

## After reading *A Mirror for Simple Souls*

*Writing a mysterious text on the precious parchment of the soul, in words no human mouth can utter.—Marguerite Porete, A Mirror for Simple Souls*

they wrenched your words from your body  
then ripped your sex from your words  
which circulated motherless for six hundred years  
attributed to men in flagrant opposition  
to your florid feminine metaphors  
finally united with your name  
only in the age of science  
an age that vaunted your renown long after  
the triumph of a Reason you wished to slay  
and the occlusion of the community for which you stood firm  
opposing the church  
their death sentence boasted of their sumptuous violent power  
a cracked mirror to your purity and faith

in the shadows here below	a life brought to nothingness
she cannot be robbed	she cannot be given anything
they cannot tell good from evil	sin has no weight or measure
cross the valley of humility	and the plain of truth
look into the depths from the depths	and up to the heights from the heights
so she goes naked into an unknown land	surely the virtues must serve such souls
we should be moderate in all things	except in love
the wound of love is the death of reason	only the innocent can escape the weight of this burden

were we to place ourselves with the unconsoled  
to grasp the hand of the begger instead of the designer purse  
to follow the wisdom that appends no string of letters after our name  
to vanish from all hierarchies  
suppress the clever rejoinder to party-time repartee  
pass up the plaque in the chapel  
were we not to try to dull our pain  
were we to seek the mountains that elevate the soul  
rather than the ritual high places  
humbly to serve a single cause  
and stand with the hosts

*Around 1300, the mystical Christian devotee Marguerite Porete wrote an inspirational treatise named A Mirror for Simple Souls that quickly became popular across Western Europe. Her recommendations, while well-researched and couched in particularly lovely prose, were standard for mystics of the time: giving oneself over entirely to God, renouncing material and worldly concerns, trusting only in an entirely personal inspiration for guidance.*

*Although many had been writing similar texts for more than a century (including Hildegard von Bingen and Meister Eckhart), a local bishop decided to persecute Marguerite, perhaps because she was vulnerable as a woman without a male patron and perhaps because the local beguine sect of which she was associated was currently drawing a lot of support. Marguerite was declared a heretic and executed.*

*A Mirror for Simple Souls was still widely translated and read, but as an anonymous text. Only in 1946 was the text matched with quotes from Marguerite's trial and reassociated with her.*

*The middle "mirror" section of this poem is composed of quotations from the book (published by Crossroad Spiritual Classics, translated by Charles Crawford).*