

**Sibilla Peyre of Arques:**

**The Motivated Construction of Experience and Self in an Inquisitorial Deposition**

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By the end of the thirteenth century Languedocian Catharism had been almost entirely eradicated, but the first decade of the fourteenth century saw what is often referred to as the “Autier revival”. Pierre and Guillaume Autier, two *perfecti* instructed in Lombardy, indeed succeeded in reaching a remarkably large audience around the county of Foix with their “underground” preaching between 1299 and 1310, when Pierre was finally sentenced and burnt – they could not have failed to attract the attention of the Inquisition, and both Geoffroy d’Ablis and Bernard Gui took an active part in hunting down these heretics and their companions. The year 1310 did not, however, see the end of inquisitorial attempts to uproot the heresy, and Jacques Fournier, bishop of Pamiers and future Benedict XII, investigated between 1318 and 1325 a number of cases of heresy, many of which can be considered as remnants of the Autier revival. The depositions recorded in the Fournier register have proved of great interest to historians since, in addition to the actions recorded in thirteenth century depositions, they contain an extraordinary wealth of detail pertaining to social beliefs and practices, and reflect the Inquisition’s new-found interest in personal beliefs and motivations.<sup>1</sup> Amongst these depositions, one finds that of Sibilla Peyre, from Arques, deposing in November 1322, accused of the “crime of heresy”, and more specifically of having tried to escape from the attention of the inquisitor of a neighbouring county. Though she had, some time before, confessed her past involvement with heresy to

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<sup>1</sup> J. Duvernoy, ed. *Le Registre d’inquisition de Jacques Fournier, eveque de Pamiers (1318-1325)*. 3 vols (Toulouse, 1965), hereafter abbreviated to RF. Transl. J.Duvernoy, 3 vols (Paris, 1977-78).

the Inquisitor of Carcassonne, she did so again to Jacques Fournier. Her deposition principally relates episodes pertaining to her and her husband's involvement with the Cathars, running from the beginning of this involvement to her husband's voluntary confession at Lyon. Some of its most striking features, its detailed recall of the Autiers' sermons and an incident involving the *consolamentum* of her baby daughter, frequently appear in points about, respectively, the Autiers' preaching, and the practise of *endura* in the period or Cathar attitudes to women.<sup>2</sup> This essay aims to consider Sibilla Peyre's deposition in its entirety, since a "fragmentary" approach cannot apprehend the place, meaning and significance of particular episodes or remarks within the text. The essay will begin by briefly outlining the approach that will be taken to the approach of the analysis of Sibilla's deposition and some considerations that have informed this approach, suggesting the relevance of this approach to this particular deposition. It will then suggest that Sibilla, with the purpose of forwarding her interests in an inquisitorial context, constructs her involvement with Catharism in a way that both seeks to make it intelligible and mitigate it, by structuring her experience through emotionally charged events, minimising her responsibility in her own involvement by various means, and by constructing herself and a subordinate, rather passive character.

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<sup>2</sup> See M.C Barber, *The Cathars: Dualist Heretics in Languedoc in the High Middle Ages*. (Harlow, 2000), pp.100-103 and pp.187-189; P. Biller, 'The Common Woman in the Western Church in the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries'. *Women in the Church*, Studies in Church History 27. Eds. W.J. Sheils and D. Wood (Oxford, 1990), pp.156-157; P. Biller, 'Cathars and Material Women'. *Medieval theology and the natural body*. Eds. P. Biller and A.J. Minnis (York, 1997), p.103; A. Brenon, 'Le Catharisme des Montagnes. A la Recherche d'un Catharisme Populaire'. *Heresis* 11 (1988), p.64; A. Brenon, *Les Femmes Cathares* (Paris, 1992), pp. 326-329; J. Arnold, 'The preaching of the Cathars'. *Medieval Monastic Preaching*. Ed. C. Muessig (Leiden, 1998), p.204; E. Griffe, *Le Languedoc Cathare et l'Inquisition (1229-1329)* (Paris, 1980), pp. 288-289 and 293-294; M.D. Lambert, *The Cathars* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 232-234 and 240-241.

Some methodological and theoretical considerations that have informed this essay will be reviewed; the approach taken to the analysis of Sibilla Peyre's deposition will be briefly outlined and the relevance of this approach to this particular deposition suggested.

Inquisitorial depositions present more than a few methodological and theoretical problems. The original series of questions and answers in Occitan cannot be recovered from the third person, past tense, Latin narrative form (including occasional explicit questions) in which these depositions are recorded, and this is an issue that must always be borne in mind, since this process of transcription must unavoidably have entailed loss or distortion of the meaning of the original speech. These depositions, however, have frequently and for various purposes been treated as neutral, unmotivated recollections of facts and events and directly "reliable" sources of information,<sup>3</sup> and the Fournier register depositions more so perhaps than any other inquisitorial records because of the myriad of personal details they contain.<sup>4</sup> In a rather different approach, Dronke has tried to "[...] retrace the lines of thought and the integrity of thought in such testimonies [...]",<sup>5</sup> seeking to recover the hypothetical "voice" hidden under the inquisitorial textual paraphernalia, with interesting results. Depositions,

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<sup>3</sup> At a very basic level, several depositions may present divergent accounts of a same event, or depositions can be shown to contain inaccuracies, potent reminders that the content of these depositions cannot be taken as unsullied "fact". Such is the case for example, of Sibilla's dating of her first dealings with the Autiers to c.1306, when it must have been several years before 1305, year when Jacques Autier and Prades Tavernier were arrested and the penitents of Arques (amongst whom was her husband) went to Lyon to confess to pope Clement V.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, E. Le Roy Ladurie's famous *Montaillou, village occitan de 1294 a 1324* (Paris, 1975).

<sup>5</sup> P. Dronke, *Women writers of the middle ages* (Cambridge, 1984), p.203.

however, cannot be regarded as spontaneous speech that simply needs to be extracted from the text. Indeed depositions are “texts”, the fruit of a very particular situation, and their content is heavily informed by the central interest of the Inquisition in certain categories of actions and words.<sup>6</sup> Arnold has suggested the addition of an extra dimension to this and construes these texts as sites of discourse where inquisitorial process and deponent actively play out relations of power, the deponent being accorded a certain degree of agency within the “discursive boundaries”<sup>7</sup> set up by the process of inquisition. This essay will make use of Arnold’s notion of “strategies”, narrative or rhetorical devices used by defendants in an inquisitorial situation, and aims to analyse the deposition of Sibilla of Arques in terms of the ways in which her deposition can be construed as an active construction, destined to forward her interests in a situation where there was much at stake.

Why then might the analysis of the verbal strategies used in this particular deposition be interesting? Some elements from both within and around the text shall be brought to bear on this question.<sup>8</sup> It has already been suggested that Sibilla had once before confessed to an inquisitor at Carcassonne, but this does not sum up her dealings with the Inquisition. Her husband had been one of the “penitents of Arques” who spontaneously confessed at Lyon in 1305, after Jacques Autier and a companion were arrested. Sibilla and her husband both later confessed at Carcassonne, before Geoffroy d’Ablis, with others from the Arques group; it is

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<sup>6</sup> The term “Inquisition” shall be used for commodity, referring here to the process rather the unified body, which only comes into existence later.

<sup>7</sup> J.Arnold, ‘Inquisition, Catharism and the Confessing Subject; The Discourse of Heresy in Languedoc c.1200-c.1330’. Unpublished D.Phil. Diss. (University of York, 1996), p.110.

<sup>8</sup> See Sibilla’s deposition (RF II, pp. 403-429), that of Guillaume Escaunier (RF, pp. 7-19) and Griffe, E. *Le Languedoc Cathare et l’Inquisition*, pp.285-294.

not entirely clear whether this time her husband was confessing voluntarily or not, but in any case he was sentenced to imprisonment in Carcassonne (where he later died). Sibilla presumably did not receive a penance, due to the spontaneous nature of her confession, since she records returning home after her confession. Accused here in 1322 of fleeing from the bishop of Alet and the inquisitor of Carcassonne, who had summoned all those of the Arques group (the ecclesiastical authorities presumably having doubts about the motives of their “mass conversion”) she tells Fournier that since these two officials had told her that she need not confess again, she had not thought necessary to inform them that she was leaving the county.<sup>9</sup> She went free after this deposition, and received no penance. In addition to showing that Sibilla would have been familiar with the Inquisition’s manner of proceeding, these facts suggest a certain “success” on Sibilla’s part (if not on her husband’s). Indeed, even though she had confessed voluntarily, several years of sustained involvement with Cathars, a year of belief in heretical errors, an imprisoned husband, repeated confessions and dealings with the Inquisition would have painted a rather damning picture for many in the religious context of those years, but Sibilla remained free, suggesting at least some grasp on her part of the way the inquisitorial process functioned. This evidence of Sibilla’s experience with the Inquisition is complemented by elements within her deposition which suggest her understanding (and distrust) of inquisitorial methods. She rather shrewdly makes reference to her previous confession and possible future *addenda* in these terms: “*And she said that if she had been interrogated as now by the said bishop, all that was confessed now would have been confessed then, and even better since her memory was greater. She wants,*

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<sup>9</sup> This account only appears in the second part of her confession, made about three weeks after the principal deposition - it is not entirely clear why this is the case.

*however, to remain in the present confession and also the said confession which she made voluntarily before the said inquisitor, as true and legitimate, inasmuch as they do not contradict or oppose each other [...]. She reserves however, if she remembers anything, to be able to confess it without danger for herself, which was granted her by the said bishop [right of which she avails herself, producing more information around three weeks later] ”<sup>10</sup> – thus showing her understanding of the Inquisition’s preoccupation with perjury and retention of information, which caused the downfall of many defendants. She also refers to the interrogation of her husband by the inquisitor of Carcassonne (a comment which she puts in the mouth of others) in the following way: “[...] and they interrogated your husband so much that they made him say silly things [...]” <sup>11</sup> – which is something that Sibilla is obviously aware she must avoid doing herself. Indeed all these facts taken together – her experience and awareness of inquisitorial methods and the “successful” outcomes of her depositions – all suggest that one might be able to make an interesting use of Arnold’s concept of deponent “strategies” in the analysis of Sibilla’s deposition. Indeed this essay aims to show that more than simply avoiding saying “silly things” Sibilla’s deposition can be construed as an endeavour to say “the right things”.*

The principal part of Sibilla Peyre’s deposition runs chronologically, but more than simply a chronological record, it contains a causal, an explanatory narrative. As already

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<sup>10</sup> RF II, p.583: “Dixit etiam quod si fuisset tunc interrogata ut nunc per dictum dominum episcopum, omnia que nunc confessa est tunc etiam confessa fuisset, et adhuc perfectius, quia tunc magis memor erat. Vult tamen, ut dixit, stari in presente confessione et dicte etiam confessioni quam fecit coram dicto domino inquisitore ut veris et legitimis, inquantam sibi non contrariantur vel etiam opponuntur [...]. Retinuit tamen quod si de aliquo recordaretur, quod illud posset reconferri sine periculo suo [...].”

<sup>11</sup> RF II, p.428: “[...] et tantum interrogaverunt maritum vestrum quod fecerunt ei dicere stulticiam [...].”

suggested, a comparison of thirteenth and early fourteenth century inquisitorial records suggests a significant development in the interests of the Inquisition during that period, and a recurrent characteristic of the depositions of defendants from the Fournier register is an attempt to explain and contextualise their actions, words or beliefs. Many elements of Sibilla's deposition, though not all of course, form part of such an endeavour. Moreover, her narrative does more than attempt to explain her involvement with Catharism; it also explains her disillusionment with it.<sup>12</sup> That Sibilla's deposition thus makes full use of the opportunity to present her involvement with heresy in a way that both makes it intelligible and mitigates it will be suggested here - the manner in which Sibilla structures the narrative of her involvement in heresy, followed by "tactics" she uses to diminish her responsibility shall be examined, before the issue of her constructed passivity is briefly considered

The most striking aspect of the way in which Sibilla structures her experience is the fact that she makes her involvement with Catharism begin and end (or at least end in thought if not in deed) with family dramas, emotionally charged incidents.<sup>13</sup> Incidents such as heretications - which in other depositions are an end in themselves, heretical actions witnessed - here serve an additional purpose and are used as a means of structuring and explaining. Her narrative begins in the aftermath of a personal tragedy, and the opening lines of the deposition immediately places her first involvement with Catharism within the context

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<sup>12</sup> It is in this respect interesting to compare her deposition to that of Guillaume Escaunier (RF, p.7-19), who records the beginnings of his involvement with the heresy in some detail, but offers absolutely no explanation to his spontaneous confession, which occurs very abruptly within the text.

<sup>13</sup> Which has made it tempting for many to treat her deposition as an unmotivated fragment of personal history. It must, in this respect, be added that the aim of this essay is not to cynically deny Sibilla's experience, but to suggest that about twenty years after the facts this experience is being constructed and used in a way that forwards the deponent's interests.

of emotional distress: “*She said that it might have been sixteen years ago, and she does not remember the time otherwise, when she who is speaking lost a certain daughter of hers named Marquesia, about which she felt much pain and was very sad, and so was her husband [...]*”.<sup>14</sup> – when hearing the Cathars preach is presented to her as a panacea by her neighbour, Galharda. Conversely, the episode of the heretication of her daughter and the violent conflict that ensues constitutes a turning point, or more precisely a point of rupture in her *cursus* of faith, in that this incident costs the Cathars her belief, if not her material support.<sup>15</sup> Her baby daughter, who was very ill received the *consolamentum*: “[...] *and after the heretication [the perfectus] said that she should not henceforth give to the said girl milk to eat or drink, or anything else born of the flesh, and that if she survived, she should afterwards be fed with Lenten foods.*”<sup>16</sup> “*However, after [her husband and the perfectus] left the house, she who is speaking breast-fed her said daughter, since she could not, as she says, see her said daughter die thus.*”<sup>17</sup> This heretication occurred shortly after another heretication, that of the neighbour Galharda, heretication which had also been followed by a

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<sup>14</sup> RF II, p.403: “*Dixit enim quod XVI anni possunt esse, et aliter non recordatur de tempore, cum ipsa loquens perdidisset quandam filiam suam vocatam Marquesiam, de qua dolens et tristis erat multum, et etiam maritus eius [...]*”

<sup>15</sup> This distinction, which Sibilla establishes at the end of the main part of her deposition (RF II, p.424) is quite a shrewd one, in a context when motivations and beliefs can strongly mitigate the incriminating character of actions.

<sup>16</sup> RF II, p.414: “[...] *et post hereticationem dixit quod de cetero non daret dicte puelle comedere vel bibere lac nec aliquid quod natum esse de carne, et quod si viveret, nutriret de cetero cum cibis quadragesimalibus.*”. The deposition of Mengarde Buscail (RF II, pp. 525-542) tells us that she refused to have her young son hereticated for precisely this reason.

<sup>17</sup> RF II, p.414: “*Ipsa tamen loquens postquam exiverant de domo lactavit dictam filiam suam, quia non potuit videre, ut dixit quod sic dicta filia eius moreretur.*”

forced, but ultimately abandoned, *endura*.<sup>18</sup> Sibilla records that she secretly gave Galharda food when this woman's family refused to do so, and her hatred of the practice of *endura* is recorded near the end of her deposition: "[...] *she believed that they were not good people but bad ones [...] because they made people die in the endura*".<sup>19</sup> But her rejection of Catharism is suggested – by her striking recollection of the violent and long-lasting conflict that the incident caused within her family – to be attributable not simply to her hatred of the *endura*, but also to the reaction which her rebellious act unleashed against her. Having suggested that the original basis of the appeal of Catharism to her and her husband should be sought in their emotional distress of the time, which may have mitigated it to some degree in the eyes of her interrogators, Sibilla's deposition thus likewise explains her subsequent rejection of Catharism in way that would be intelligible to the Inquisition,<sup>20</sup> by evoking the distress an inhumane practice caused her, and the hostile reaction her refusal to submit to it provoked (and also in a way that involves laudable acts of rebellion against the Cathars). It should also be noted, whilst considering the episode of the heretication of her daughter, that the immediate reaction provoked by her revelation that she had fed this daughter is one that has strong undertones of misogyny, as her gender was thrown at her as an insult by the devoted Cathar *credens* Pierre Maury: "*He that was speaking also said that she was a bad*

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<sup>18</sup> This heretication, and the subsequent failed *endura*, are also recorded in the deposition of Guillaume Escaunier, her son (RF II, p.15-16).

<sup>19</sup> RF II, p.424: "[...] *credebat eos non esse bonos homines, ymo malos [...] quia faciebant homines mori en la endura.*"

<sup>20</sup> And one that would be convincing, an important consideration in a context when the ecclesiastical authorities obviously still entertained doubts about the veracity of the conversion of the Arques *credentes*.

*mother, and he said that women were demons,*"<sup>21</sup> and the picture created is that of the unleashing of male fury against an isolated and vulnerable woman. This misogynistic outburst against her (and similar comments directed towards Galharda) can be said to form part of the narrative of her disillusionment with Catharism, but it can also be suggested that this gendering<sup>22</sup> of the incident serves the purpose of emphasising her subordinate position within the household, and hence mitigating her responsibility in her own participation in Catharism – a point which shall be developed further in this essay.

In addition to structuring her narrative in a way which contextualises and explains the original appeal of Catharism to her and the reasons for which she quickly and definitely rejected it, Sibilla Peyre uses "tactics" to diminish her own responsibility in her involvement in Catharism. For the sake of clarity of exposition, these tactics shall be presented in a rather "caricatural" way, but they are in fact very subtly, though effectively, deployed throughout the text. Indeed, although no one incident or remark is entirely conclusive in isolation, the fact that they consistently work to build up a coherent and motivated picture is significant.

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<sup>21</sup> RF II, p.415: "Dicebat etiam ipsi loquenti quod mala mater erat, et dicebat ut mulieres erant demones." This is from the mouth of a *credens*, but Sibilla's deposition also recalls the *perfectus* Pierre Autier saying, on the topic of the Incarnation: "[...] *that it was not worthy to say think or to believe that the Son of God was born of a woman or that the Son of God adumbrated himself in something as vile as a woman*" (RF II, p.409: "[...] quod non erat dignum cogitare vel credere quod Dei Filius natus esset de muliere vel quod in re tam vili, sicut mulier est, Filius Dei se adumbraverit."). On Catharism and negative attitudes towards women, see M.C. Barber, 'Women and Catharism'. *Reading Medieval Studies* 3 (1977): 45.62; P.Biller, 'The Common Woman in the Western Church'; P.Biller, 'Cathars and Material Women'; J. Duvernoy, *La Religion des Cathares. Le Catharisme*. Toulouse, 1976.

<sup>22</sup> Which is emphasised by Sibilla's juxtaposed statements that after the incident, her husband hated her and her daughter for a long time, but Galharda became a very good friend.

Minimisation of participation and responsibility, either by omitting incriminating evidence or by shifting the blame onto someone else (though the two are obviously interlinked to some extent), preferably “on the absent and the dead”,<sup>23</sup> is a very commonly used defensive tactic in inquisitorial depositions. The latter process is particularly important in Sibilla’s deposition – and it shall be analysed in some detail in this essay – but certain parts of the text suggest that, though it is difficult to say to what extent, the former may also be at play. Sibilla’s journey to Limoux to see Pierre Autier can be said to be her most independent action as a *credens* in her narrative, and it is noteworthy (though, it must be admitted, not necessarily motivated on her part, or significant) that several of the actions traditionally considered by the Inquisition as particularly incriminating (the symbolic partaking of bread blessed by the heretics and the equally symbolic action of sitting at the same table) are recorded by Guillaume Escaunier, who was also a member of the party that went to Limoux, but are, in Sibilla’s deposition, explicitly stated to have not occurred in this particular occasion.

Sibilla’s deposition consistently constructs her in a rather passive role in relation to heresy and shifts the responsibility onto other protagonists, namely (and mainly) her husband and the Autiers.<sup>24</sup> Her husband’s high degree of involvement with Catharism runs through the whole text as a sort of *leitmotiv* and she frequently mentions meetings and dealings which involved her husband but not her, though, as a believer and the wife of a believer, she

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<sup>23</sup> Lambert, p.234.

<sup>24</sup> Pierre Maury also receives his share of blame in relation to her husband’s involvement, and thus indirectly to her own.

must have played an important part in supporting the *perfecti* on a day-to-day basis.<sup>25</sup> In a sense, she uses her matrimonial status to exonerate her from blame, constructing herself as a docile, respectful wife, in accordance with social models of the time<sup>26</sup> Indeed, this is explicitly how she explains her continued involvement with the heretics after the failed *endura* of her daughter: “*She received them, however, from then, in her house, because she feared and loved her said husband very much, and did not want to offend him[...]*”.<sup>27</sup> The overall impression is that she is emphasising her husband’s enthusiastic involvement so as to conversely better downplay her own. A comparison of the way the relative part played by Sibilla and her husband in the heretication of their daughter is recorded in Sibilla’s deposition and in that of Guillaume Escaunier is, in this respect, significant. Sibilla primarily records her husband’s enthusiasm for this heretication, and her consent is presented as rather secondary; Guillaume remembers both husband and wife very forcefully trying to persuade Prades Tavernier to perform the *consolamentum*. Of course, taken as an isolated case, this would not necessarily be relevant, but as already suggested, the entirety of Sibilla’s deposition works in this direction.

The way in which Sibilla’s deposition minimises her responsibility by making reference to the Autiers (and their fellow *perfecti*) works in different way, making reference

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<sup>25</sup> It is incidentally interesting to notice that the reason given by the perfect Prades Tavernier for refusing to hereticate her husband when he was ill was that he was a good supporter of the Cathar church. This refusal is often explained by the fear of an incident such as that following Galharda’s heretication, but it can also be seen as reflecting the *perfecti*’s crucial need, in a context of persecution, for reliable “secular” support.

<sup>26</sup> And also as a loving mother, another social model, especially when the two roles clash and she rebels against her husband.

<sup>27</sup> RF II, p.424: “Sustinuit tamen eos ex tunc in domo sua, quia multum timebat et amabat dictum virum susm, et nolebat offendere eum [...]”.

to anti-Cathar *topoi* rather than social models, and can only be fully understood in the context of the whole text. Sibilla's rejection of Catharism has previously been mentioned; the emotionally articulated narrative of her disenchantment with Catharism is closely tied to a narrative of disenchantment with the Autiers and other Cathar *perfecti*, and this latter has a particularly clear bipartite structure, revolving around the point of rupture that the episode of her daughter's failed *endura* represents. From the learned, amiable, urbane men leading an exemplary life of abstinence and altruistic renunciation that Sibilla portrays in the first half of her narrative, they become in the second part rather impersonal characters who advocate not only forced *endura* but also the murder of those who denounce them, and who share an important preoccupation with money. In this light, the context of the beginning of the Peyres' involvement becomes what one would now call a "moment of emotional vulnerability" which the heretics took advantage of.<sup>28</sup> In sum it can be said that Sibilla's deposition implicitly plays on the anti-Cathar inquisitorial *topos* of the learned, hypocritical heresiarch who lives an apparently exemplary life all the better to seduce and lead astray ignorant, illiterate people (and women in particular).<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> There is an interesting instance in Guillaume Autast (RF I, pp.235-253) of a Cathar believer attempting to comfort women who had lost children by telling them that their souls would be reincarnated.

<sup>29</sup> See for example James Capelli "Because no truth adheres to the pernicious traditions of the heretics, they flavor them in consequence with a certain *seasoning of simulated virtue* so that the underlying poison is less perceptible through the pleasant sweetness of the honey.[...] For they are cunning serpents, hucksters adulterating wine, so that, with a *show of simplicity*, they proffer to *unwary hearers* a draught of death." (Italics mine). Cited in W.L.Wakefield and A.P. Evans, ed. and transl. *Heresies of the High Middle Ages*, Records of Civilisation Sources and Studies 81 (New York and London, 1969), p.306.

Both the structuring of her experience around family dramas and the shifting of responsibility in Sibilla's deposition participate in the construction of a rather passive *persona* - an emotionally vulnerable mother,<sup>30</sup> a respectful wife, a peasant woman duped by beautiful words.<sup>31</sup> - a person, in sum, who is likely to cooperate with the Inquisition. Her involvement with Catharism is presented as tied to emotions and relationships,<sup>32</sup> rather than based on any individual evaluation or appreciation of Cathar doctrine. The one instance when Sibilla explicitly recalls her opinion of the preaching of the Autiers, it is phrased negatively as a rather tentative opinion: "[...] *but it seemed to she who is speaking that the said heretics said nothing bad.*" Despite an unusually detailed and complex recollection of Cathar doctrine and myths (suggesting that she understood them and that they were significant to her), there is little intellectual "interiority" in Sibilla's deposition, and the subjectivity constructed is essentially an affective one - thus distancing herself from the hard-core of the Cathars, who were renowned for their learning and considered by the Inquisition as dangerously clever. It can thus be suggested that the elements we have considered in Sibilla's deposition not only serve to explain and mitigate her past errors, but

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<sup>30</sup> It is interesting to notice that when interrogated on the subject of her presumed attempts to escape the notice of the Inquisition, Sibilla once again invokes the illness of a daughter as her reason for leaving Arques (RF II, p.428).

<sup>31</sup> She recalls that Jacques Autier "spoke with the voice of an angel" (RF II, p.406: "[...] loquebatur ore angelico"). Sibilla's recollection of the words of the Autiers is indeed striking (especially by comparison with the little recorded by Guillaume Escaunier, RF II, pp. 7-19); not only does she recall their anti-clerical statements, their assertion of their apostolic descent, their doctrines and the practical implications of these in great detail, but she also relates one of their colourful creation myths, which is very unusual (the only other deposition in the Fournier register that is comparable to Sibilla's, in this respect, is that of Pierre Maury).

<sup>32</sup> Her deposition is in this respect comparable to that of Beatrice of Planissoles (RF I, pp. 260-290).

also to construct a persona, strongly gendered, that would pose no threat to the inquisitorial authorities she was facing.

This essay has suggested that Sibilla Peyre of Arques makes use in her deposition to Jacques Fournier of a number of devices which, by contextualising, explaining and mitigating her past involvement with the Cathars, forward her interests in this situation. It has been suggested, in particular, that these devices include the structuring of her experience of Catharism through emotionally salient incidents as well as various means of diminishing her own responsibility, and that her deposition paints a portrait of a rather passive woman, a figure of little interest or threat to the inquisitorial authorities. The gendered element of this construction of passivity is particularly interesting, though it has not been within the scope of this essay to do more than allude to it. Whether a more systematic study of “strategies”, whether successful or unsuccessful, used by deponents would reveal a gendered pattern is an interesting question which deserves further research. Likewise, a more detailed comparison, in the light of the approach proposed in this essay, between the depositions of Sibilla Peyre and Guillaume Escaunier, which overlap considerably in content and background, would undoubtedly prove a worthwhile task.

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