good friend, Bérot.

They read:

"Grace comes from God, and its trajectory is direct from God to the chosen ones and indirect for everyone else.

Then, it goes from the orchard to the sea, from the river banks to the caves, from the leaves to the core of the stomp, from the air to the sap.

It does not have the same blush for all.

But each must immerse in it, from the hair to the toe, from the skin to the inner blood.

It is mandatory to reflect upon these things and see what they mean, for Grace is the unifying mystery, and the torch to see through this mystery.

If the soul grasps Grace and its divine origin, one might say it is great science. If the soul sees Grace and is blinded by it, one might say it is the way to know the Truth.

If the soul does see Grace, and Grace has taken hold of the soul, submerging it, one might not say anything, for nobody else can see it, understand it, testify about it. Grace, at this point, is the other side of being."

When Brother Martin read these lines to Bérot, the latter had a blank look on his face. He turned to Brasquet de Laons and asked candidly:

"Did I say that?"

Brasquet answered seriously:

"Not in these exact words."

He explained:

"Didn't you say that Grace has an unpredictable movement? Didn't you say that

there are several forms of Grace, but the one that reveals Truth had to be a total immersion of the soul? Haven't you repeated many times that the divine influence travels as from the leaves to the core of the tree, and then again, in the opposite direction? It travels also from the skin to the inner blood, although it could be from the inner blood to the skin, you said more than once."

Bérot answered with a sigh:

"Did I say it? I guess I did,"

Brasquet may not have replied literally "I rest my case," but he must have nodded with a rather satisfied smile.

Martin De Lleda concluded:

"I still do not understand."

Martin loved to trouble religious people. He was not really anticipating any mind-boggling explanation, but he had to poke again at Bérot.

As expected, Brasquet intervened, trying to find another angle for a better clarification. That time, the Book of Hours did not record Brasquet's vain attempt.

Brasquet de Laons appeared from nowhere and spent about ten years following Bérot, writing many pages about religion and spirituality.

Then he disappeared.

However, we know more or less where he headed.

Around 1326, Le Tertre de Carces monastery started a new era. Substantial changes can be observed through the monastery's Books of Hours of that time. Brother Martin was gone, except for a couple of visits he made to see his friends, all of them before 1330. Bérot became less of an active participant in the daily activities and more of a recluse.

It is my assumption that Brasquet de Laons got a little bored, if I may use this trivial term. After all, you can imagine that, at least from the outside, monachal life was not really zooming in the fast lane. But at the end, Brasquet seemed to have lost his appetite for spiritual wisdom. In other words, his tenure at Le Tertre de Carces seemed to end in an internal vacuous standstill.

At that moment, fortunately for Brasquet de Laons, a great diversion came to save him from his doldrums. His curiosity for spiritual adventures was awakened again at last, that time by the *Companions Builders of the Sacred Altar*.

This group was created in the late 1260's by a certain Hugues Bisault. Here is another fellow who deserves his own action series on your TV set, or perhaps just a bi-weekly comic magazine rich of incredible action.

Hughes Bisault traveled all over Europe for 10 years before

following the famous Order of the Knight Templar to the Middle East. However, he was neither a monk nor a knight, but a builder.

Hughes started at a young age, in Rheims, as a quarryman. He traveled East and then South, accumulating skills and experience. When he finally embarked with the Knight Templar, he was a master stonemason. Eventually, he became in charge to rebuilding a strategic fortress on the road to Acre. That gave him the title of "maître d'oeuvre," an architect of the time.

Unfortunately, his work was razed to the ground by the enemy. Hughes Bisault escaped death only because of the bravery of a few knights.

The rather intense experience shook quite a bit the new *maître d'oeuvre*.

In those days, builders were grouped in professional guilds or associations, almost unions, called "sociétés de compagnons".

When he decided to follow the Knights Templar, Hugues had to switch his allegiance to a special society called "L'Ordre du Saint Devoir de Dieu" (the Order of the Saint Duty for God). This organization tended to model itself a little like the Templar.

After his traumatic near-death experience and when he eventually returned to Europe, Hughes Bisault chose to create a super *Order of the Saint Duty for God*. He established stringent initiation rites and drastic rules.

Instead of being commissioned by the noblemen, the merchants or the Church, the group vowed to travel all over Europe, and rebuild abandoned churches and old pilgrimage sites.

Since they would have no income, Hughes Bisault imagined they would live as Mendicants Brothers. He named his group *The Companions Builders of the Sacred Altar*.

After Hughes Bisault's death, the group added new conditions to its already rigorous regulations. Its members had to pray six times a day and to observe a vow of silence when working and eating.

Our special correspondent in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century, Jan Amoulet, wrote these lines about these intriguing fellows:

"They eat and travel together. When they find a consecrated site that seems requiring their care, they work without stopping, as if possessed by a divine fervor, until the building is completely restored.

If they fulfill their task with honor, they are repaying the great gift God gave them.

If a companion fails his task, he is severely punished by all..."

Even before Hugues Bisault's death, the local Church officials did not know exactly what to make of this new secular order that started to usurp a certain religious status.

Once, a bishop went to visit a construction site chosen by the *Companions Builders of the Sacred Altar* in his own diocese.

He asked the "maître d'oeuvre" why his men would rebuild a church that had been abandoned and that nobody wanted to attend.

The answer was a loud and curt

"Are you saying that a house built so that  
the name of the Lord could be revered, is  
useless?"

As he pronounced this question, all the companions stopped brusquely what they were doing and turned toward the unwelcome visitor.

The bishop, we can guess, cleared his throat, smiled and praised loudly God for the providential intervention of the *Companions Builders of the Sacred Altar*.

That anecdote, reported in various regional chronicles, reflects well the clergy's discomfort towards this movement.

When Hugues Bisault died, he had gathered and initiated 23 companions. When Brasquet de Laons decided to join the association, they were almost two hundred men, mostly young and still very exalted.

Their pious mission gave them an aura of sanctity. However, the spectacle of a couple hundred silent and ferocious looking beggars, armed with heavy tools, invading towns and villages, was rather disturbing to a lot of people. Moreover, if these companions vowed silence, dedication to rebuilding churches, and

material detachment, they were far from swearing any type of celibacy.

Some sexual excesses were reported. They may have been amplified, exaggerated by the villagers' fears.

Many legends followed the mysterious troop until 1345, the year they were outlawed both by the secular and the religious authorities.

In 1346, Geoffroy de Sercq, an unpopular nobleman seeking some political diversion, started to hunt down the remaining companions who left the region and soon after disbanded.

It was brought to my attention that, at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the Parisian newspaper *L'Evènement littéraire* published as a serial novel, "*Les bâtisseurs de Chapitiaux*," signed by a certain Gustave Passel. It was a rather gory fiction, mixing sexual situations a la Marquis de Sade with humongous body counts; but it was explicitly inspired by the *Companions Builders of the Sacred Altar*. I am actually surprised that nobody has unearthed the once popular book by Passel to make a series of movies filled with "adult themes."

One day of March 1329, Brasquet de Laons left le Tertre de Carces to join the *Companions Builders of the Sacred Altar*.

At that point, we lose completely his trace. If he wrote the spiritual chronicles of his daily life with the companions,



the manuscript did not reach our century, unfortunately.

We actually do not even know if he was admitted in the exclusive and fervent circle. It is not impossible but, in my opinion, it is not very likely. By then, Brasquet de Laons was not a young man anymore, and the transition between a rather sedentary, intellectual, monastery life, and a rough existence of action could be quite drastic.

If we let our imagination take over, we may see Brasquet leaving the group, getting married and settling down in a town not very far from Le Tertre de Carces.

I like to picture him as the wise man in a small town. Maybe Brasquet became the proprietor of a tavern, raising often his glass in the name of the Divine Grace and other profound mysteries. Then, perhaps he floated in an eternal and enchanted alcoholic stupor he named Heaven of Earth?

We can also imagine that, after all these many years of spiritual peregrinations, as Voltaire's *Candide*, he went back to Laons and "*cultivated his garden*"?

Among all the possible endings to the life of the author of the fateful "*Sentences to Apostles, Saints and Prophets*," I can hardly picture him laying stones with mortar and pushing a heavy wheelbarrow.

Then again, there are plenty of events I have failed to fathom, and that have occurred nonetheless, leaving me always

more astounded.

XVIII Rich monks, poor monks and clever monks

While evoking the characters in and around Le Tertre de Carces, it would be logical to direct our attention to the monastery itself.

One typical medieval paradox was that a monk had to be poor, but monasteries were often quite opulent. Some monasteries were actually powerful landlords that had some weigh on the local economy and of course on its politics.

In the early 14<sup>th</sup> century, the Tertre de Carces monastery was not only known for its library but also for its feud with the Count of Forquignoles.

When we study special nuances of spirituality in the days of the Inquisition, we have to hire the cleverest literary and sometimes scientific sleuths to gather a few clues. But if we want to study a specific quarrel about lands, we have at our disposal literally hundreds of documents. Unfortunately, these

abundant texts, filled with clauses and codicils wrapped in puzzling legal jargon, enlighten us very moderately and could be conceivably even more tedious than this very *novel*.

We do have a plethora of documents showing that, shortly before Bérot's return to the Tertre de Carces, the count of Forquignoles, the local lord of the region, scored many strategic coups. As a result, Le Tertre de Carces monastery lost a big portion of its farmed land.

We have mentioned that the local chronicles of the time implied that the exodus of the monks seemed to have been provoked by Bérot's unwelcome arrival. But, in the previous twelve months, the father abbot and the other elders of that flourishing cultural site had been politically and economically so soundly defeated by the Count, that they were very worried for their own wellbeing. They feared that the relentless and greedy Forquignoles was not going to leave them alone, even after his successes.

So, after exploring in vain all diplomatic responses, the inhabitants of the monastery were ripe to abandon ship, just when Bérot arrived.

When most of the monks left, the Count of Forquignoles, who could care less about papal Bulls and visiting heretics, took that flight as another personal victory, and understood that the path to all the lands of the monastery was clear.

He licked his chops, but could not make his move right away because of a peculiar, risky action he had just carried out, in order to acquire some other lands. In that second front, he had found it more convenient to physically eliminate an annoying nobleman. Unfortunately, that bothersome rival happened to be related to the Count Robert d'Anjou, Forquignoles' own suzerain.

Thus, Forquignoles had to lay low for a while, using his resources to serve his lord with great zeal in order to get back in his good graces.

Finally, reassured that his risky maneuver was forgotten, the Count De Forquignoles came to visit the monastery one day of August 1332.

There was no doubt that he had in mind to get hold of the last few plots of lands still under the monks' control. He knew by then, that the father in charge, Garné, had the reputation to be a very simple man, certainly easier to bully than his predecessors.

The Count invited himself and his men to a feast in the refectory. He had brought with him rich food, wine and even music in the person of a lutenist. He came as a conqueror visiting his future fief, ready to inflame the situation, with his captains and his two sons dressed for battle, exhibiting symbolically their weapons in the religious site.

It is safe to assume that De Forquignoles did not like the

clergy in general. He took some great pleasure to eat, burp and raise great raucous in the vast room, roaring loudly and repeatedly his hypocrite surprise to see that only his men were feasting, while the monks were seated silently, certainly disapproving but also thoroughly terrorized.

Garné had to sit next to his "guest", but he was not taking part to the agapes.

Toward the end of the meal, the Count offered to manage all the monastery properties. The monks would then be under "his personal care and protection."

Garné answered him. First, he asked for a common prayer and a special blessing for his guests. Then, he recited passages of the Bible, thundering suddenly the names of Ezekiel, Zechariah and Malachi. And, pointing an accusatory finger, he asked:

"Do you understand, my lord? I surely wish you understood!"

That was vintage Garné. The count was utterly confused. But his contempt for the monastery, plus his natural greed, were powerful antibodies and soon, he recovered from his surprise and was about to yell an ultimatum to the monks when Brother Martin intervened.

The Count of Forquignoles was unaware that among the monks, there happened to be one man who had dealt with high political and financial matters almost all his life.

As for any other endeavour, being prepared is indeed always the most powerful weapon to have. While the nobleman was busy underestimating an adversary he thought already defeated, Martin De Lleda, during the few weeks preceding the visit, gathered a lot of useful information on the Count.

Why did the ex-cardinal undertake the task of defending Le Tertre de Carces?

He had been very likely asked. But by whom? Nobody was supposed to know his real identity, or that he possessed the legal acumen and the ability to resist De Forquignoles.

Somehow, I cannot fathom Father Garné assessing coldly the gravity of the situation and summoning Brother Martin to spearhead a surprising counterattack by the monastery.

The person who accurately evaluated that Martin could be the man for the situation, may have been Bérot, Gratien l'Ancien or even one of the novices, like the peculiar Jan Amoulet who may have recognized Martin from one of his many voyages throughout Europe and specifically, to Avignon.

In any case, entrusted with the defense of Le Tertre de Carces, Martin De Lleda did not have time to begin a real diplomatic action, which would have involved visiting other noblemen and knitting a few key alliances. But he started gathering all the information he could on the Count of Forquignoles.

André de Forquignoles was of rather recent nobility. His direct ancestors were more usurpers than true blue blood. The Count was not the most literate person in the region. He had simple hobbies, like feeling rich and respected, accumulating land and income. He did not excel at classical chivalry values. He hated the Church, but he was weary of its power. Also, he did not want to alienate God. He had a private chaplain that advised him on matters of salvation and was appointed to pray for him and help perform some low cost charitable deeds.

This behavior illustrated his general philosophy in all things: beware of God, but abuse His creatures.

For instance, he was himself the vassal of Robert d'Anjou, King of Naples who, fortunately for him, did not care much for what was happening in this county as long as all the obligations were fulfilled by De Forquignoles. And, at the exception of his recent faux-pas when he had inadvertently killed a remote family member of his suzerain, the Count André acquitted himself of his duties in a scrupulous and exemplarily servile manner. In exchange, he felt entitled to set up edicts and laws to get what he wanted in his county.

Also, he strong-armed the local religious authorities, but cultivated liberally his relationship with the Bishop of the region.



At the conquering dinner imposed by De Forquignoles at Le Tertre de Carces, Brother Martin started by giving an eloquent tribute to the monastery's "guests."

He insisted on the Count's wealth and enumerated all his domains, among which he listed in details the newly annexed lands that used to be, he stressed, "under the local authority of the Tertre de Carces."

He added that the monastery was, by the way, a simple administrator for the powerful "*Grand Maître des hospitaliers*" of the time.

That last information was a blatant lie. But it had the expected effect on the Count: his ears perked up.

Martin concluded with a semblance of admiration that it was a bold move to defy the Grand Master. It proved how fearless the Count of Forquignoles truly was!

And he blessed the bravery of the man who could free the poor monks, who just wanted to devote themselves to the service of God, from the triviality of administering lands for what was truly "*a mundane power.*"

The Count of Forquignoles, I imagine, said something like: "Wait a minute, my man. Wait a minute. Let's rewind the tape."

Not with these exact words perhaps, but he did protest: this monk full of verbiage was surely confused. His newly acquired lands had nothing to do with any *Grand Maître des*

hospitaliers.

Martin repeated calmly that he understood the nobleman's modesty, but he still had to thank him for freeing the monks from these tedious administrative tasks.

The Count did not like that his celebrating feast could be souring. What was this damn monk talking about? He affirmed with a discernible impatience that he had the documents to prove he was the legitimate owner and defied anybody to say he was not!

Martin, still with a fake deferential demeanor, stubbornly continued:

"We all know it is not a small endeavor to challenge the Grand Maître des hospitaliers. But we worry also, even though we trust in the strength and wisdom of our Lord the Count, that His Holiness the Pope would also intervene in the matter.

That intervention would be actually most certain.

But, my lord, none of that matters, for you are the most valiant nobleman of the world.

You and your heroic army..."

Here, Martin must have paused to stare at the other guests.

"You and your heroic army can take on anybody. And, if the pope excommunicates you or declares a holly crusade against you, you

will be certainly more reckless than  
Louis IV of Bavaria.

Our only concern would be the Count Robert  
d'Anjou's reaction.

However, we trust that you, our Lord, the  
Count De Forquignoles, will convince him to  
take your side in the matter. But we can not  
help fearing that the Pope and the Crown of  
Anjou can not conflict politically in this  
somewhat minor matter, for they are tied in  
so many different affairs, vital to the  
world."

The Count André looked around. Besides a few soldiers, his  
captains and his two sons in war gears, there was a young  
cleric, a relative of his most trusted advisor who did not come  
because of his health. Besides, it was certain that the  
victorious expedition did not require his services.

Now, that young cleric was here definitely out of Martin's  
league.

Using his usual orator tricks, Martin de Lleda changed his  
tone of voice. Now, louder, more deliberately, he suddenly  
exhibited a sealed piece of parchment:

"We have received a message from the Grand  
Maître des Hospitaliers. Would you care to  
read it, my lord?"

Of course, the sealed letter was forged by the Gratien brothers who had precisely followed the ex-cardinal's specific and expert directions, since he was very familiar with that type of documents.

Martin had suddenly a cardinal-like authority when he said to the Count, looking at him directly:

"You may want to see by yourself the signature of the Grand Maître des hospitaliers."

The Cardinal Martin De Lleda knew well the Sovereign Military Hospitaller Order (*Les Hospitaliers*).

Will the reader demand to be acquainted with it? Should I summarize why the Pope Clement V dissolved the Knights Templar Order in 1312 and how their properties were given to the Hospitaliers?

It could be a lengthy chapter, very interesting (to some). However, in truth, even the Count of Forquignoles did not have an exact grasp of who the Hospitaliers were. For him, like for most of his contemporaries, they were mysterious and very powerful. Like the Templar, the name exuded a whiff of sacred knighthood in faraway lands, in the holy Palestine. Their shadowy reputation rubbed off quite a few other groups of the time, like the *Companions Builders of the Sacred Altar* that we saw earlier, for instance.

It would not be the choice of a lower tier nobleman, with a gluttony for material possessions slightly above average, but not necessarily overly audacious, to have an enemy that was not a local squire, but a potent organization whose knights fought against the Infidels all over the medieval world.

The Count of Forquignoles was slightly more tentative when he declined Brother Martin's offer to examine the document. No, after all, he did not need to read any letter.

His men had slowed down their rowdy consumption of food and alcohol. They could feel that the situation went awry at some point: the Count was letting this monk talking nonsense and, more importantly, they were not ransacking the place.

But Forquignoles found some renewed strength in the sight of his armed men. He drank his glass, and had a loud, assertive laughter.

Martin noticed the change. Before the Count could take his sword to make a theatrical, symbolic gesture against the monks in the room, the *Hospitaliers*, and perhaps even against the Pope, Martin placed swiftly a verbal coup de grace.

He unfolded promptly the document the count had refused to check, and exclaimed, as if he was very impressed by the beautiful and intimidating signature:

"His name is Héliion de Villeneuve. And here  
is the armory of the Grand Masters of the

Order, my lord. Here is, you see underneath,  
the armory of his family. Can you recognize  
it, my lord?"

Curious, the count could not help staring at the symbol. He  
frowned. Why would he know it?

"The greyhounds. Like the Count Jobert de  
Gast's very own coat of arms."

There is no doubt that the Gratien brothers had thoroughly  
enjoyed mixing three coats of arms for the design of this one  
"official," very solemn-looking, quite imposing document. They  
copied the actual blazon of Jobert de Gast, a neighboring squire  
that De Forquignoles knew very well. Then, they took some  
elements from it and added them subtly to their creation, the  
supposed coat of arms of Héliion de Villeneuve, a historical  
character who was actually the Grand Master of the Order at that  
time.

It was of course Martin de Lleda who had provided all the  
necessary components for the document, the signature, the  
various coats of arms and even the seal, to look real and  
foreboding.

Eventually, the count had to articulate a question:

"What is the relationship between this Grand  
Maître des Hospitaliers and Jobert de Gast?"

Martin was now in control. He started toying with the  
Count, using all the information he had carefully collected.

"You see, my lord, the Grand Master and Jobert are second degree cousins".

Some local rumor claimed that the Count of Forquignoles had ambushed and killed Jobert de Gast. Both, you guessed it, were haggling over some land Forquignoles desperately wanted.

Now, it looked like at least the ghosts of two men that Dear Andre had killed to annex a few more acres of land, were coming back to exact their revenge.

Martin's plan was sufficiently farfetched, convoluted and unexpected to overwhelm a completely unprepared Count of Forquignoles.

Now, in the Count's mind, there was a couple of blurry but perilous links between the Tertre de Carces monastery's properties and two potentially hostile and powerful entities.

He decided to think thoroughly about this predicament and first, consult his legal counselor.

And to the great disappointment of his belligerent party, the Count ordered to retreat at once.

For the next few months, the Count de Forquignoles left alone the Tertre de Carces monastery. He had actually more pressing cares, since one of his captains, his personal advisor and his elder son, tried to depose him.

Eventually, the younger son took over, got rid of the

plotters and ironically, found it appropriate to exile his father... to a monastery in Spain.

There should be some moral lesson to draw here, shouldn't it?

Local chronicles, official documents and, of course, the monastery's own Book of Hours give concurring versions of the event we have described. However, one may regret that we are not left with a more personal account of it, coming from Brasquet or Gratien, for instance; or Martin de Lleda himself.

Once again, we may marvel about the complexity of this episode's hero. Martin de Lleda, who admitted to be prone to bouts of anger, and who was not the most humble man of the robe, displayed in the circumstance, a remarkable, almost perfect self-control.

Was the character who scored a textbook defeat of an aggressive nobleman, with his epic mastery of diplomatic strategy (or his gift for lying), the same one who lamented in the "Saint Petersburg 'anonymous letter'":

"One hundred times, the Lord gives me the key of His Chest and one hundred times, I misplace it.

I cry, stammer and break in a sweat, for I have lost the Way of all Treasures.

Will my Lord forgive me one more time, as a



mother who can not resent her last born, a  
very devoted but also very slow-witted son?"

Let's summarize the essential question from the previous paragraph: how can the same person be so perfect and so flawed within a very short period, or should we say "at the same time"?

For our linear minds, it would be acceptable to be flawed in the beginning and eventually finish as a perfect or near perfect human being.

In trivial terms, everyday observation proves that even a great man or woman who seems to have achieved some spiritual excellence, can screw up lamentably, and more than one time!

The theme of perfection occupied greatly Bérot and Martin in their religious discussions.

The same way they had already determined that they could not keep an everlasting Grace in everyday life, they also admitted they were unable to experience a permanent perfection.

In theory, the true man of God should be able to achieve a grace and a perfection that would die only with the chosen one's death. But the two monks' very different experiences tended to show that such spiritual achievement was impossible for common men or, to repeat their recurring disclaimer, men who were neither prophets nor saints. Even "hidden prophets" were subjected to the ephemerality of all human things.

In other words, a righteous man cannot be always righteous. Or to take a more concrete example, one could not expect the Martin de Lleda who affronted Forquignoles with an admirable mastery, to be so evenly tempered next time he would not find his missal.

Already, Bérot/Brasquet had voiced that idea in *Readings of the Bible on Truth and Grace*, in a commentary of a Psalm:

"(...) and my mouth shall declare Thy praise.  
But Thou know that my lips will be closed  
soon, for men are imperfect and they can not  
sustain Thy perfection, nor can they receive  
Thy infinite Grace, since they are finite  
creatures."

And in one of the later monastery's Book of Hours, an anonymous scribe commented:

"This man is wise and some say he is  
perfect.  
But this perfection shall not last, for it  
is not in man's nature to last.  
As truly as men are born, mature, fall sick  
and die, man's perfection will not last  
before your eyes.  
But it will, in the Eyes of God.  
So, if you are before a wise man, do not  
expect him to do the impossible and be who

he can not be.

But he will be eternally wise in the Eyes of God, for His Time is different from our time on this Earth.

And if you see a man that errs, do not say he is a fool by nature.

Think of Peter. Did he not sin before and even after being the disciple of Jesus?

Think of the other Apostles. Were they always perfect towards Jesus Commandments?

Think of the chosen people. Did they always listen to Moses and the prophets sent by God?

Thus, you will know that things do not last in the world of men.

And if you think about it without passion, ignorance will also fade; even the thicker form of ignorance, which seems always like a layer of solid mud in the noon sun.

That too will eventually disappear..."

Many texts found at Le Tertre de Carces repeat more or less explicitly this conclusion:

"Grace and perfection will not stay with men. Thus, the righteous man will not stay

righteous. There is no infallibility among men".

When exposed to it, my students are curiously divided. I would roughly estimate that a majority of my freshmen students judge this assertion rather negative and somewhat depressing, while my graduate students, in general, judge it realistic or even positive, since it frees men of the tyranny of perfection, so to speak.

Very often, I just quote a text and I feel that the intrinsic quality of the passage, its depth, is perceptible to all. I forget that each text endures the transformation inherent to any interpretative reading (a marked redundancy, as we know).

All readers are not equal, and we are not talking about IQ or attention, but just of timing.

For instance, in a previous excerpt from the monastery's Books of Hours, did you notice its outstanding concept of time?

"For (God's) Time is different from our time on this Earth."

We must remember that, like many concepts that modern men take for granted, time was not perceived the same way in the medieval era. Since people did not have wristwatches and clocks in their living rooms, they depended on the sky, the light and other *visible* rhythms, to sense time. Often, the church bells accentuated its passage.

However, the monks at Le Tertre de Carces left many written reflections about human space and time and "their divine counterparts."

In a very convoluted passage of *Readings of the Bible on Truth and Grace*, Bérot placed himself in the moment of rapture, when in the "meditative prayer," "Divine Grace is bestowed onto the searcher of God." In this spiritual place, the searcher is immersed in the divine reality, which is eternal. While in this "dimension," we would say nowadays, the seeker shares God's eternity. Of course, to the naked eye of the possible observer, this seeker would be "still growing old and decomposing, while claiming to be immersed in the eternity of God"

Superficial readers, like your average inquisitor, will indeed find quite sacrilegious to claim that a mortal could be in some way "experiencing the eternity of God".

To us, it is fascinating to see that the monks had conceived the quite abstract thought of a difference between the linear time that leads a person from birth to death, and the divine time that the devout mortal upon whom the Grace is bestowed, can experience. That time is altogether another *dimension*: a spiritual one.

Quite a few years before these cogitations took place at Le Tertre de Carces, the much celebrated Master Eckhart pronounced in his sermon on "The nearness of God":

"The heavens are pure and clear without shadow of stain, out of space and out of time. Nothing corporeal is found there.

Their revolutions are incredibly swift and independent of time, though time depends on them.

Nothing hinders the soul so much in attaining to the knowledge of God as time and place. Therefore, if the soul is to know God, it must know Him outside time and place, since God is neither in this or that, but One and above them.

If the soul is to see God, it must look at nothing in time; for while the soul is occupied with time or place or any image of the kind, it cannot recognize God."

Le Tertre de Carces was obviously a school of moderation. At a time when monasteries and religious movements thought that extreme strictness paved the road to salvation, Garné and his monks cultivated a more temperate approach.

What Martin de Lleda found in the monastery was not a "heretic" secret, but the relief from the tyranny of eternal perfection. His spirituality became more limber. It allowed room, space for changes to proceed, since change must occur.

This discovery actually allowed Martin de Lleda to explore some paths that the Church's more traditional ways had never

revealed to him.

XIX Jan Amoulet

The reader may remember that among all the odd things I have confessed in these pages, one was the desire to have been a novice at Le Tertre de Carces when Bérot, Martin and company lived there. I mentioned that the older novice in these days seemed to have been Jan Amoulet, who was by then in his late forties.

It is impossible not to devote a few pages to this peculiar character.

Jan Amoulet has left, literally, a remarkable paper trail. He wrote a lot. Some of his work has survived the centuries and has been translated and studied. He gave some important information to historians, thanks to his keen sense of observation.

Indeed, Amoulet did not see himself as some type of "journalist," who would be working for future scholars! He was



in his own mind a poet, a troubadour, a philosopher and a "true disciple of Francis of Assisi".

Unfortunately, posterity has not been too inclined to acknowledge his literary genius. Today, only a few voluminous literary anthologies mention him before publishing reluctantly a short example of his rimes, usually judged very ordinary, from an esthetic point of view.

But if Jan Amoulet, the poet, is not very visible for the historians of Literature, Jan Amoulet, the witness of his days, is held in high esteem by us, medievalists.

Through his early "troubadour" songs and his long self-serving, lyrical poem, "*The Quest for Wisdom*," Jan Amoulet painted the following portrait of himself.

First, he never pretended to be a nobleman. According to him, he was one of Bruges wealthiest merchants by birth. His most original song was actually about the passage of the Zwin, the river around which Bruges was built

Versed in many arts and sciences (sic), he felt progressively a very Augustinian boredom and the general regret not to be "different."

He had the noble aspiration, and he repeated it ad nauseam in his writings, to know everything there was to know.

One day, while traveling for his trade, Jan Amoulet saw on the

road a few very dismayed families journeying west. They had been chased from their land, or rather the land on which they were working for generations. There was at the time some political instability and they were caught in the middle of bloody confrontations between noblemen. They fell also victims of vicious brigandage.

Jan, without further ado, gathered all his fortune and gave it to these poor villeins. He felt instantly better. He was "*free of the servitude of Mammon.*"

He started "roaming the world" for his true calling: the search of wisdom. He traveled south, expecting to join the ranks of the most elevated troubadours.

At that point, Jan Amoulet remained discreet about his achievements or lack thereof, as a poet and an entertainer. He described the regions he passed through in details, applying always the same pattern: he witnessed some oddities he often found laughable or reprehensible. Then he applied himself to study each case in order to find through these "*trials*" more wisdom.

In his opinion, Jan's path seemed to have been scouted and prearranged by "*angels and invisible emissaries of the Almighty.*"

His search of wisdom led Jan to meet some "remarkable figures" of his days. I shall spare the reader the rather meaningless litany of names and titles who "*have acknowledged*

*his simple grandeur."*

Amoulet wanted to be indeed a "man of the world," but also a chosen soul, a man of great stature in the religious realm. He declared having a special and full relationship with God.

However, he claimed repeatedly not to understand his "brother in the Lord," the people of the Church.

The feeling was mutual. Jan wrote several times how disappointed he was with the Friars Minor (the Franciscans) he had met. Spiritually speaking, he did not doubt he was the descendant of St Francis. Of course, the Franciscans claimed the same filiation.

But Jan would ask shrilly:

"Who would you believe, the man who gave all his wealth to the poor or a group of men who, contrary to what Francis ordered, had a rigid structure and quite a few possessions?"

Nonetheless, in spite of his apparent scorn of the Franciscans, Jan tried several times to be accepted by them, not as a simple friar, but as a model of sorts. Meanwhile, the Franciscans he met kept on seeing in him some misinform vagabond rather than the true representative of the illustrious saint founder of their order.

During his religious peregrinations, Jan Amoulet went to hear a

few renowned preachers of his time, providing us with several very precious historical data.

He had also a certain propensity for seeking very strange individuals who happened to have some type of following. Officially, it was to refute them mercilessly.

For instance, he traveled 70 miles to see Marcos-the-Greek, whose real name was Marc Lemaistre and who came actually originally from Paris. Marcos affirmed he saw saint men's shadows at night naming unceasingly the "stages of sins," where all of the human deeds were measured in terms of sin gravity. Marcos would look in the eyes of his visitors, shake his head and, the next day, assess an adequate penitence.

Amoulet met also a certain Margarilda, an octogenarian lady who had healing powers and who claimed that angels came by night to evaluate the daily actions of men. Dreams reflected their intrusions in men's thoughts and that lady had a system to interpret these telling dreams. Margarilda was a local celebrity and a few noblemen and noblewomen came to consult her in her hamlet at the border with Spain.

Jan noted another oddball theory expressed by a certain Pagès d'Apt. It was an animist vision of the world where everything was speaking of the Christian Message. Nature was uttering meaningful words that could weigh heavily on the human fate. These words could be translated by a high priest (such as Pagès d'Apt himself, wouldn't you know!) and relayed to the

people who had to obey them.

The sermon by Pagès d'Apt that Jan Amoulet attended took place at sunrise on the banks of a small river. Pagès listened intently to the running water, the insects, the birds, as well as the wind. Word per word, the nature around Pagès' flock started to build a text very close to "*Behold. The hour cometh, that you shall be scattered, every man to his own*" (John, 16, 32). Jan Amoulet was not too impressed by the religious service, except for one thing: at some point Pagès d'Apt asked everyone present to turn to the sun and breathe in and "swallow" the morning rays. He chanted:

Holy Spirit, You penetrate all  
corner of this Earth  
In the morning dew, I make You  
mine  
For You give us the strength of  
the sun at its zenith.

Amoulet found the incantation so powerful that he did feel "nourished and full of the energy of the conqueror."

He kept performing on his own that ritual for many years.

Jan Amoulet's reports never contained one ounce of discernable irony. He described what he was witnessing with great severity, repeating often:

The wise man learns life by studying the

errors of the fool.

Jan Amoulet was not afraid to write a stern commentary/conclusion like any expert in religious topics would. And he did consider himself to be an expert. After all, he had read a lot, listened to many masters and above all, he had the ultimate passport to the religious elite, at least in his mind: he had given all his fortune to the poor.

However, the first time he went to observe Bérot's service, his comment of the event was somewhat different from his usual harsh reviews.

As usual, Jan started by painting the surroundings of the mass with his typical circumspection. But, by the end of Bérot's sermon, Amoulet seemed genuinely impressed by the sincerity and the inspiration of the man.

Jan Amoulet was actually so impressed that, a little more than three years later, he decided to become... a novice at the Tertre de Carces! In his autobiographical poems, it appeared that a quasi divine revelation prompted him to go to the monastery.

We may indeed marvel at this miracle: the man who thought of himself very much superior to any Friar Minor, accepted, at a rather ripe age, to join the ranks of apprentices more than twice younger than him, in a small monastery on the decline.

He abruptly left the dusty roads dear to his model and spiritual master, Saint Francis, for the sedentary life of a

Benedictine-Dominican-Garnéian novice!

There may have been a more economical component to this "divine inspiration." We do not know exactly how Jan Amoulet could travel so extensively after giving away all his fortune.

It is understood that, at the time, one did not need an expensive transportation ticket, a rental vehicle and a bed in a hotel, to explore a region. But, whatever sustained our medieval chronicler, either some of his past fortune secretly stashed away, or just a clever and frugal way of traveling, all that came to a stop around the time Jan chose to go to Le Tertre de Carces. Amoulet's writings of those days reflected some real material and health concerns.

The previous remark, voiced during a lecture, brought up a puzzling debate that affected me at a rather personal level, I must say.

One of my students had to write a paper about Jan Amoulet. She chose to describe a "realistic or pragmatic" version of his decision to enter Le Tertre de Carces monastery as a novice. At first, her introduction was falsely "romantic": Amoulet really felt intrigued by Bérot and, after an improbable chain of events, he could realize the goal of being his disciple.

Then, this graduate student established, with well researched background details, a more "realistic" reason for his sudden vocation.

So far, there was nothing in this paper that I had not taught. But this young woman had a particularly biting writing style that stressed caustically the hypocrisy of the character she was analyzing.

She used at some point the words:

*"He had to lie to himself and to others."*

In the previous paragraphs, my own description of Jan Amoulet hopefully shows that I was not duped either by the image of himself the ex-Belgium merchant tried to project in his texts.

But Amoulet was still for me the quite endearing figure of a simple man who wanted to lead a heroic life. He was a little like a sweet and older great-uncle or a remote cousin you may have in your own family, who is quite broke, but always brings the most extravagant gifts when invited, and tells inexhaustible stories of his past glory.

When I saw Jan being harshly ridiculed and called a liar in my student's paper, I could not help running to his rescue.

As their teacher, I was able to drum up a plan, albeit a bit childish as you will see, and run the following question by my students.

"On your way to school, you are daydreaming of what you would respond when you hear that your doctoral thesis has been accepted *summa cum laude*.



Very much entertained and distracted by these thoughts, you do not see a banana peel on the pavement. Your unconscious remembers the old Buster Keaton's movies you liked a lot when you were young and you slide and fall down.

Not as limber as Buster, you twist severely your ankle. Now, what would be your version of the incident if the Dean of the Department asks you why you are limping?

A small majority of students, tickled by the proposal, claimed they would tell the truth. The rest admitted being more comfortable telling a "white lie."

I raised the ante and replaced the daydream of scholarly success by a darker thought, maybe of lust, greed, etc. God knows that we all have these, and my students were kind enough to delve in their own demonic labyrinths. All of them admitted they would not tell the truth.

I had to pursue with another question. What would be the nature of your lie?

My contention was that a lie that puts us in the center of a personal, lyrical odyssey has some outstanding advantages. If we must lie to others and to ourselves to a certain extent, we might as well do it with a smile if it is possible at all, but always with a sense of depth, with the conviction that there is

another dimension to the situation where we find ourselves.

In other words, if I fell down, it was for me to see the world from a lower perspective (!); or to be taken care of by a beautiful nurse; or to be temporarily immobilized, so I could read some outstanding book that I would not have read otherwise; to write a heartfelt poem about suffering that will win the Poet in Great Pain Competition; to become more humble, etc.

A sheer unidirectional existence driving us from birth to death would lead us to inevitable despair. That is why, in my opinion, humanity had to become "religious". Not solely to believe at any cost in a paternal entity who would watch benevolently over us, mortals, but to give us another dimension, a sense of the magic in our midst, in our routine.

If Jan Amoulet saw himself as a secret knight of God and a disciple of St Francis, his delusion did not fool anybody, I think. But it did color his existence with an interesting hue.

I must admit that quite a few of my students were not that impressed by that brilliant demonstration. They did question my defense of a "romantic" and subjective reality, while I was supposed to look solely at the cold facts, as any researcher raised with pure academic integrity, should do.

Then again, those were the days when I was not a fiction writer.

As one can expect, Father Garné accepted that Jan Amoulet stayed at Le Tertre de Carces. Even though Jan was supposed to be a simple novice, Garné tried to discreetly exempt him from the most menial chores.

Garné repeated pleasantly to younger novices that if he, the Father Abbot, did not clean the poultry-yard with them, it was not a matter of hierarchy but because he was himself physically so unfit that he would do a despicable job of it. He may have uttered the same excuse to spare the older novice Jan.

During the fourteen months he spent in the monastery, Jan Amoulet copied many pages in the library, but he hardly wrote anything of his own.

He may have been actually a bit overwhelmed, not so much by the wisdom emanating from the place, but by the more down-to-earth schedule.

Even with Father Garné's protection, Jan still had to take part to most of the daily masses. He had to work in the kitchen, perform a minimum of maintenance chores, read, study and of course, copy a lot.

He was spared of helping in the fields and in the barn, but he was supposed to leave the monastery and follow a certain itinerary at least twice a week, preaching a little and trying to actively help the persons in need.

At some point, "*angels and other elevated creatures*"

reappeared, summoning Jan Amoulet to leave the monastery, so he could explore new regions and live new adventures.

Here again, a more pragmatic analysis would show that, besides the poetical call of these hazy, heavenly creatures, a family member of Amoulet came to Le Tertre de Carces and may have materially contributed to Jan's departure. .

Jan resumed his life of self-promotion through his poems and songs. He stopped for good in Simiane, as he was over sixty years old. The family member who appeared earlier at Le Tertre de Carces was established there. He had a close relationship with the local baron. Together, they helped Jan Amoulet to settle in this region.

We know nothing of his last years, because Jan stopped writing when he settled down. Indirect sources indicate that he may have been working for the Simiane aristocracy, maybe as a steward, as some records mention the name Jehan des Flandres, very similar to Jan of the Flanders.

A precious collection of manuscripts called *the Sénanque Collection*, because it was discovered in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century in the library of the famous Cistercian abbey, contains many works from Occitania and even from Castile, all dating from the late Middle-Ages. Among these pages, researchers think they have discovered the original poem of the famous song "*Sweet Wisdom*"

(Originally, "*Douce Sagesse*").

"*Sweet Wisdom*" is a song that has circulated for many centuries throughout Europe. Its musical line, quite simple, and its lyrics, exquisitely nostalgic, endured many changes but may be recognized in works distant geographically as well as chronologically. The musicologists Reese and Paton found obvious traces of the song in Claude Le Jeune (16<sup>th</sup> Century), John Blow (17<sup>th</sup> Century), Sammartini (18<sup>th</sup> Century), etc. And nowadays, everybody can hear it almost as plagiarized as the famous "Green leaves," in a multitude of movie and TV series scores.

As improbable as it may seem, this original version of the famous folk song, the anonymous poem found in the *Sénanque Collection*, was very likely written by our very own Jan Amoulet.

This assertion is not one of my wilder deductions. It does not only stem from the fact that Simiane and Sénanque, where the poem was found, are geographically very close. It is, believe it or not, almost common knowledge, at least among medievalists.

Even though this poem does not boast Jan Amoulet's ostentatious signature, it has the form and the special blend of Flanders and Occitan expressions, etc., typical of our Belgium chronicler.

This piece was very different from all his previous poems. Jan always loved big, obscure words, Latin redundancies, etc. In "*Sweet Wisdom*," the author remained very clear. He did not force his rimes and he eliminated the usage of an awkward rhythm that

made Amoulet's poems so difficult to understand.

There is actually a dark irony in the fact that the only time Jan did not sign a poem, the piece became "universal" and was recognized by many as a masterpiece.

Since no translation of this original "*Sweet Wisdom*" is available in English, here is, as usual, an almost telegraphic version that takes into account the meaning but is, indeed, unable to render the rhythm or the rimes of the work.

As the sun rose on my youth,  
And the rose bloomed its sumptuous noon  
I followed shadows,  
Fabrics of legends,  
Chalice of high seas  
Ropes of boats never ashore  
My will was to know and lead my brothers  
My wish was to climb to the top  
My whims were to ask like others pray

As the sun shone on my life,  
And the rose leaned in the summer breeze  
I followed the paths of heroes.  
I swallowed a sunrise glow  
My bark in still under the noon sun  
No wind will lead it ashore

My will was to know and lead my brothers  
My wish was to climb to the top  
My whims were to ask like others pray

As the moon rose on my age,  
And tormented trees bend to the ground  
Yellow petals cover men's glee  
Shadows glisten in the mist  
And the moon reflects my white hair  
Fabrics of legends,  
Chalice of high seas  
Ropes of boats never ashore  
I wish I had solely followed my Lord

One of the scholars who recognized in Jan Amoulet the author of the original text of "*Sweet Wisdom*" was Dr. Zachariah Fahey.

In an article published in the *Journal and Archives of Medieval Studies* (Spring 1997), Dr. Fahey gave a new biography of our Belgium hero.

According to him, Jan Amoulet may have exaggerated his family wealth. He was obviously greatly influenced by the life of Pierre de Vaux and the Waldensians. Pierre, as we saw earlier, was the merchant from Lyon who gave away his fortune and started to preach in the streets. Contrary to Francis from Assisi, who had a rather similar background and attitude towards

the sanctity of Poverty, Pierre de Vaux and his followers were excommunicated. Thus, it is Dr. Zachariah Fahey's theory that Jan Amoulet was more Waldensian than Franciscan. But, aware of the Church antagonistic reaction to Pierre de Vaux, Jan prudently claimed (spiritual) allegiance to the Franciscans, duly recognized by the Pope. He actually seemed to confuse constantly Pierre and Francis in his writings.

Dr. Fahey, in his article, concluded that Jan Amoulet was a touching figure, whose ego was only literarily overly inflated. As the hero of his own poems, he was larger than life. But he was in reality humble and almost self-effacing.

As a matter of fact, at the Tertre de Carces, he was described as a man conscious of his age, modest, trying to fulfill diligently his obligations.

In Simiane, Jan Amoulet's voice became suddenly silent. This literary death did not mean his actual passing away. Fahey did a thorough study of all the documents bearing the name Jehan des Flandres. None was very conclusive. He found more interesting some other legal documents that mentioned an "honorable layman" who was a benefactor of the abbey of Sénanque. Dr. Fahey identifies him as Jan Amoulet.

We quote part of his conclusion, with Dr. Fahey's gracious authorization:



"As a medieval Candide, he traveled as far as he could, looking for a mythical, universal truth and an all-encompassing wisdom... only to find, eventually, a sweet garden, where he did not have to make up any more stories, doing *"good deeds and forgetting them,"* as he wrote in a poem he deliberately never signed"  
(...)

Brasquet de Laons, Jan Amoulet... How many medieval Candides can we have in a single book?

Actually, Bérot and Martin de Lleda also qualify to a certain extent, for that very nickname.

XX The concept of Grace in everyday life

After this overview of most of the characters living at Le Tertre de Carces in the early 1320's, we may have to examine how the spiritual "golden age" of the monastery started to fade.

Why did Martin De Lleda leave the monastery? Had he found what he was looking for?

And by the way, are we any closer to know, ourselves, what was Bérot's *ultimate secret*?

As a newly appointed novelist, I did have in mind to render the end of my book quite exciting. But every time I considered the answer of this question about Martin's departure and the beginning of the real decline of Le Tertre de Carces, I stumbled again on the less than climactic concept of *grace*.

Next time, I'll have Bérot and Martin fighting over a nun who committed some gruesome murder when she was a novice.

For now, I must go back to more spiritual matters.

The common modern definition of "grace" is "*state of one who is under divine influence.*" We saw that for Bérot, the term was a hotchpotch of various concepts that had in common a connection with the divine. In short, at Le Tertre de Carces, "grace" was, so to speak, the meeting point with the divine.

Since *grace* was the apparent crux for Martin's departure from the monastery, let us buzz around the word.

First, *Grace* should not be confused with modern, ecumenical ideas, such as "nirvana," "transcendental enlightenment," "meditative trance," etc.

Or should it?

As soon as I wrote the brilliant previous sentence, I had the sick feeling of having jumped into quicksand.

Then, I had the fantastic inspiration to add that, for Bérot, *grace* was not "an extinction" like the nirvana.

That is when I noticed that half of my brain was getting numb, or perhaps disappearing, which is a synonym for "becoming extinct."

What a coincidence!

Let's temporarily forget any new attempt to explain the word and let's go back to what we know about the concept of *grace* for Bérot.

Its main characteristic is to be fickle, to have a stubborn

tendency to abandon the common and inattentive worshippers, which is basically almost all of us.

Also, it is not a special instant, brought about by some intense meditation. It is less of an exceptional or blissful occurrence than a continuous presence that can be perceived as by accident, like the sudden reflection of something behind you when you glance for a second into a mirror-like surface.

Martin de Lleda's own spirituality made him more inclined to feel *grace* as an illumination.

He wrote that one can encounter this *grace* in church, perhaps during mass, when Christ's mystery shines upon the one who prays. But Martin tried to demonstrate that this illumination could also blossom in a flash, in many other places.

What do these two definitions of *grace* have in common and do they complete each other in some way, or are they completely antithetic?

From the echoes left in the monastery's Books of Hours, Bérot's explanations of the divine grace, always blurry and polymorphic, had a way of frustrating the much more intellectual former cardinal. However, it did also challenge him in a more positive way. It enticed him to pursue his research outside of his spiritual comfort zone.

It is a great feat for anybody to leave one's philosophical comfort zone. But it is truly a miracle for someone who had devoted all his time in a certain religious path, like a cardinal, to leave *that* comfort zone.

We always marvel about it, finding the phenomenon equivalent to Jesus giving the gift of sight to the blind man.

Opening up is, in our experience, as rare as any miraculous healing.

We suggested that Martin's willingness to overcome his annoyance toward Bérot's meek intellectual similes, stemmed from the respect he felt for Bérot. His curiosity and his esteem for the monk had enticed Martin de Lleda to stay at Le Tertre de Carces for many years.

After a while, Martin understood that Bérot and Brasquet were talking of a grace, a contact with the divine, *with the Lord*, not located in one incredible moment of rapture. Grace was a hub between what is precarious (or human) and what is essentially eternal and omnipresent, like the Lord Himself.

The imprecision of their descriptions was to avoid voicing a startling truth that could have really led them to be burnt as heretics: the authentic mystery was not the Creation, the Trinity and the Church... It was the most immediate daily life!

Martin de Lleda could find ironic that the Pope and the

authorities wanted to condemn Bérot for having the gall to utter sentences like "I know the Truth," while his real message was in a way infinitely more offensive for the religious establishment: grace is in everyday life and is given to every human being, not to one specific representative of the superior classes.

So, Martin could fathom intellectually Bérot's concept of grace, but he could not truly experience it. He was able to imagine it, think about it, etc. But when he went on to his daily chores, "*the tedious, repeated steps*" (as he wrote) kept their weight on his consciousness and no "permanent grace" could lift his spirits up.

As we know, describing spirituality is truly impossible. If you have ever tried to evoke precisely a fantastic personal inner experience, you know how ineffectual words can be. But to illustrate Bérot's theory of grace, a certain example may come to mind. We have the luxury to hop through time and cultures and to call to the witness stand the illustrious San Juan de la Cruz, who lived more than two centuries after Martin and Bérot.

If people located a few decades apart cannot understand each other's technology, sociology, culture and even some general psychological perspectives, it is not the same for spiritual matters. Even our contemporary Pope would never affirm that, after two thousand years of progress, he is more

knowledgeable than any of the Apostles in the matters of the soul!

That is why, if Martin could have heard Juan de la Cruz *Stanza of the Soul*, I do believe he would have understood it as an accurate poetical illustration of his own thoughts.

1. *On a dark night, Kindled in love with yearnings—oh, happy chance!—*

*I went forth without being observed, My house being now at rest.*

2. *In darkness and secure, By the secret ladder, disguised—oh, happy chance!—*

*In darkness and in concealment, My house being now at rest.*

3. *In the happy night, In secret, when none saw me,*

*Nor I beheld aught, Without light or guide, save that which burned in my heart.*

4. *This light guided me More surely than the light of noonday*

*To the place where he (well I knew who!) was awaiting me— A place where none appeared.*

5. *Oh, night that guided me, Oh, night more lovely than the dawn,*

*Oh, night that joined Beloved with lover, Lover transformed in the Beloved!*

San Juan described in this *stanza* an ascension by night towards the Divine. It is a moment of rapture. Commentators may argue about the nature of each "object," the ladder, the night, the light burning in the heart, etc. It expressed a process, a movement.

Let's imagine that Martin could have recited that poem to Bérot, as to illustrate his own definition of *grace*. It is probable that the monk would have appreciated it as a wonderful piece. After a few minutes of probing, Martin would have heard Bérot repeat that he liked a lot the poet's style, but as far as a personal indication, an advice, a guide to encounter the divine grace... all this gymnastic with the ladder in the dark seemed a bit superfluous to him.

The divine grace was already there. There was no need to do any contortion to reach it... On the contrary!

Now, from our perspective, it seems clear that, if Grace is placed in a summit of consciousness, not easy to reach; or if it is all around us already but not perceptible at once, in both cases, Grace is far from being evident. So, if we jump up and down to reach it or learn more or less methodically to see it, there is a certain discipline to follow. Then, the paths to *reach* it or to *see* it, could be conceivably similar or identical.

But Martin would not settle for this conciliatory view of the problem. He would just continue to be frustrated by the idea



that the esteemed Bérot perceived a grace that escaped him.

Frustration may not be the best spiritual catalyst and, in the monastery, not all discussions on the topic of *grace* were thoroughly constructive.

For instance, Bérot may have uttered a description of *grace*. Martin, being a more accomplished and a sharper intellectual, would then promptly slice to pieces, rhetorically speaking, that attempt.

One day, as Martin and Bérot went together on an excursion to help in a hamlet that had been destroyed by some calamity, they saw an exhausted worker taking a nap under a tree. The man was having some kind of nightmare. He shivered in his sleep and had brusque movements of his limbs.

Bérot went to him and woke him up. The peasant looked around him with incomprehension. When he recognized where he was, he had a wide smile.

"What was your dream about?"

"I don't remember. But it is good to be here."

Of course, the informed reader can guess that a Zen-like scene is developing as we speak.

And here it comes, indeed.

Bérot turned to Martin and said:

"This is Grace".

Martin smirked. His answer was going to be brief, sharp and certainly sarcastic. But at this very moment, someone called harshly the tired builder, calling him names of various animals with a sad reputation for laziness.

The Grace, and the smile, had vanished.

Suddenly, Martin de Lleda's analytical mind started to heat up: this sleeping fellow was in a certain, mysterious world. Abruptly awoken, he opened his eyes, realized where he was and seemed relieved. Oddly, Bérot called that occurrence, a moment of grace, which could be visible in the man's face, because of his bright smile. Then, common, callous reality took hold of the man's consciousness as someone scolded him, and grace and smiles disappeared altogether.

The ex-cardinal rushed to the man, who was hauling a heavy load, and introduced himself with his usual volubility. But for the life of him, he could not get the ex-dreamer to remember what he was thinking or seeing when he had opened his eyes.

"You smiled!"

And the man with a shrug:

"Did I?"

So what? My wife cries during her sleep"

Going back toward Bérot, Martin continued to cogitate.

What did the man see, or feel, that reassured him so? Nothing but what was before - and after - the dreariest reality.

Before his nap, the builder had no peculiar appreciation for the place. And now that he was dragging his burden, there was little doubt that this location was of little interest to him. But, after a frightful dream, that very place seemed heavenly to the worker.

Seen from the outside, the place before the dream, during the dream and after it did not change an iota.

Martin felt confusedly that this observation of the sleeper suddenly awoken, could be an illustration of a mind that unexpectedly sees a quality that was always there, but that was, before and after that instant of recognition, very much invisible.

Martin de Lleda kept on with his train of thoughts. He was with Bérot and the sleeper in one place. At a certain point, that very place had a special meaning only for the sleeper brusquely awoken, but not for Martin, Bérot, or even that very man before and after that specific instant.

The sudden relief of the man could be called *grace*, as Bérot did, or something else. What was important was that Martin had intellectually conceived how a mind can be blind to a hidden reality, before suddenly glancing at it, and eventually losing it again afterwards.

The thought of Moses and the Burning Bush came to Martin. If he had gone to Mount Horeb with the prophet, Martin de Lleda would not have seen anything: the bush was burning for Moses

only; *in* Moses, so to speak, very much like the relief that appeared solely in the suddenly awoken worker's mind. It was real for him, but not for anyone else.

Thus, concluded Martin, Grace - and all religious issues, as a matter of fact - were not for the people but for the individual! In Martin de Lleda own words,

*"a sacred truth is only revealed in its total splendor, to one soul and one soul only."*

"You look like you have seen a ghost, or a demon, brother Martin," said Bérot, alarmed.

Martin de Lleda was just intellectually struck.

Even if this very reasoning had occurred several times in the past in his mind, it never had this type of obviousness and that radiance.

After a rather long time, Martin asked his friend, with an awkward mix of suspicion and anticipation:

"What this man felt for a brief instant was Grace, wasn't it? What if a man would not lose this mysterious vision of the world that makes it shine and makes us smile? And, from the truth of your heart, tell me: do you have it? Do you have this vision?"

Bérot appeared at first confused by the avalanche of

questions coming apparently from nowhere, since the two men were on a practical mission. After all, they were far from reflecting in one of the evening perambulations. Martin's acidic tone of voice was also quite puzzling.

Bérot did not reply immediately.

Martin insisted:

"Do you have this vision right now?"

From everything we know about Bérot, everything that Brasquet and the various scribes of the monastery's Books of Hours ever wrote about him and his spirituality, we can guess that for Bérot, *grace*, the meeting point with God - or with the divine - could not be permanently engraved in the mind of common human beings, those who are not prophets and saints. Men are bound to lose it, eventually.

Therefore, we would bet our proverbial collective farms, that Bérot had a sheepish smile and answered:

"Of course, I have this vision, but only now and then".

But this is not what happened. Let it be a lesson for all of you, proverbial collective farms bettors, out there.

Eventually, looking at his friend in the eyes, Bérot nodded.

What prompted Bérot, that fateful day, to nod at his disconcerted friend that yes, he had a permanent vision of the

divine grace?

Actually, much later, Martin de Lleda did try to answer this riddle himself. He speculated that a vision that flickers remains nonetheless a vision. The flickering is part of its nature. It may be due to the weakness of the human mind. Whatever its cause, when the "light is off," most people do panic: will it ever come back? But Bérot would not get flustered. This extinction, this absence was part of the process.

Bérot's great discovery was to relax, maybe to have a "light shrug," and perhaps even to enjoy the absence. He took the complete cycle as a whole. Therefore, Bérot had the feeling that, even when he lost the *divine grace*, the loss was part of the *divine grace*, thus he never *lost it*, and he would never lose it, no matter how long he would be without it.

As onlookers of the interaction between these two men, we may have wanted to whisper in Bérot's ear that we kind of understood what he meant when he answered he felt the *divine grace* right then, or that he could claim he never really lost it. But we would have added that the timing was not ideal to nod at Martin's question.

The second axiom of Bérot's spirituality is that a man who knows the divine grace is not infallible. Grace does not provide the gift of divine prophecy or righteousness, but just a more

truthful and pleasing perspective of our existence.

This second axiom applies to what happened in this situation. Bérot may have answered positively to his friend's question with the best intentions: with the hope to help him, to show him indirectly the way. He may have acknowledged that he never lost *grace* as another encouragement for his fellow searcher of God.

But in that case, Bérot had grossly misjudged what Martin's reaction would be.

Once by himself, Martin de Lleda, a man intellectually very competitive, drew a strange conclusion from the fact his friend may have possessed a religious gift that himself, a lifelong seeker of the Truth, could fathom, but not reach.

Why was that realization different that day?

Because, for the first time, Martin was able to define what *grace* truly was for Bérot. And he may have liked what he saw or idealized.

Martin de Lleda felt jolted. His own spirituality, at this instant, with all his prayers, all the pages he had written, his triumphant debates, etc. became very dim. Even his Senez experience, where he thought he had reached Heaven on Earth, had lost its relief.

Still from our position of spectators, we wish we could have shouted the third axiom of Bérot's spirituality: everything

changes in the universe of men. If only Martin de Lleda could have been distracted by a benign incident on the road back to Le Tertre de Carces monastery, the intensity of Martin's sudden sense of spiritual shortfall would have passed, and perhaps his search for the sacred would have been indelibly enriched.

But the two friends walked silently back home, and Martin lost the insight he had on the subtle reality of the *instant of grace*, and remained trapped in a swamp of doubts.

The vision of the worker who saw grace and then went back to his dreariest reality, superseded inexorably the glimpse of a man simply touched by a grace hidden in this *dreariest reality*.

We have mentioned earlier "*The Book of Mirrors*," a famous medieval, religious manuscript copied among many places, at Le Tertre de Carces, and therefore often quoted in its Books of Hours.

In one chapter, the book reports the journey of a group of four wise men towards the *Throne of God*. Only one of them reaches his noble goal, while one gets distracted with acquiring secondary powers and never makes it to the Throne. Another one lacks interior stamina and spiritual strength and has also to stop. The third one makes it to the final sphere and receives the following recommendation:

*"At that point, you shall see the brightest light you have ever seen. Turn your eyes*



*away rapidly if you do not want them to  
burn."*

Of course, this wise man is hypnotized and loses his sight.

This story came to my mind as I was attempting to analyze what happened that day between the two improbable friends.

Martin de Lleda had stared at what he thought to be a glimpse of the hidden grace, not only available to the chosen ones, but to every man. For some reason, his understanding of the religion froze there. Like the wise man of the tale, who could not look away, Martin was unable to *think away*.

Maybe any "ultimate truth" should be only glanced at?

At that point, the only reprieve Martin de Lleda could find was to leave the monastery.

Less than one week after the exchange we have just reconstituted with the reputable accuracy one can expect from a 264 pages old novelist, Brother Martin announced he was leaving for a journey of a personal nature. In order to avoid any type of explanation or farewell, he said his absence was going to be brief.

As a matter of fact, in the next three years, Martin made three short swings by the monastery. But the famous "*Perambulations*" and spiritual discussions had been, by then, replaced by recitations of spiritual verses and prayers.

The monastery's Book of Hours did not record Martin de

Lleda's last visits.

XXI Women of God and of the Devil

When he left the monastery, Martin de Lleda did not go very far. He stopped for quite some time at St Claire Du Bon Secours, a convent located less than 100 miles west of Le Tertre de Carces.

In those days, the convent was rather famous. When he was cardinal in Avignon, Martin de Lleda had heard of the legendary Abbess Isabelle, the Mother Abbess who reformed that convent.

Isabelle appeared in 1279 in what was then a rundown convent that was built for the Order of St Clare.

She left at the door the name Isabelle De Fresne. She did not waste any time, obtaining swiftly from the temporary Mother Abbess the permission to visit right away a few local noblewomen to beg them to restore the buildings.

And her efforts were instantly successful.

Where did she come from? Her origins are puzzling. We know she was well educated and was raised as a member of the

nobility.

The French novelist Christine Villeparis, who is supposed to have also a college degree in History, devoted a whole book showing that *Isabelle De Fresne* was in fact a descendant of the theologian Alexander of Hales.

The reader may be suspicious of Mrs. Villeparis's line of reasoning, but her historical novel, "The Resilient," has the merit of being imaginative and a very entertaining read, which is a precious quality, as my distressed but faithful readers can vouch.

Let's just say that Isabelle De Fresne officially claimed to have received her education in Eibingen, the monastery of the illustrious Hildegard Von Bingen. Isabelle actually went as far as professing learning directly from Hildegard.

I do not know if, during her lifetime, she was often challenged by skeptics remarking that the two nuns lived one century apart. In that case, I guess she would have claimed a *spiritual* relationship woven through dreams.

So, one day, out of nowhere it seems, Isabelle, who was in her twenties, appeared at St Claire Du Bon Secours and overtook the monastery.

Here again, the information of this religious "coup" is sketchy. We know that abbesses in the region and of this Order were certainly not that young. They were not elected but named by the Mother Abbess of All Convents, who was herself selected

by the Pope.

There is no trace left of any prior correspondence between Isabelle and the Order before her arrival at Le Bon Secours.

Also, unfortunately for us, all official texts that could have shed some light on Isabelle's first years in her new domain have disappeared in a fire in the 15<sup>th</sup> Century.

The Order's proclaimed asceticism and self-sacrifice were very good, but hardly enough for Isabelle and her taste for reforms.

She provoked a little internal turmoil by demanding that the nuns also read and studied. She invited some masters from European universities and got a few to come, after convincing them she was some modern, Southern version - we could not say "reincarnation" - of Hildegard Von Bingen.

Isabelle established rigorous yearly, monthly, weekly and daily schedules for her nuns, a model of sorts, where her Clare Sister alternated studies, penitence, chores, active good deeds toward the more unfortunate members of the community, seclusion in complete silence, preaching, etc.

Some local members of the clergy frowned at the "reforms" implemented in a congregation that had very different founding rules. Her regulations, a fifteen page manifesto encompassing a typical year of devotion, entitled "*Imitation of Marie and Magdalena*" made its way to a preliminary analysis in Avignon.

To prevent any misinterpretation of her words, Isabelle

traveled to the papal city and asked to be received by the Pontifex Maximus himself.

Of course, that was not possible at once, but Isabelle got to see one of his cardinals. The one who had the good fortune to grant her a hearing was the Cardinal of Parma.

Isabelle's volubility, her mixture of erudition and exaltation, her constant references to Hildegard Von Bingen, etc., made this poor fellow's head spin. Pressed to have her leave Avignon, he reassured Isabelle: he would organize a meeting with the Mother Abbess of the Order and would appeal to her generosity, so Isabelle's changes in this one convent would be permitted under certain conditions.

In truth, the cardinal appeal to the generosity of the Mother Abbess of the Order was a stern ultimatum in the name of the Pope. But the language of the Church had to be, of course, slightly more flowery.

In the meantime, and in exchange for his tactful promise, the young Mother Isabelle was to return to her monastery and wait there... leaving finally alone the exhausted Cardinal of Parma.

So Isabelle went back home triumphantly. Her "*Imitation of Marie and Magdalena*" became the rulebook of the Abbey. She also got some more noblemen to sponsor the construction of two new wings to the convent.

However, after her momentous and blistering entrance in the religious world, her multiple attempts for other "coups," such as opening new monasteries, becoming a *magister* (a teacher, a traveling master), spreading the religious hymns she had composed, etc., did not meet the same success.

After two decades at the helm of her monastery, Isabelle, who had groomed a nun to succeed her, disappeared.

Isabelle's personality and her memorable visit to Avignon made her rather notorious among the clergy, and many years after this visit, Martin de Lleda was told of her story.

He wished he could have met her. His stop at St Claire Du Bon Secours was as much to inquire about her mysterious disappearance as to meet Isabelle's successor, the Mother Abbess Hauquina Marie, also notorious, but for other reasons.

How did the colorful, boisterous, domineering Isabelle ever chose Hauquina as her spiritual daughter?

Hauquina was among the young nuns being educated when Isabelle, 16 years her elder, invaded St Claire Du Bon Secours.

Hauquina's background is clearer than Isabelle's, to a certain extent. She was one of the many daughters of a merchant and she entered the abbey at a very young age. She was discreet, apparently unassuming.

The archives do not explain anything about the relationship between the two women. As long as I am writing a work of

fiction, I could have made up some titillating, guilty ties between the two nuns. It would have entertained me and perhaps increased my readership.

An unfortunate lingering academic probity prevented me to stoop to this interesting level. Let's make our next novel a trashy one, shall we?

As unnoticeable as she may have been, compared to her illustrious predecessor, Hauquina Marie was nonetheless incredibly efficient.

In a very short time, the monastery veered back toward the classical rules of St Claire., but with a twist. Hauquina wanted that the Sisters had more of a social presence. So, she reduced the time for penitence and contemplation and increased the chores for helping the poor and the sick in the nearby communities.

While Isabelle was the "superstar" of the convent, Hauquina knew how to delegate. For instance, she created different "councils," a truly unique structure for this Order. Each council had "a small army" of Sisters working on multiple specific projects, such as caring for the sick, burying the dead, finding more room for the convent hospital, finding food and shelter for the surviving inhabitants of a nearby village ravaged by the passage of a rogue army, repairing the bell tower, etc.



Rather than establishing new formal rules grounded in a complex theory, and trying to expand the monastery spiritual influence, Hauquina wrote a medical treaty "*Raphael's legions*" and trained at length her nuns to care for the sick.

By today's standards, *Raphael's legions* is a strange and surrealistic compilation of far-fetched theories and unbelievable remedies. Its title refers to the belief in the healing powers of the angel Raphael. His *legions* are the myriad of plants and recipes duly noted in the book.

Even a stench new age guru, eager to return to the wisdom of old wives' remedies, may waver before applying these directions to fight certain disease.

Here is a mild example, against back pains:

"If the soreness is like a needle in the back, and prevents someone to get up or to move, the Sister of God may relieve the pain using a patch of cloth soaked in hot water, rosemary, yarrow, and ground chicken bones. If the pain remains as intense after two days, one may add some bone marrow to the patch."

We are not sure about the quantities used, but we do know of reports of frequent healings. Was it because of the hidden virtues of bones and bone marrow, or was it a mere placebo effect amplified by the image of virtuous women, praying at

one's bedside, following a mysterious book, and giving complex, specific medicines?

Whatever the cause, the abbey of St Claire Du Bon Secours had a great reputation among the commoners of the region and beyond.

A wing of the compound was devoted to shelter the travelers, according to the rules of the abbey.

That is where Martin de Lleda was invited to stay when he arrived. The place was a sort of cramped "hospital" where poor people would flock to be cured from a variety of ailments

Martin did not stay very long among the crowd of crippled, wounded, disease-stricken... He quickly got a separate cell and Mother Hauquina accepted that he gave to her nuns a series of lectures on the Fathers of the Church.

A young novice recorded all these lectures. As brilliantly as ever, an inspired Brother Martin started with the biography of the venerable Fathers, such as Saint Augustine, Clement of Rome, Tertullian, etc. to lead subtly his listeners towards some intellectual and spiritual speculations they had never heard before.

Apparently, Mother Hauquina listened to a few of his theories with some concerns for her nuns and novices classical and simple religious values, but she never intervened directly.

Brother Martin managed to see Mother Hauquina often. Please, silence these loathsome fantasies of yours. The two were never alone and we have very specific records of their encounters thanks to the same young novice/secretary.

For instance, after the first couple of weeks of his lengthy stay at St Claire Du Bon Secours, Martin remarked quite boldly to his hostess:

"It just so happened that once, I came across a trial against a witch. She was using very much some of the same recipes you are using."

Martin tried to decipher Hauquina's reaction. She may have blushed. It was difficult for Martin to be certain, since he could not stare too directly at her.

It was impossible to estimate Hauquina's age. Martin could see her face with large cheekbones, a skin that has not been protected by the shade of the convent, but rather battered by the weather and some old burn, and deep dark, intense eyes. Her gaze actually fascinated Martin.

With a soft voice, Mother Hauquina answered him with a question:

"Why was this witch using this remedy?"

Martin found an inquisitorial tone when he replied curtly:

"What is the difference? What matters was not whether she was making a love potion, a

remedy or a curse. What matters is that she used a power that is not coming from God."

As soon as he had uttered that generic, orthodox statement against the witches, Martin de Lleda knew he had gone too far.

As usual, he just wanted to give an argument to "stir the pot", or the caldron, if you prefer. His answer sounded too much like the real official condemnation of witchcraft.

It was true that Martin de Lleda was well versed in the official position of the Church toward witchcraft. Contrary to common beliefs, the papal inquisition of that specific time period was much more concerned about "intellectual" heretics that could lead to popular anticlerical movements, than about witches who were essentially individuals, usually older women more or less peculiar or crazy, and certainly not dangerous for the papal authority.

Witch hunting was a popular sport in the 1320's, a sport for the masses. Some officials took part in the hunt at times, in secular tribunals, and for various reasons.

I studied closely the case of a nobleman who periodically went witch hunting. He was actually aiming each time at boosting his sagging popularity.

A witch trial was, so to speak, a "public relation" scheme that proved the nobleman valiance and probity, while finding a cheap and easy scapegoat to divert the tensions stemming from

real social problems.

Hauquina answered calmly Martin de Lleda's attack. She used yet another question:

"Have you ever met a witch, Brother Martin?"

- Well, yes.

- Did you have the opportunity to talk to her?

Martin had attended a couple of witch trials, but he had never spoken privately to one of the women.

So, Mother Hauquina organized an excursion for Brother Martin.

She brought along a few novices.

It is time to come clear about one of them. You may have noticed in one of our most recent paragraphs the sentence

*"A young novice recorded all of Martin's lectures."*

A fine example of classical literature, to be sure!

You may have wondered what the function of this sentence was, or if the author was going to eventually elaborate on it.

Then again, if you chose to be so meticulous and ask this kind of questions, you would be still crawling, seriously and inextricably aggravated, around the first chapter of this book.

The young novice found the lectures so marvelous that she consigned them in writing the best she could.

These pages are accessible to the contemporary researcher in the Dijon (France) Library. They are actually much more than just the summary of Martin's lecture at St Claire Du Bon Secours. The novice developed a fascination for this erudite stranger and she sought Brother Martin's answers to her many questions about religion.

You can imagine how important these documents are for us.

Also, this novice was not anonymous. Curiously, I hesitated to write her name. I even thought of changing it, in order to be spared of the accusation of trying to impersonate the worst kind of novelist wannabe, the type who likes to pull some incredibly thick tricks for easy effects.

Well, the novice's name was Heloise. I know, a young woman from the Middle-Ages, admiring an older scholar to the point of writing, not letters in this case, but a treaty about him, sounds like déjà-vu, or a total lack of imagination from my part. That is why I was cowardly tempted to change her name to Adelaide, her middle name, why not even Berthe, in a desperate attempt to dodge any criticism against my inventiveness or lack thereof.

Then again, Heloise Adelaide Vitens, said Heloise de St Aurillac, did exist and it is likely that what is left of my reputation as a scholar would have taken another blow if I had changed her name in this text. Also, I finally sobered up and came to wonder why I would be so scared that my creativity would

be under assault. As if it was avoidable!

What do we know about this young lady? The 1434 fire that we have already mentioned did erase all the records of the residents of the abbey.

All we know for certain is that Heloise met Martin de Lleda when she was 16 years old.

Martin stayed twice at St Claire Du Bon Secours. The first time was a long visit of about five weeks. The second one happened after Martin's return journey to Toulouse. He came back almost one year after his first stay, visited Mother Hauquina for a couple of days, and left.

That time, Heloise did not ask a single question to her spiritual and intellectual idol, or rather she did not record anything of the sort.

Less than one month after Martin de Lleda's second visit, we lose her trace, her voice, at St Claire Du Bon Secours.

I see where you are going with this type of succinct information. Next time, must I promise, or threaten, I shall cater to my readers' most lascivious side and write some juicy secret affairs at the abbey.

How exciting to think that you entered this first novel with some apprehension and perhaps some repugnance, knowing that it would be some type of classical mishmash, certainly not daringly avant-garde... But now, you are rewarded with a new

universe of spin-offs popping up before your very eyes, a wide array of books and films, maybe theatre plays, musicals, without forgetting TV series ready for syndication, and action figures: "The Samurai Monk adventures", "The secret life of nuns"; "The Decamaroon: the journey of Martin Casanova de Lleda"; just to name a few.

On their way to the *village of the witches*, the nuns stopped several times to provide assistance to the sick.

Martin was extremely impressed by the devotion and the efficiency of these pious women. In his experience, from the universities to the papal court, and all the churches Martin had visited, nobody was at the level of these "frail women," in terms of total dedication for helping people.

Of course, he had met many eminent religious thinkers who wrote and spoke beautifully on the topic of emulating Jesus and assisting the needy. But these Sisters were truly and very discreetly immersed in action.

The word "discreetly" is important because we all know that when a person does any type of good deed, that person has a strong tendency to spread the news, and vociferously if possible.

We remember Bérot's "hidden prophets." Hauquina was undoubtedly one of them, in Martin's mind. She had actually impressed him maybe more than anybody he had ever met. He evoked



in his own "*Sentences to Apostles, Saints and Prophets*," St Francis's example, and cited the episode when Francis decided to change his ways and do whatever he was frightened of undertaking. He had an understandable repulsion for the sight of lepers, so, he decided to kiss a leper on the lips.

Through Martin de Lleda's own writing, the reader can see how terrifying this image was for him. Later, Martin confessed he could not attend the gravely wounded. The sight of the sores, the pus, the blood "*drained his intelligent energy.*"

Somehow, I can very well imagine Father Garné, some of the novices in Le Tertre de Carces and even, more tactfully, Bérot, being tickled to death at the idea of a dignified religious man and a recognized intellectual, fainting before an injured child, while an anonymous nun has to take care of the child and of the fallen cardinal, laying unconsciously next to him.

At St Claire Du Bon Secours, Martin witnessed the Sisters patiently and carefully cleaning all the most obnoxious purulence without batting an eye.

Keep in mind, dear contemporary reader, so hard to impress, that rubber gloves, among other amenities, were yet to be invented.

Also, in times of need, the nuns would reduce drastically their own pittance to feed the more unfortunates.

Martin told facetiously one day to Heloise:

"The Fallen Angel pointed at the Earth and

all of Men's sins and said:

"Why do they have a Church?

They are so low; they are not  
worthy adversaries for me.

How can they fight me? Men enter  
their churches, but I am in their  
hearts already.

The parish priest, the bishop  
and the pope: I enter their  
thoughts as I please."

But the Fallen Angel was answered:

"The Church exists because it  
has begotten the humble nuns  
who truly spread the word of  
God, which is of complete  
devotion and imitation of  
Christ."

The little group eventually arrived in a village, Les Bramades,  
besieged by many afflictions. That was the place we called so  
imaginatively, the *village of the witches*.

As usual, Mother Hauquina and her "*courageous little army*"  
attended some of the terrorized, sick inhabitants.

When the people demanded an urgent mass of purification,  
she declined to serve it, because she was too busy helping the

poor, ill victims. However, she referred the population to the less useful Martin, the eloquent preacher, and everybody was happy.

Before the solemn mass of *vespers* and his special blessing, Martin inquired about the nature of the evil curse overwhelming the area.

For a few months, people, cattle and crops were dying at an uncommonly fast pace; cows, goats and sheep were having less milk, hens less eggs, everybody more skin rashes, heartaches and quarrels

The cause of all this general misfortune was, in the eyes of everyone, two women living in a hamlet north of Les Bramades.

Brother Martin listened to all the evil characteristics of the witches. The litany against them seemed inexhaustible. First, one was a known widow gone mad, the other one was a stranger, with a strong accent. Both were "barren" (they did not have children). They were ugly and possessed marks of the devil on their face and body. Finally, there were countless eyewitness testimonies of their evil pronouncements and deeds.

The villagers brought before Brother Martin a young boy who swore to have seen the witches in a stormy night flying on top of a "*cloud shaped like a goat.*" Martin asked a couple of questions to the boy, and the answers revealed a young mind very disturbed. Martin looked around. Nobody in the populace

assembled in front of the church seemed to notice how preposterous the boy's responses were.

Martin recognized the madness of fanatics and did not insist. Crowds are very dangerous entities and Martin knew it was not the moment to object or intervene.

After the special mass, even though it was quite late, our heroes decided to pay a discreet visit to the witches.

On the way, Mother Hauquina talked to her companions in general terms of two women who had to join forces and find some solace in each other's company and support:

"Life is hard in this region for a woman without a family."

Martin asked her if she was specifically talking about the two "witches" they were going to see, and if she knew them personally, somehow.

Hauquina answered with a simple "yes" that could have applied to one question or both.

The visit was somewhat anticlimactic. Mother Hauquina had described the plain and harsh reality of these two women fighting sickness, solitude and poverty.

Martin had heard, back in the village, some severe accusation of ghastly embraces between the witches and the devil.

Witches were traditionally associated with lascivious, immoral sexual practices. No matter how decrepit an old "witch" may have appeared to the naked eye, in the boundless imagination of the sexually repressed populace judging her, she was always having passionate intercourse with a powerful and virile devil, in sulfuric positions they fantasized with a titillated horror.

In that case, a scandalous threesome with two lesbians satisfying each other, plus the demon, hardly fitted the reality of these two sick and helpless women, unless one had a very frustrated mind, assessed Martin de Lleda who, as we saw earlier, had a hands on experience about the topic of the flesh.

Mother Hauquina asked the two women a few questions, for Martin's information.

It appeared that the women used potions, recipes, remedies to cure themselves and other people.

The sick lady reminisced with sadness that when her husband was alive, she was somewhat of a good doctor and people from other villages, when passing by, would often consult her. After her husband died in gruesome, "unnatural" circumstances, a rumor spread - she had her suspicion about its origin - and her reputation changed rapidly. She acknowledged also that, ravaged by sorrow, she was not the same by then. Her transformation may have surprised many. She explained that her husband was a good man who did love her for who she was. His brutal death made her

world collapse and she may have responded with some bitterness and aggressiveness that was wrongly interpreted by her neighbors. She heard one of them, a former friend and "patient" testifying that she was always mumbling some evil prayers in a strange tongue.

When Mother Hauquina had entered the little cabin of the *witches*, she displayed her usual courtesy and respect. However, Martin did notice that she bowed quickly before the older lady, "the stranger with an accent."

It was obvious that this woman was afflicted with a form of dementia. But Hauquina's discreet reverence towards her made Martin observe the "witch" more carefully. Her eyesight was almost gone but she had still a profound and intense gaze. Her accent that appeared reprehensible to the populace, was not that pronounced. However, she spoke in a mixture of northern, ("Parisian") French, Provençal, German and Latin.

Suddenly, Martin thought he had recognized in her nonsensical logorrhea entire sentences of Hildegard von Bingen.

He called: "Mother Isabelle?"

The old woman turned her peculiar gaze towards him. Her eyes became brighter and soon, silent tears rolled down her cheeks.

Mother Hauquina asked softly the two women to come with them to

the abbey of St Claire Du Bon Secours. She explained they could help around.

Martin de Lleda approved this proposition that could keep the two poor souls out of harm's way. But to his surprise, they elected to stay.

Isabelle just said "no," and talked a lot afterwards, but without uttering any reason anybody could understand. Her friend claimed to be too tired to travel anywhere. Besides, she wanted to keep the proximity of her late husband (sic).

The ex-cardinal tried to plead with them. He argued that nothing good could happen to them if they stayed. But the remarkable debater could not convince these two older women.

Mother Hauquina concluded philosophically:

"We can not force them. We do not know what appears important to them, do we? The will of God escapes the mind of men."

The little group did not go back to their abbey directly. In the wee hours, the next day, the novices returned to Les Bramades, giving notice to the inhabitants that a special blessing would be given that very evening. Of course, it concerned the misfortunes that had plagued the region for some months.

That night, the church was filled like for a Christmas Mass. Martin served once again the Vespers mass. He knew that his eloquence would not be sufficient to save the two older

women accused of witchcraft. Maybe if he had his purple robe and all the accessories for the best ceremonial pomp, he could have subjugated these difficult parishioners. But, as a simple priest, he had to take a figurative backseat to Mother Hauquina who had a burgeoning reputation of sainthood among the people.

So, instead of attempting to shock or puzzle his audience with one of his patented sermons, Martin chose to develop the theme of the quasi divine qualities of Mother Hauquina. He gave a glowing summary of what the good nuns at St Claire Du Bon Secours were doing for the community. He described eloquently some astonishing healings he had witnessed. Then, Martin enumerated the names of the local families the nuns had visited. He slipped quickly, as a detail of little importance, the shack located in the hamlet North of Les Bramades .

As expected, the news was not received quietly by the parishioners who pressed him with bitter questions.

Martin asked hastily Mother Hauquina to come to the pulpit.

The nun got up.

The hostile murmurs stopped temporarily.

However, Hauquina did not join Martin at the pulpit. She started to speak from where she was standing, in an even softer voice than usual.

Many cried:

"Louder, louder! Speak louder, Mother."

She smiled but did not comply.



Then, Mother Hauquina proceeded to ask at length some questions. Why the trials of existence? Why do the innocent and the virtuous have to endure suffering, etc.

She did not wait for any answer. The "frail woman" (sic) did not know the divine reasons behind misery, but she was convinced that the way to respond to all these tribulations was love:

"Love is a very difficult concept, don't you think?

We do love our family, but how do we love a stranger that we do not understand, a neighbor who wronged us?

These questions must be answered, or else we are in danger of eternal damnation, for Jesus, who was sent to us by His Father had only one message: Love.

In our experience as humble daughters of the Church, love is too elevated a concept for our petty souls.

For love, our Lord accepted humiliation and agony. For love, He endured the ultimate sacrifice.

How could we ever love as He did? We looked and searched, and shed many tears as we were confronted to our absolute helplessness.

However, eventually, we understood one idea;  
only one!

For the little servants of the Lord, the  
only way to follow Him in the path He has  
blazed for mankind, was to be the servants  
of all. We could indeed help others. We  
could help each other.

Therefore, we say that helping is the way to  
love.

Did our Lord Christ accept to come as a man  
to help other men? Then, we must do our best  
to help other people."

After hearing the soft, slightly quivering voice of this saintly  
woman pronouncing this impassioned sermon, the audience felt a  
great current of generosity and altruism circulating through the  
church.

However, someone asked about the two witches. The inspired  
parishioners may have accepted to give alms if they could, and  
help each other in the future. But generosity among men, after  
all, did not include witches!

Martin de Lleda could see that the remarkable nun could  
not reach her goal. The villagers were not going to leave the  
two poor women alone.

So, he intervened.

First, Martin worked on the transition from what Mother Hauquina had just said about love. His plan was to turn the sermon into an ominous threat. As a former cardinal, he knew well the inquisitorial phrasing.

"Mother Hauquina refers to the message of Christ, my fellow Christians. The Apostle Matthew told us that Jesus was asked:

"Master, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"

Jesus replied:

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

Martin's listeners, of course, could not read the Bible. But he gave all the references of his quotations and even pronounced some of them in Latin and in Greek, stressing them in an ominous tone of voice.

Finally, he addressed his audience harshly:

"Will anyone in this church rise against  
Christ?"

After a few seconds of silence, he continued:

"Christ was pronouncing the commandment from  
Leviticus. Let me remind you what the  
prophet said:

"Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear  
any grudge against the children of  
thy people, but thou shalt love  
thy neighbour as thyself:"

And this commandment is followed by that  
other one in Leviticus:

"But the stranger that dwelleth  
with you shall be unto you as one  
born among you, and thou shalt  
love him as thyself"

"Will anyone in this church rise against the  
Bible, the Word of God?"

After a few seconds of silence, he continued:

"You are tormenting your neighbor. You are  
tormenting the stranger amongst you!"

A murmur of horror went through the church. Men and women  
could not comprehend they would be criticized by this monk.

"And you think that God is not seeing what  
you are doing to His daughters?"

That was too much! Cries of protestation started to fill the church: this man was defending witches and calling them "daughters of God?"

Martin de Lleda turned his body noticeably and softened his voice. He addressed Hauquina:

"Mother Hauquina, is the older woman this village is persecuting the Mother Abbess who reformed the Abbey of St Claire Du Bon Secours?"

Hauquina answered affirmatively. Martin felt the understandable wavering of the parishioners:

"What did she say? Did she say that the witch was a mother abbess? Did we hear right?"

Martin, with a booming voice and an accusatory, dramatic finger pointing at the villagers, pounced:

"You want to murder the Mother of the saint sisters who have tried to help you, like they help the poorest creatures of God in this region? You want to kill God's servant, Isabelle De Fresne, who went to defend her abbey before the Pope, and whose religious zeal was acknowledged by one of his eminent bishop, the Cardinal of Parma?"

After a moment of silence and before the most stubborn of

the villagers could recover, he elevated his voice to his most thunderous degree to recite a few passages in Latin from a *Directorium Inquisitorum* used in Avignon. He translated - and interpreted for an audience that started to feel gravely ill at ease:

"These are the trials a person accused of sorcery has to pass in order to prove he or she is not from the devil.

They must go, in this specific order, through the trials of water, blood and fire.

But if they are proven innocent, these very trials must be performed on the accusers.

Let me repeat that: if a person is found innocent of sorcery, it is just to deduct that his or her accusers must have obeyed an evil voice. Therefore, they too must go through these very trials by water, blood and fire."

Martin glared for a moment at some of the most vehement accusers of the two women.

"You must have heard of the famous test of floatation or the search for the mark of the devil on the bodies of the presumed witches. But nowadays, the methods of our Saint Inquisition are even more sophisticated. One

of them consists in holding an incandescent blade against the left eye of the accused, while pronouncing secret names of angels and demons in a certain order, like Azazel, Raphael, etc.

We wait for one brusque move, and the head turns irresistibly toward the fine edge of the blade. Experience shows that witches prefer to lose one eye rather than listening to the sacred names."

After a long silence, he changed again his tone of voice, softening it, but making it more threatening, somehow:

"Do you know who I am? I am sent by the Cardinal of Murcia. I have the power to summon the Inquisition to set a trial for the two presumed witches.

This is why Mother Hauquina invited me to come here.

If you decide to proceed, I will report that you are accusing two women to have spread all types of plagues and diseases in the region. One of these women is Isabelle De Fresne, the Mother Abbess who reformed the Abbey of St Claire Du Bon Secours. The other one is her friend and her helper, now that

age and sickness have ravaged Mother  
Isabelle's body, like they will, to  
everybody's, and to yours too, in due time.

These are the women you are accusing, then?"

Another pause, and then, the *coup de grace*:

"I need the names of the people who have  
witnessed their witchcraft and who can stand  
before the envoy of the Saint Inquisition.  
If the two women are to be found innocent,  
they will need to accept to go through the  
trials endured by the wrongly accused, as  
these trials are set in writing in the  
*Directorium Inquisitorum*.

I will be taking their names."

The parishioners looked at each other with great  
uncertainty. How did Martin contain his satisfaction when he saw  
the people around the deranged boy who was the main "witness"  
against the two women, being ushered quickly out of the church?

He concluded in a softer voice:

"Of course, you, good people, can not  
undertake a precipitous trial by yourselves.  
For your own good, you will let the Saint  
Inquisition take care of the matter. For, if  
you were to harm unjustly one of the most  
eminent daughters of Christ, you may have to



incur eternal damnation at the end of your  
life, and a judgment and punishments by the  
Saint Inquisition, before it."

He repeated with a fatherly smile that time:

"I will be waiting to take your names at the  
church door."

Would you believe that nobody came to him?

XXIII First epilogue

If Heloise Adelaide Vitens, aka Heloise de St Aurillac, had not been already smitten by Martin de Lleda's particular charm, this excursion to Les Bramades would have won her over completely.

In her spiritual journal, Heloise depicted this episode in great details. She fell short of concluding with a moan: "My hero!"

As an apprentice novelist, I would have gladly described Martin riding a black horse, why not a stallion, into the sunset, that very night, yelling: "So long! Other adventures are awaiting me!" while Hauquina, Heloise and all the other nuns, wringing their hands, sighed, remembering that under the religious cloaks of the Little Servants of Christ, womanly hearts were still palpitating.

But in her journal, Heloise simply reported that Brother Martin stayed eleven more days in the abbey. Her style was as

enthusiastic as always, but she only gave the particulars on some more doctoral lectures pronounced by Brother Martin on Tertullian and Augustine of Hippo.

Heloise stopped her spiritual diary in April of 1330, just after Martin de Lleda left.

It is understandable to think that, after his long stay at Le Tertre de Carces, Martin de Lleda had, in a way, to clear up his mind.

He may have had the urge to take the road and see more places and people after being cooped up for a few years in this monastery. He also wanted to return to the place where he had encountered great minds and original thinkers, in his formative years, the University of Toulouse.

On his way, as we saw, he stopped at the abbey of St Claire Du Bon Secours, by curiosity, since he knew the story of Mother Isabelle.

There, he became fascinated by Hauquina and by what she represented: a religion of pure action, of total devotion not through prayer, study, contemplation, but through serving people in distress.

Hauquina was, in Martin's mind, the female equivalent to Saint Francis, not in what they both intended to do (follow Christ's example) but in their unique, total commitment to it.

He marveled at the fact that Mother Hauquina did not have

one ounce of opportunism in her veins.

The ex-cardinal had encountered many remarkable men who identified with a noble cause and became opportunistic for that particular worthy cause. This identification of a person and a cause always seemed murky to Martin.

But Hauquina was obsessed, not by the abbey of St Claire Du Bon Secours and its nuns, like her noble predecessor, but by the endless problem of adequately relieving the sufferings of her brothers and sisters. The abbey was barely a mean to achieve that pressing, burning goal.

Hauquina had repeated one thousand times to Martin, who was so eager to absorb her secret, or rather the secret of her inner strength:

"The love of God is the love of men.

The love of men is helping them."

However, the same way that Bérot's *grace* was understandable to Martin but not quite attainable, Hauquina's immersion in pure action, as fascinating as it may have been, was too difficult to achieve for our ex-cardinal.

So, Martin de Lleda went back to Toulouse, to his dear cloisters of The Jacobins. But he could not find his old professors, except for a couple of eminent Dominicans who were too conservative in their approaches to help him.

Martin remained a few weeks in the region, attending

various seminars. Because of his flight from the papal palace, he tried to remain inconspicuous.

One can find a mention of a certain Martin de Murcia in a letter dated November 1330, by the scholar Pons d'Auvergues who was then teaching in Toulouse. Pons referred to him as

*"an old friend who brought back a few wild tales from perilous borders"* (sic).

Pons ended that same letter with this seemingly incongruous conclusion:

*"One can not stare with impunity at the sun, as we pray for our distinguished brother to be less foolhardy."*

We lose Martin's trace before his reappearance at the abbey of St Claire Du Bon Secours for a couple of days, in May, 1331.

It is possible that he came from Toulouse via a little detour through Spain, but we must admit that it is anybody's guess, as much as the answer to this more important problem: what happened to him after this short visit to Mother Hauquina?

And, by the way, what happened to Heloise whose literary voice becomes suddenly silent?

It may be time to remind our estimated readers that for the great majority of scholars, the cardinal Martin de Lleda had officially disappeared under mysterious circumstances from

Avignon, about ten years before this second vanishing act.

It is only yours truly who has identified, or claimed to have identified, the wandering friar as the ex-cardinal from Murcia.

But at this point, after another short visit back to Le Tertre de Carces in August 1331 by Martin, we lose for good our religious hero's tracks.

As someone who has spent many years in the (spiritual) company of the Tertre de Carces monastery inhabitants, mainly in the early 14<sup>th</sup> Century, I am rather partial and maybe protective of them, like you may be towards the closer members of your family.

Have you noticed that none of the main characters I have mentioned so far have plainly died in these pages?

One may doubt they could be still alive, since the passing of some six hundred years is rather unforgiving. However these people continue to live in my books, and I believe, in a sickeningly sentimental, corny way, in me.

Now that I am a full-fledged novelist, I may have to consider a dramatic, heroic or tragic ending, like a last movement of a symphony with plenty of percussions and blasting trumpets.

Or should we choose the uplifting Hollywood type, with Martin de Lleda coming back to Avignon, dethroning John XXII, and unveiling the rules of a new church of superb dialectic,

love and understanding, while the crowd cheers hysterically?

It would be easier to pick a French ending, i.e. to stop right here. "Good bye," it is time to let the reader work a bit and fill out the blanks by themselves.

We could organize a poll, or better, a literary competition with the best ending being published. Then again, that part could be so good that the rest of the book would suffer and the publisher may end up deciding to keep only the end and get rid of the preceding nonsense.

In truth, we do owe Martin de Lleda a somewhat plausible conclusion, albeit of course an arbitrary one. He was a man of heroic stature who crossed all the different layers of the medieval society.

He was, among other things, a scholar, a financial counselor, a diplomat, a monk... He met some of the highest political and religious characters of his time. And he often attempted to help the unjustly accused and the poor...

He preached, wrote, argued; he seduced, failed and walked hundreds of miles, his head filled with a jumble of elevated, religious and trivial questions, like mine and perhaps even yours.

Martin de Lleda left one treaty he wrote in his youth, and I attributed to his penmanship a few unsigned fragments totaling less than fifty pages, especially those compiled in the "Post

*Guiart des Moulins School*" manuscripts. But he never got to put in explicit writings his boldest spiritual meanderings. From a strictly historical point of view, Martin de Lleda did not leave a tangible legacy.

I mentioned that I lived intellectually with Martin de Lleda for so long that I have the feeling to have an osmotic knowledge of him. However, even as a myopic, self-consumed author, I do realize that such a feeling of closeness to Martin is much more revealing of me than of the historical cardinal of Murcia.

If I could have met him at the end of his time, I would not have posed Martin any anecdotal questions, such as:

"What happened to you? Have you chosen a path of anonymity to live with Heloise?"

No, I would have asked about the topic that had haunted him all his life:

"Have you discovered the Truth?"

I wonder if I would have listened to his answer before asking this other question:

"Are you finally at peace?"

I would be tempted to say that Martin de Lleda's answer to both questions would have been an elusive "yes."

I do not mean to lean at any cost towards a Pollyannaish ending. I deduct his probable positive answer precisely from his silence.



We are going to suppose that Martin was not run over by a cart pulled by buffaloes, nor killed ignominiously by a deranged and fearful inhabitant of Les Bramades who had stalked him for many months. These twists could have been thrilling in a sick way, but they would be very uninteresting for a book dealing with spiritual issues.

What we would prefer for our literary Martin de Lleda, would be a silence deliberately chosen by him, not imposed by unsettling circumstances.

When someone is happy, serene, this person tends to enjoy his, her state and not fuss much about the why and the how.

When Siddhartha was a young prince, protected by the heavenly family palace, he had no intention of becoming the Buddha. It is only when he was exposed to the human reality of suffering that he started his quest.

Can we say that contentment contains a glowing inertia?

On the contrary, writing usually comes from a certain unbalance. In a poem, I would have had the bad taste to make "writing" rime with "whining." A contented soul does not take a pencil to describe that satisfaction.

The classical advice summarizes it well:

"In days of happiness, rejoice. In days of  
turmoil, reflect."

After all, writing is reflecting. Even your average "How

to" book teaches something the reader is lacking!

What is the link between this string of clichés and our topic?

We would like to assert that silence could mean peace. Therefore, Martin de Lleda's silence may have meant that he had reached what he was looking for.

I found it very convenient and oddly reassuring to have very little or no information on the last days of all the main protagonists who lived at Le Tertre de Carces.

At the end of a fairy tale, the reader can expect some sort of *"They lived happily ever after."*

By the way, the French fairy tales conclude with an odder *"Ils se marièrent et eurent beaucoup d'enfants,"* (They got married and had many children), a moral ending that could be nowadays synonymous of total failure and cataclysmic nightmare, for some hardcore bachelors, at least.

Fortunately, fairy tale readers are usually young and they go to sleep satisfied, omitting to ask:

*"And then, what happened?"*

We are subsequently spared to answer:

"Then, my child, they fought on and off,  
they fell sick and they died.

It is going to happen, by the way, to all of  
us, even to me.

Oh my, the solitude, you will feel!"

Isn't this roughly the reason why biographers very seldom observe a chronological line? They spread the apogee of their hero's accomplishments a little everywhere in their work.

A linear approach would always be a history of decay, not excessively interesting and usually a bit depressing.

If I have uttered these banal and somewhat disenchanting reflections, it is because, as a less than objective historian as far as Le Tertre de Carces is concerned, I am way too affected when I get to the end of my characters' lives. I do hate to bid them farewell.

That could be why I could never trim down my gargantuan "*The Library of Tertre de Carces in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century.*"

In a way, it pleases me to lose Martin de Lleda's trace at some point. Brasquet de Laons stopped writing, thus he and Bérot lost their voices. The same goes for Jan Amoulet. The Gratien brothers left Le Tertre de Carces. It would make sense to believe they hit the road after Father Garné's death. However, I did not find the official record of the gentle Father Abbot's passing away.

If you find it, save yourself the postage. I do not absolutely need to see it with my own eyes.

But after the Gratien brothers' departure, what was

important to me was that the famous, original, superbly informative monastery's Books of Hours became ordinary and flat, even though their illuminations were esthetically more sophisticated than ever.

It would be utterly childish to claim that, since I have no literal evidence of my heroes' deaths, my imagination could still, in a way, keep them alive. Me, childish? Ha!

I am just taking advantage of this other perk of writing one's own novel: ignoring deliberately some facts, while stressing others. And to me, the lives, rather than the deaths, of these inhabitants of an era known as a "dark age," are a tremendous source of inspiration.

You and I are living in what appears to be a spiritually challenged century. Materialism, cult of the ego and general intolerance seem to have a stronghold of our everyday culture.

However, we cannot decently claim that our age is more somber than Bérot's. If at the time of the Inquisition, feudalism, immense poverty, injustices, small but fatal pandemics (just before the devastating Black Death), Martin de Lleda and company could devote their lives to open their minds, their hearts, their souls... it should be very much easier for us to do the same, or at least, to try.

XXIII Second epilogue

A long time ago, a historian gone wild, bitten by the infamous fiction bug, followed one of the characters he was studying, to a monastery, where some fellow, who happened to have been accused of heresy, claimed to have found the *ultimate truth*, the *divine grace*.

At the end of that foolish author's book, did the truth seeker, his biographer, and most importantly their readers, find conclusively the secret of the heretic monk?

Let me ask you a question that has little to do with the previous one: if these pages were not labeled "fiction," would you have started reading a book discussing the concept of grace for a "defrocked cardinal" and an obscure, sacrilegious monk, both living in the 14<sup>th</sup> century?

Will reaching some type of epilogue protect the patient reader

from another untimely zigzag?

It is doubtful.

In his superb book on medieval Jewish mysticism "*The Chassidei from Speyer*," Dr. S.A. Roscher describes a certain Levi from Speyer, a spiritual ancestor of Rabbi Meshulam Zusha (or Zousia) of Anipoli (18<sup>th</sup> Century Poland).

Zusha was a Hassidic rabbi, famous for his simplicity and his modesty. For instance, as he was laying on his deathbed, Rabbi Zusha was crying inconsolably, which was very strange for a man so evenly tempered and so spiritually honest and courageous.

His disciples did not know what to say. They felt rather unsettled to see their virtuous master so anxious. Wasn't he almost like Moses or Abraham, like the greatest prophets?

Zusha answered:

"When I will get to the Heavenly Tribunal, I will not be asked why I was not Moses, Abraham, or any other prophet. I will be asked:

'Why weren't you Zusha? Why didn't you fulfill your mission on this Earth?'"

The 12<sup>th</sup> Century Levi from Speyer led a life very similar to the beloved Meshulam Zusha of Anipoli. He was one of the most

erudite men of his time.

He was "*revealed many ancient secrets and exposed to numerous new ideas.*" But all his life, Rabbi Levi from Speyer remained the most humble, the poorest man of the region. His teaching could only spread because a few disciples came to ask specific questions. But he never thought he was worthy of opening his own school.

Like Zusha, he never wrote anything. But, thanks to Dr. S.A. Roscher's research, we now have a compilation of several of his disciples' testimonies about Levi's theories. Here is an excerpt of one of the reported tales about this not very famous spiritual character:

(Rabbi Levi from Speyer said) Many mothers  
can brag

"My son accumulated wealth and he  
is a good son, for he bought me  
this and that..."

Or

"My daughter married rich and she  
is a good daughter for she did not  
forget to get me this or that..."

My own mother, the poor good lady, tries to  
say nice things about me:

"He is a polite man and tries very  
hard to sin the least he can."

One can show his fortune, his house, his properties; one can count his clients, his friends, his servants; one can be proud of his titles, his position...

As for me, trying not to sin does make me a decent neighbor, for I am so busy trying to reform my faults that I have little time to envy, to lust, to plot, to covet, to keep grudges, to resent, to spite...

That is why my mother can only boast that I seem less malicious than others.

As of my personal ordeal to alter my petty ways, nobody knows about it, but the Lord."

Dr. Roscher reported that Rabbi Levi indicated several times to his disciples that there was, guess what, an *ultimate truth* to be searched! But that truth could be permanently reached only by the prophets. However, it had to be the goal and the destiny of all human beings to spend their lives searching for it.

Rabbi Levi mentioned that he could not share that secret with his own mother, who must have died thinking she had given birth to a sweet person, not too bright about things that counted (for her family and her neighbors).

He was, so to speak, a lovely loser.



Some narrator could be inspired to pose the following question:

What did Rabbi Levi from Speyer exactly  
discover about "reforming his ways?"

That narrator, perhaps a scholar, could research it beyond the wonderful compilation translated and edited by Dr. S.A. Roscher. He could write a book similar to the one you are about to finish. Quite plausibly, this narrator would be less silly than yours truly, more eloquent, and a better stylist altogether. But beyond the form of the book, chances are that his conclusion would look very familiar: Rabbi Levi from Speyer could not explicitly share his *secret* much better than Bérot from le Tertre de Carces did.

Such a secret is not confined to a certain century, to a certain culture. I have already used a more modern simile: the *ultimate secret* is truly an access to another *dimension*.

We saw that such a dimension could not be simply thought as "parallel" to our most common reality. It is rather that very trite reality filtered through a new appreciation, a limber sensitivity, a fluid comprehension, an alert consciousness..

In every century, in most civilizations, society works with a system of exclusions: "*If I am right, you are wrong*. How can we coexist?"

Even mystics can be at time belligerent. Besides, we saw that spiritual myths borrow often terms from the vocabulary of

war (sword, knight, shield, fight, etc.) A literal reading of such myths or comparisons is catastrophic, as we see in violent fundamentalism in all the Churches.

The "ultimate truth," as I comprehend it, is merely experiencing differently reality, reaching an authentic contentment that fills - and fulfills - the present... without the help of any cannabis, tequila or colorful, potent pills, etc.

Look at me giving a sermon about spirituality.

Who am I trying to fool? It must be time to stop the mad verbiage and to conclude straightforwardly: after all these pages, we still do not have the exact map to get to the "ultimate truth," or to define the concept of "grace."

But, obviously, this narrator believes it is attainable; thus, the writing of this "novel," which is another bizarre attempt to discuss what is, by nature, unspeakable.

XXIV The name game

The book that you have just heroically finished, an unbelievable feat that I appreciate very much, has been labeled a novel, thus a fiction.

How much liberty did I take with the historical medieval setting I have depicted?

Quite a bit, I must confess.

For the next few pages, pull up a chair, recline yourself comfortably, grab a pencil and relax. We shall play a rather mindless game that will allow you to assess your knowledge of the Middle Ages, while I come more or less clean with my description of the 14<sup>th</sup> Century.

The rules of the game are simple. We shall go through the names we have encountered in this book and discuss which ones belonged to History and which ones were fictional.

In an astonishing effort to be logical, we shall follow the

order they appear in the book.

Each good answer will count as one point. Write down your grand total in a piece of paper, decorate it if you must, laminate it for protection, and show it next time you have an important job interview or if you want to impress a date. You can also flash it in front of the doorman if you have forgotten your invitation in a dressy social function. These rewards may vary with time and place and will not be guaranteed by the publisher, I am guessing.

**Bérot:** Fictitious. You see, the game is very easy.

**John XXII:** Pope in **Avignon** from 1316 to 1334. He did condemn as heretic **Master Eckhart**, also mentioned and even quoted in this novel. If you knew **Master Eckhart**, chalk up two more points. If you did not, please do read his Sermons. If you get anything positive from "*The Man Who Knew The Truth*," it could be listening to this very plea.

**Le Tertre de Carces** : Fictitious. « Tertre » is a small mound, in French.

**Faith and righteousness**, the austere title of the papal bull condemning Bérot: If Bérot did not exist, would the bull exist? I guess not.

**Readings of the Bible on Truth and Grace:** Curiously, even though Bérot was a fictional character, this book, which is supposed to have been written by him, is real.

Nah! Sorry, I was just trying to amuse myself.

**Martin De Lleda:** The inquisitor turned friend of Bérot must exist in the same realm as Bérot.

**Avignon, Murcia, University of Toulouse:** If you live literally in the antipodes of Europe and if you answered "real" to these three nouns, add three charitable points to your total.

If you live in Europe and wrote "fictional" next to them, subtract 10 to 30 points.

If you knew that the University of Toulouse was established in 1229, add a handful of points.

Those who are asking "1229 BC?" lose all their points.

**Martha Gröning:** Fictional. However, if this book makes any money, we are expecting a Martha Gröning to appear from nowhere to sue us for quoting her book without her permission.

**The Duke of Senez:** Senez is a Provençal village. An English speaking teenager lost in these pages, may chuckle when reading that the village is located on the left bank of the **Asse** (river).

However, the **Duke of Senez** is fictional.

**Esperron:** Fictional

**Count of Gréoux:** Fictional. There is a Provençal city called Gréoux.

**Guilhem, Le Bessilon:** A couple of fictional names.

**Brasquet de Laons:** The companion of a fictional character.

**Father Garné:** Fictional.

**Black Death:** Unfortunately, a real plague that has erased half of the European population.

**The Gratien brothers:** Fictional

**"Elevated Middle-Ages":** This remarkable exhibit is fictional.

**Jean Pucelle:** An actual 14<sup>th</sup> Century illuminator.

**Pr. Matt Brown:** Curiously related to Martha Gröning. What are the odds?

**Webster-Floyd College:** We hope it is fictional.

**Heraclites, Novalis, Hölderlin, Rilke, Caspar David Friedrich:**

One point per name, just to pad your total. Quoting these names is also a subliminal message enticing the reader to get acquainted with them.

Same remark for **Theresa de Avila** and **San Juan de la Cruz**.

**Jan Amoulet:** Fictional.

**The Book of Mirrors:** Many books bear this title. The one we are quoting from is fictitious.

**Saint Cyril:** There are actually two **Saint Cyril**, but Bérot's story is apocryphal.

**Aquelhom:** Fictional.

**Guiart (Guyart) des Moulins:** He was the first translator of the Bible into French (1294). However, the **Post Guiart des Moulins School, 14<sup>th</sup> Century**, supposedly kept in Saint Petersburg is fictitious.

**Pierre de Vaux (Pierre Valdo):** He was actually a merchant from Lyon (12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> Century) who did give away all his wealth to

become a wandering preacher.

However, "***The Knights of Poverty***" was written solely for your enjoyment by this very book's invasive narrator.

**Vladimir Jankélévitch:** 20th Century French philosopher. Double your points if you have read this author, triple them if you intend to read him.

**Marcel Proust:** One quarter of a point for the correct positive answer?

**Abélard and Heloïse:** 12th Century historical couple, who became heroes of mythical stature.

**Hildegard von Bingen:** Amazing 12th Century eclectic mind. Nowadays, one can read her writings, listen to her compositions, look at her illuminations.

**Pierre de Lusignes:** Fictional.

**Pierre de Sponde,** and his famous "**Of the Lives of Knights without Squires:**" Fictitious.

**Marcabrun (or Marcabru):** Actual 12<sup>th</sup> Century troubadour. The "translated" poem "***Cuidas, cuidas ai compaignier***" is, you guessed it, made up for this novel, including all the glorious names it mentions (**Ebrart the Red, Eisius the Rotten, Chailloux the Fort**)

**Aire sur l'Adour:** An actual city in the southwest of France.

**Jehan de Sarians:** Fictional.

**Coutdou de Bearn:** Logically fictional, considering the previous note; same thing for **Chaix de Carpentras.**

**Bernard de Clairvaux:** The large, complex, historical figure of the 12<sup>th</sup> Century.

**The Count of Saint Didier** is very much related to **Jehan de Sarians**.

**Lo cavalièr de piscoalha:** Fictional as well as its erudite analyst, the illustrious **Paul Keller**.

**Philippe DeVeer:** Fictional.

**Charle IX:** A king of France.

The relationship between **Gilles d'Aucy** and **Jacques Amyot** is mentioned in the text. The first name is fictional and the second is an actual bishop.

**Bourges, Melun:** One point for you, if you have never been to France.

**Pietro da Morrone:** Isn't Pietro, an actual historical figure that is indeed mentioned in Dante's *Divine Comedy*, a fascinating figure?

**Jean Michel Eusèbes:** Fictional

**Lagrime di San Pietro**, by **Orlando Lassus:** Subtle advertisement for the reader to listen to this beautiful piece.

**Boniface VIII:** Historical figure.

**Silvacane:** An abbey built by **Bernard de Clairvaux**.

**The Cluny Museum:** It is actually the National Museum for the Middle Ages, in Paris. However, it is doubtful they have the fictitious "**Gargoyle of the Cathedral in the Clouds**."

**The abbot Dumont:** He did exist and was the teacher of the 19<sup>th</sup>



Century French poet **Alphonse de Lamartine**.

**Delaisne**: Fictional.

**Stalled Starship**: I wonder if there is such a rock group. With all the sexual symbolism attached to the image of the rocket, it would be a courageous name, wouldn't it?

**Tadeo**: Did you say "**real**"? I am impressed. There is a Tadeo who was the illuminator of the Pope Leo X (16<sup>th</sup> Century).

**Marie Diawara**: An interesting name. Had she existed, I wonder what her background would have been.

**Plato**: Are you serious?

**Companions Builders of the Sacred Altar**: The name is fictional. However, the **Companions**, roaming skilled workers, did exist in Europe, and some companions did follow the Templars.

**Hugues Bisault**: Fictional.

**L'Ordre du Saint Devoir de Dieu**: Please, see the note on the **Companions Builders of the Sacred Altar**.

**Geoffroy de Sercq**: Fictional

**L'Evènement littéraire**: Doesn't this title sound like a real Parisian magazine? It does not seem to be an actual publication, though.

**Gustave Passel**: Fictional.

**Marquis de Sade**: One point for the correct answer is extremely generous, perhaps even inappropriate.

**Count of Forquignoles**: Fictional

**Robert d'Anjou**: He was really the King of Naples.

**Grand Maître des hospitaliers:** An actual title.

**Hélien de Villeneuve:** He was actually the **Grand Maître des hospitaliers** of the time period we are examining.

**Louis IV of Bavaria:** Declared enemy of John XXII.

**Jobert de Gast:** Fictional.

All the characters described by the fictional **Amoulet** (**Marcos-the-Greek, Marc Lemaistre, Margarilda, Pagès d'Apt**), are unsurprisingly fictional.

**Simiane:** The name exists. However, it does not correspond to the city described in the book. Thus, it should be considered here fictional.

**Sénanque:** It is **Silvacane's** sister abbey, in Provence.

**Reese and Paton:** Fictional.

**Claude Le Jeune, John Blow, Sammartini:** You can of course listen to these musicians' works.

**Dr. Zachariah Fahey:** Fictional.

**St Claire Du Bon Secours:** The Order of St Clare exists, indeed. St Clare of Assisi was one of St Francis's followers. However, the abbey itself is fictional.

**Christine Villeparis:** Fictional.

**Isabelle De Fresne:** Fictional.

**Alexander of Hales:** A 13<sup>th</sup> Century theologian.

**The Cardinal of Parma:** Of course, he existed. But since **Isabelle De Fresne** is fictional, his meeting with the abbess is not very likely.

**Hauquina:** She is of course fictional.

**Saint Augustine, Clement of Rome, Tertullian:** Bonus points. If you came so far into the book, you are certainly entitled to one point for each one of these **Fathers of the Church**.

**Les Bramades:** Fictional. Doesn't it sound real?

"Bramer" is a verb that means "to bell" as in the specific name for the cry of the deer.

**Pons d'Auvergnes:** Chances are that there was a Pons in Toulouse, originally from the Auvergne (without a final "s"). Of course, here, it is a made-up name. Thus, everybody gets one point.

**Chassidei from Speyer:** Fictional, with a real background. The "Chassidei" existed in the Middle Ages. Its founder, Rabbi Yehuda, was born in Speyer, Germany.

**Dr. S.A. Roscher** is fictional as well as the character of his work.

However, **Meshulam Zusha (or Zousia) of Anipoli** is the wonderful self-effacing personality who did exist in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century and whose words and actions were lovingly transmitted from generations to generations by his disciples.

For quite some time, a disturbing thought, a rather upsetting suspicion keeps on pricking through this questionable questionnaire.

If the Tertre de Carces and his inhabitants are fictional, could there be a research volume entitled "**The Library of Tertre**

***de Carces in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century***”?

And how many points do you get if you guessed that this title is also fictitious?

Let’s go one step further and let’s deduct that if “*The Library of Tertre de Carces in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century*” never existed, then the historian, author of these “thousands of pages,” does not exist either.

Could the whole thing be a fraud?

Allow me first to remind you, with an involuntary but difficult to avoid lack of tact, that the cover indicates that “The Man Who Knew the Truth” is a fiction. Consequently your fearless narrator may have never been the History professor he claimed to be, even though he did it in shiftily, vague terms.

We can state here the common claim that a novel is a way to take the willing readers on a journey.

Also, if you were the author, where would you take your own readers? Toward a suspenseful murder scene; behind the headlines of a newspaper filled with everyday gore; in an island of passion and love? Maybe you would daydream with a certain depth and have the good fortune to be able to share your literary fantasies? Maybe you would write so well that you would be acknowledged as a wonderful stylist?

Now that you are suddenly sitting in the author’s chair, with a certain topic to share and your very special manner to

express it, let's open the door to one of your reader.

The same way you were slightly disappointed when you met in trivial circumstances this actor or actress you used to idolize, you look at your reader, and you cannot help thinking that he/she is not at all what you had imagined. You do not say it, because you do not want to antagonize him/her, but you envisioned him/her much more like you, although more open-minded, if possible.

Instead, your reader is this unexpected, strange person, somewhat fidgety. You wonder out loud what on Earth has attracted him/her to your book.

No matter what your reader's answer may be ("I heard from you," "I received your book as a retirement gift from a colleague who always hated me," "I was feeling blue and needed to be entertained," etc.), you sense there is more than those one-liners.

So, you insist. And you are answered something like:

"There are always things that are on my mind, of course."

"Like what?"

At that point, do not be surprised if your reader rolls his/her eyes. Just raise one eyebrow to show your interest and nod:

"Yes?"

Your reader may never tell you clearly why he/she came that day to read you, filled with a vast curiosity, or is it a certain hunger?

So, I shall spell it out for you, if you promise to refrain from smirking more or less discreetly, chuckling mockingly, or even laughing hysterically.

Your reader's curiosity can be expressed with a succinct sentence:

"Is it how men live?"

If the hero in your book is a murderer, a prince, a billionaire or a homeless, a genius or a shaman living in an exotic jungle, your reader wants to understand one thing.

You see, knowing how people live; what are their limits and limitations; what are the answers of your heroes to common or exceptional trials and tribulations, no matter how monstrous they may be... is a way to situate oneself in one's own life.

That is why your reader came to see you.

Try something else, if you are so inclined. Pronounce that your reader's real problem is that he/she is helplessly mortal.

Nothing is most disturbing than knowing the fleeting nature of a life.

You may have to brace yourself and ignore his/her sardonic:

"I never think about death."

You are not fooled. Everybody knows or will know about

loss.

However, you do not want a too violent reaction from your reader. Humor him/her, respect the appearances and play the game:

"Oh then, you came to be entertained? How timely! I have a historical novel handy. It is about a man who pretended to know the truth."

"What kind of truth?"

"You know, the usual. Why we live and die; basic philosophy and other commonplaces... But I also have swords, horses, witches and defrocked monks, if you want".

Yes, thinking about death is a philosophical cliché. But, like love or joy, it is always existentially fresh at an individual scale.

No matter what the giants of the literature ever wrote about it, the youngster down the block is Romeo or Juliet.

The child on your left and the one on your right will experience loss as if it has never happened in the universe before.

Today's most hyped up star is already on the decline, you can see it clearly. Do not blink twice! Didn't Death shrug its robust figurative shoulders?

Writers, readers, we meet in the same struggle, as we belong to the great brotherhood of conscious beings confronted to the great paradox that makes all of us existential philosophers and poets: we live, but not forever.

You can hear your neighbor squeal again and again that he/she never think about Death. The fact is that he/she is aware of the concept of loss and does not specially like it.

Thus, he/she is very aware of death.

Sometimes, we all appear like Prince Arjuna of the Bhagavad-Gita.

One day, in the middle of a great battle, the valiant prince threw down his weapons and wondered out loud why he had to continue to fight if, after struggling against an intricate and absurd jumble of family and foes, the outcome was going to be death.

If, as in the Bhagavad-Gita, we are lucky enough to have Krishna as our personal charioteer, we may comprehend the answer, the *secret truth*.

If we venture that we are Arjuna-like entities, there is nothing truly revolutionary in the previous suggestion: the secret truth could be revealed to us.

It may be bolder to suggest that there is actually a sacred charioteer on our side, revealing what we want to know or perhaps what we are not, right away, inclined to know.



It is time for the reader to assess the situation. If we clear the scarce and confusing historical facts, the meanderings of a sickly imagination, the easy jokes and the seemingly endless pseudo-cogitations, what do we have left?

A certain Bérot du Tertre de Carces claimed he knew something like the secret of the divine truth. A Martin de Lleda, Bérot's official inquisitor, went to great lengths to understand that secret. A historian, some six hundred years later, studying both characters, gets personally interested in them, and in the secret. At the end, they all drop their masks and who do we see?

As always, a writer; and with some luck, a reader!

So, logically, the reader is entitled to ask the author about his motives: did he intend to insinuate that such a secret exists? Did he pretend to lead the reader specifically to that secret? If it was not the case, why write at all?

At that moment, the reader may break in a cold sweat, realizing that the author could start another book altogether, stating that, indeed this secret could be an "altered perception of the present," but not entirely, etc.

It could happen, you know.