

Inquisitors and Scribes

Mikhail Bakhtin and the Languedoc Inquisition

I

Until the 1970's, inquisition records were a rarely-used historical source, or, on the occasions when they were used, they were often valued as much as ammunition in both scholarly and polemical battles, whether for or against the Catholic Church, as part of the great class struggle, or other similar ideologically motivated endeavours.¹ However, the historiographical changes of the 1970's also led to a new understanding of the inquisition records as sources, and to the appearance of a number of methodological approaches to them. In the following, we will examine a few of these different approaches, before briefly turning to a presentation of the theories of Mikhail M. Bakhtin and how they can be applied to inquisition records, followed by a practical analysis of the inquisition testimonies against Peter Garcias from the Doat collection vol. XXII, fol. 89-106.

II

As a result of both their origins, their historical context and their subject matter, inquisition records are a highly complex and multi-faceted group of sources which require that the historian formulates a robust methodological approach before engaging with them. Over the past couple of decades, a number of such approaches have emerged. In particular, the appearance of Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie's *Montaillou* in 1975 and Carlo Ginsburg's *The Cheese and the Worms* in 1976 introduced not only the inquisition records themselves as a valuable source for cultural history, but also a new historiographical trend. Methodologically speaking, *The Cheese and the Worms* was probably more innovative here than *Montaillou*. Whereas *Montaillou* was fairly conventional in its attempt to describe the internal and external social dynamics of a community – if an unusually small one, for the time – *The Cheese and the Worms* broke new ground in its strong focus on a single individual, not simply for the purpose of traditional biography, but rather as the central element in the new field of *microhistory*.

Drawing in particular on theoretical material from anthropology,² microhistory focuses on the extraordinary and the unusual, rather than the average and the everyday. Often, these will be events, individuals or groups which present a challenge to the normative standards of their society. By studying these 'outliers' and the mainstream response to them, microhistory proposes to recreate a microcosm which can reflect certain dynamics in the wider contemporary society better than a more traditional large-scale study would be able to do.³

1 Arnold, John H.: *Inquisition and Power. Catharism and the Confessing Subject in Medieval Languedoc* (Philadelphia, 2001), p. 4

2 Such as Clifford Geertz's 'thick description', cf. Geertz, Clifford: *The interpretation of cultures. Selected essays* (New York, 1973)

3 Levi, Giovanni: 'On Microhistory', in: Burke, Peter (ed.): *New Perspectives on Historical Writing*, 2nd ed.,

Certainly, this approach, and the appearance of a historiographical tradition based on anthropology, literary theory and the 'linguistic turn' of which they form a part, are highly valuable developments that have had a positive impact on the way many historians consider both their field and the past. However, the methodology of microhistory has also been criticised on a number of points. Most importantly, it is questionable how generally representative, or even applicable the results of such studies actually are.

These methodological problems are particularly apparent in Ginzburg's case. The parts of *The Cheese and the Worms* that deal with the individual example of Menocchio and his case before the inquisition are extremely compelling and present a masterpiece of anthropological 'thick description'. However, when Ginzburg subsequently attempts to generalise from his example to a suggested predominantly oral popular peasant culture (or class) that is culturally distinct from, but connected to the elite class, his results are less convincing. John H. Arnold has expressed the fundamental problems in his approach very well:

*Ginzburg [...] takes one "exceptional" voice to stand for a deep-rooted oral culture. The relationship between the unusual "real dialogue" and a wider, yet otherwise silent, oral culture seems contradictory. It also fails to provide a way of addressing those cases where the voices are "unexceptional": what is our response, as historians, to this apparently impoverished speech? Finally, Ginzburg is problematic on theoretical grounds: his understanding of dialogism as a concrete struggle between folk and official culture rests on a reductive reading of Bakhtin, and his interest in dialogism is unbalanced. Ginzburg invokes the theoretical concept of a struggle within language only in order to assert the authenticity of one voice, rather than to investigate the relationship between the two voices.*⁴

Again, raising such criticisms is not to say that microhistory is not a valid method in itself, but it should be recognized that it faces a number of methodological challenges that need to be addressed if it is to distinguish itself from local history.⁵

A very different approach from microhistory draws on the political and social sciences to view the relationship between the inquisitors and their witnesses and defendants in the analytical terms of power. An excellent example of this approach is James Given's study *Inquisition and Medieval Society*, which examines the techniques used by the inquisitors to establish a position of dominance in a society in which they were at first, in a number of ways, outsiders. Further, Given examines the different means by which that society responded to the inquisition, mostly through various forms of resistance, and finally the social and structural factors that "*helped control and shape the work of the inquisitors.*"⁶

(Cambridge, 2001), pp. 97-120

4 Arnold: *Inquisition and Power*, p. 8. Cf. also Valerio Valeri's review of *The Cheese and the Worms* in *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 54, No. 1 (Mar., 1982), pp. 139-143

5 An observation that is certainly not meant as a disparagement on local history, which is a highly valuable field in its own right.

6 Given, James B.: *Inquisition and Medieval Society. Power, Discipline and Resistance in Languedoc* (Ithaca, 1997), p. 167.

A particular advantage of this approach is that it aims to provide a corrective to the grand narratives of such theorists as Weber, Elias and Foucault in the context of the Middle Ages.⁷ On the other hand, exactly because it focuses so strongly on techniques and structures rather than more intangible theoretical aspects such as perceptions and the categorisation and construction of knowledge, a corresponding limitation of this 'realist' approach is that it, as one review of the book has pointed out, "...precludes the treatment of inquisitional practice as a form of representation. [...] the inquisition's techniques were accurate and careful enough to successfully recognize and destroy these heretical phenomena with relatively little distortion, false accusation, or collateral damage to innocent (i.e., nonheretical) people."⁸

As the reviewer also points out, this is not so much a critique of the book itself, which has a different objective, but it is an important observation about the theoretical framework that lies behind it.

On the other hand, such objections cannot be raised against a different study which also uses the concept of power, John H. Arnold's *Inquisition and Power*. Arnold draws heavily on particularly Michel Foucault's thoughts on the non-linear exercise of power and its relationship to language and discourse in order to analyse the inquisition records as complex texts that contain numerous layers of significance and meaning, rather than as a simple recording of 'real voices from the past'.⁹

However, while I definitely agree with Arnold's ambition to move beyond a simplistic reading of these sources, I cannot help but feel that for all of his methodological sophistication, his choice of theoretical tradition has not been entirely fortunate. The great challenge of applying Michel Foucault's concepts as a framework to interpret the Middle Ages is that his concept of power – and to an even greater degree his later concept of 'governmentality', which was developed out of power-knowledge¹⁰ – is very dependent on the existence of a impersonal disciplining, or "normalising" power that only appears as a part of the rise of the modern, sovereign state and its institutions, in particular the clinic¹¹ and the panoptic prison.¹²

The problem, of course, is that for the most part, these institutions (as Foucault understands them) did not exist in the medieval society. The medieval world had its share of repression, to be sure, but of an entirely different character,¹³ and the sovereign, institutionalising power is also largely absent – especially in the case of 13th century Languedoc, where we rather find a multitude of different power agents engaged in a struggle for dominance with one another, not just politically and religiously, but also culturally. Under those conditions, it seems that Foucault's conceptual framework is at risk of breaking down.¹⁴ For these reasons, I am not convinced that trying to

7 Given: *Inquisition and Medieval Society*, pp. 219-20

8 Review in *Speculum*, Vol. 75, No. 1 (Jan., 2000), pp. 182-184

9 Arnold: *Inquisition and Power*, pp. 10-15

10 Burchell, Graham et al. (eds.): *The Foucault effect: studies in governmentality. With two lectures by and an interview with Michel Foucault* (Chicago, 1991)

11 Foucault, Michel: *The Birth of the Clinic. An Archaeology of Medical Perception* (New York, 1973)

12 Foucault, Michel: *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison* (New York, 1979)

13 Given: *Inquisition and Medieval Society*, pp.219-20

14 Foucault's ideas in esp. *The Order of Things* about the way discourses change over time would seem to lead to a

superimpose Foucault's post-early modern methodological framework on the *premodern* and much more fluid medieval society is entirely appropriate.

Arnold also mentions the works of Mikhail M. Bakhtin as a theoretical foundation for his study,¹⁵ but unfortunately, this foundation remains mostly implicit in the subsequent text, and is not developed further to any significant degree. "Unfortunately", because as Arnold himself point out, "... *inquisitorial discourse is inescapably heteroglossic as it seeks to have the subject speak within its monologic voice, and yet to prompt that speech must bestow upon the subject a degree of agency, which thus opens the inquisitorial text to admit a certain excess of speech,*"¹⁶ and further, "...*the inquisitorial registers are heteroglossic, containing many interweaving voices, sometimes in concert and sometimes in opposition.*"¹⁷

It seems to me that this would have been a much more interesting to pursue this line of inquiry in some greater detail, partly because, since historic and social scientific studies that employ Bakhtin are unfortunately still relatively rare,¹⁸ there is a quite fertile field for new studies and approaches to be found here; and partly because Bakhtin's theories and concepts seem to be very well suited to the analysis of complex sources such as inquisition records. We will develop this further in the following section.

III

Without launching into a full examination of Bakhtin's theories, a project which in itself would far exceed the space available in this essay, there are a couple of his key concepts which merit a bit of closer attention.¹⁹

The mature Bakhtinian philosophy is one of and about language, understood in the widest sense. Bakhtin himself worked primarily with the use of language in literature, particularly in the novel, but the theories can easily be applied to other social scientific and humanistic fields, insofar as all human interaction is dependent on the use of language. Fundamentally, language consists of 'utterances', which are conditioned by the particular 'speech genres' in which they appear. Rather than existing simply as singular, isolated events, all utterances are by definition formed as a reply to a previous utterance and are as such 'addressed' to some other agent, forming a part of 'chains of

similar conclusion; a methodological framework that is valid for the 19th century may be entirely inappropriate for an analysis of the 12th because the underlying categorisations of knowledge are quite different. Cf. Foucault, Michel: *The Order of Things. An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London, 1970)

15 Arnold, *Inquisition and Power*, p. 12

16 *Ibid.*, p. 13

17 *Ibid.*, p. 114

18 At least more rare than those that employ Foucault.

19 Elements of Bakhtin's philosophy and theories are found and developed throughout his works, especially in *The Dialogic Imagination. Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist (Austin, 1981) and *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. Caryl Emerson (Manchester, 1984). For good introductions to Bakhtin, see Holquist, Michael: *Dialogism. Bakhtin and his world* (London, 1990) or Gardiner, Michael: *The dialogics of critique. M. M. Bakhtin and the theory of ideology* (London, 1992). Selections of writings by Bakhtin and others of his circle are presented in Morris, Pam (ed.): *The Bakhtin Reader. Selected Writings of Bakhtin, Medvedev and Voloshinov* (London, 1994)

speech communion'. Further, utterances are 'situated' in a 'chronotope', i.e. in a particular context of time and space.

For Bakhtin, it follows from these points that the chain of speech communion is 'unfinalisable' – since no utterance can ever exist entirely on its own, but only as part of an eternal, ongoing exchange. This is the basis of the essential concept of 'dialogism', which is the idea that all utterances (including thoughts, texts, etc.) exist as a response to a past utterance and in anticipation of a future one. This dialogism between different situated 'voices', or a 'polyphony', in turn leads to the concept of 'heteroglossia', which is the ongoing interaction between the voices and their different viewpoints, emphasising the fundamentally 'participatory dimension' of dialogism.²⁰

These ideas are very well suited for use with the inquisition records, and in particular with its depositions and testimonies – originating in the form of a dialogue (the interrogation), but transformed into an apparent monologue in the final records. The many voices of the original have been fused into a single one, and they will need to be 'disentangled' again, as it were, for us to gain a better understanding of the source.

Further, these inquisition interrogations took place in a physical and psychological space – a *chronotope* in the Bakhtinian terminology – which was controlled by the inquisitors and intended to emphasise the gravity of the situation and the severity of the sanctions which could be brought to bear against those who would not cooperate, leading to a very peculiar type of 'speech genre'. Even the texts themselves interacted with one another, when previously recorded statements, or utterances, could be compared to later statements, or even brought up during an interrogation to challenge discrepancies.²¹

But we must not forget that the inquisitors and their texts were only one voice, or group of voices, in the heteroglossia. The witnesses and those accused of heresy must not be reduced simply to passive victims – they also had their voices, and they were often used for opposition or resistance. Indeed, it is interesting to note that the chaotic situation in 13th century Languedoc is not unlike the concept of the 'carnival' which Bakhtin examines especially in *Rabelais and His World*.²² A period of civil and political strife is quite a different thing from the more benign carnival, to be sure, but they have in common the overturning of an existing order and the substitution of a more chaotic fluid state of affairs; whether the 'world-turned-upside-down' of the carnival or the factional struggle of the civil war. Either presents a challenge to the established and dominant authorities and creates an environment in which the 'polyphony' of languages becomes more immediately apparent.

Finally, viewing the inquisition and the conditions in Languedoc as a Bakhtinian struggle between different languages in a heteroglossia leads us to face an interesting, if somewhat elusive question: Who actually has more power in the setting inside the inquisition courtroom under such circumstances – the Inquisitor or his scribe? The Foucaultian model would point at the Inquisitor, as the representative and the agent of institutionalised discipline, who holds the power to condemn,

20 Thiselton, Anthony C.: *The Hermeneutics of Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, 2007), p. 135

21 Given: *Inquisition and Medieval Society*, p.

22 Bakhtin, Mikhail: *Rabelais and his World*, ed. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington, 1984)

and to bind and loose; but Bakhtin perhaps leads us to seriously consider the more anonymous and peripheral scribe – the one who holds the power of language, of interpretation and of the written record, and who shapes the nature and legacy of the discourse. We shall keep these things in mind as we turn to the practical analysis of the source material.

IV

In the following, we will attempt to test the ideas outlined above through an analysis of the testimonies delivered against the suspected heretic Petrus Garcias by a group of Franciscans in August 1247. The testimonies appear in the Doat collection vol. XXII, fol. 89-106, and are quoted here from the printed edition in C. Douais's *Documents*.²³ For the sake of convenience and consistency, the Latin personal names have been used.

According to the testimonies, Petrus Garcia had been coming frequently to the Franciscan convent in Toulouse during the winter of 1246-47 to see his kinsman Guillelmus Garcias. During his visits, they apparently often discussed matters of theology and faith. However, on two occasions during Lent and on the Easter vigil, several other Franciscans had hidden themselves above the common room of the convent in order to listen in on the discussions. We do not know whether or not the original intention was to gather evidence of Petrus's heretical views, but in the event, the group of friars eventually testified against him before the inquisition in Toulouse.

Beyond Guillelmus Garcias, the group consisted of the friars Guillelmus Cogot, Deodatus Rothenensis, Imbertus, Petrus Raimundi de Sancto Barcio and Arnaldus Daitz (or 'de Acio'). Guillelmus Garcias, Deodatus and Arnaldus witnessed both occasions, while Guillelmus Cogot only witnessed the first, and Imbert and Petrus Raimundi only the second. The inquisitors also got supporting testimonies from other people who knew Petrus Garcia, but we will not deal with those here. Further, Mark Pegg has previously summarised the contents of the testimonies, so that will also not be repeated here. Instead, we will briefly examine how the testimonies differ from one another.

The testimonies are most conveniently thought of as consisting of a number of different elements, such as "*essent dou dii*",²⁴ "*lex Moysi non erat nisi umbra et vanitas*",²⁵ "*nichil supposebat pro rebus visibilium, que sunt nichil*",²⁶ and so forth. None of the testimonies contain all of these elements, but some are more "complete" than others. As might be reasonably expected, since he was Petrus Garcias's discussion partner, Guillelmus Garcias includes almost all of these elements from both occasions, including a couple from the Lent discussion which all the others missed, specifically that "*omnes qui non erant heretici fecerat diabolus in corpore et anima*"²⁷, that

23 Douais, C. (ed.): *Documents pour servir a l'histoire de l'inquisition dans le Languedoc, II*, Soc. de l'Hist. de France vol. 300 (Paris, 1900), pp. 90-114. Also translated in part in Wakefield, Walter L.: *Heresy, Crusade and Inquisition in Southern France, 1100-1250* (London, 1974) pp 242-49.

24 Douais, p. 90

25 Ibid., p. 91

26 Ibid., p. 92

27 Ibid., p. 103

”*Christus adduxerat Beatam Virginem et Johannem Evangelistam in testimonium*”,²⁸ and a statement about Guillelmus de Roaxio, a consul from Toulouse. On the other hand, he very curiously misses one element in particular. Guillelmus Cogot mentions towards the end of his testimony that ”*cum requireretur dictus Petrus a dicto Willelmo Garcia utrum mater ipsius P. fuerat heretica, dixit quod non; sed bene esset heretica, nisi ille Nicholaus, quondam capellanus Beate Marie Deaurade, impedivisset.*”²⁹

Regarding the discussion that took place during Lent, Guillelmus Cogot's and Arnaldus's testimonies are identical. Deodatus's testimony is almost identical, except that he omits Petrus Garcias's two statements that ”*Johannes Baptista erat unus de majoribus diabolis qui unquam fuissent*”³⁰ and that ”*caro non resurgeret nisi sicut postis*”.³¹ The latter omission is somewhat remarkable, since Petrus Garcias underlined this statement by physically hitting a wooden post³² (”*percussiens postem cum mano*”),³³ an act which one supposes would be hard to miss under the circumstances.

Concerning the second occasion, on the Easter vigils, Deodatus' and Guillelmus Garcias' testimonies are practically identical, except for a curious difference in the dating: According to Deodatus (as well as Imbert³⁴ and Petrus Raimundus³⁵), it happened ”*hoc anno, in vigilia Pascha*”,³⁶ while Guillelmus has it take place ”*hoc anno in quadragesima*”³⁷ – probably a mistake on Guillelmus' part, but still noteworthy considering how identical the testimonies otherwise appear to be. Imbert's testimony is less complete – it specifically mentions that ”*de Passione in romano nichil audivit*”,³⁸ but also omits Petrus Garcias's opinions that ”*Deus non voluit justitiam quod aliquis judicaretur ad mortem, [and] vituperans ex hoc quemdam fratrem predicatorem Crucis...*”,³⁹ and that he ”*dampnavit ... omnem ordinem preter ordinem fratrum Minorum...*”.⁴⁰

The testimony of Petrus Raimundi de Sancto Barcio is even briefer – it curiously only states that ”*...audivit dictum Petrum Garcia[m] dicentem: "Si ego tenerem illum qui creavit multas animas et de illis paucas salvat, dilanearum eum," et quod angeli qui ceciderunt de celo salvabuntur, sed non omnes.*”⁴¹ It is not clear why this testimony mentions nothing else, not even by reference to one of the other testimonies. Finally, the testimony of Arnaldus Daitz is apparently identical to those of Deodatus and Guillelmus Garcias, and the scribe eventually summarises the last part of it simply with ”*...et alia, idem quod frater Deodatus Rothe[ne]nsis, excepto quod non audivit dictum P.*

28 Ibid. p. 103
29 Ibid., pp. 94-5
30 Ibid., p. 93
31 Ibid.
32 An example of a non-verbal utterance.
33 Ibid.
34 Ibid., p. 107
35 Ibid., p. 108
36 Ibid., p. 101
37 Ibid., p. 105
38 Ibid., p. 106
39 Ibid., p. 99
40 Ibid., p. 100
41 Ibid., p. 108

*nominantem uxorem suam Aimam.*⁴² (The form here would seem to suggest that Arnaldus may have had Deodatus' testimony read to him and was asked whether he concurred with it.)

On the surface, these texts seem straightforward enough. Aside from the minor differences between the testimonies, they clearly refer to the same events, so it is obvious to try to consolidate them into a single narrative of 'what Petrus Garcias actually said', as Mark Pegg attempts in chapter 8 of *Corruption of Angels*.⁴³ However, there is reason to be careful here, because these texts are not without problems. And indeed, Mark Pegg is perhaps overly creative in the consolidated narrative that he attempts to construct out of the testimonies. For instance, he observes that,

*Guilhem Garcias, at this point in the Franciscans' testimonies, including his own, stopped asking questions and just listened. Peire Garcias, in the silence left by his relative, and, it would appear, confident that he had explained the sources of good and evil in the universe, shifted the conversation by bluntly stating, "All the angels who fell from heaven, and they alone, will be saved." Each of the eavesdroppers repeated the words of this non sequitur exactly to Bernard de Caux and Jean de Saint-Pierre...*⁴⁴

It is correct that this place⁴⁵ in the testimonies is precisely where the document changes from a reasonably precise description of the conversation between Guillelmus and Petrus, typically in the form "...cum dictus frater Guillelmus Garcia[s] loqueretur de..." or similar expressions to the much more terse and repetitive form, "Item, audivit dictum Petrum Garcia[m] dicentem [etc.]"⁴⁶ which persists almost until the end of the testimony, in effect (seemingly) reporting on a long series of utterances. This change in form could lead us to join Pegg in thinking this reflects a change in the original discussion itself.

However, in doing so, we would forget the scribe who acts as the interpreter of the events in the courtroom. What we may see as a shift from a dialogue between Guillelmus and Petrus to a monologue solely by the latter could in fact rather be a change in the reporting style of the scribe – he has already established that we are dealing with a discussion between the two, so to save time and energy, he settles on a briefer and more economical form. This point may seem like a minor one, but it does make a significant difference in how we perceive the attitude of Petrus Garcia – a confident and perhaps even defiant *credens* who blurts out details about his heresy on his own initiative, or an unsuspecting debate participant who continues to be led on by his opponent for the benefit, literally speaking, of the gallery.

Bakhtin's principle of dialogism may help us to avoid at least some of these pitfalls, by reminding us that there are a number of different voices present in the text, and that their utterances are shaped

42 Ibid., p. 114

43 Pegg, Mark Gregory: *Corruption of Angels* (Princeton, 2001), p. 52-56

44 Ibid., p. 53

45 Douais, p. 93

46 Ibid., pp. 93-94

by the particular speech genre and chronotope in which they take place. Some of those are immediately visible, while others are more obscure.

The friars should properly speaking be distinguished as separate voices, but since we know so little about them individually, it is more convenient to deal with them collectively. The most pertinent question about them from a source-analytical point of view seems to be their motivation for testifying in the first place. One obvious motivation is of course that they were genuinely concerned about heresy and wanted simply to bring a known heretic to justice, but it is also possible that we are seeing a (successful) attempt to manipulate the inquisition into serving their own ends. As James Given has explained,⁴⁷ it was not unknown for a person called as a witness before the inquisition to use the opportunity to bring an enemy or rival in trouble by denouncing him or her as a heretic. A risky endeavour, to be sure, considering the heavy penalties that perjurers faced (including the threat of infamy and excommunication),⁴⁸ but still a possibility that we should keep in mind. If manipulation were involved, the fact that Guillelmus Garcias was a kinsman of the accused might suggest that some sort of family conflict could be involved.

Mark Pegg raises a more subtle point, that the testimonies by the friars may contain just as much what the friars thought they heard as what was actually said, or "*...nothing more than the creation of four heresiologically learned mendicants trying to make sense of what they thought a credens had actually said, or, rather, what a heretic should have said.*"⁴⁹

Considering such reservations, it must be said that these friars do not appear to be particularly reliable witnesses of Petrus Garcias's opinions. At best, they act as hostile interpreters of what was actually said during these meetings; at worst, they may have fabricated the whole event (unlikely, perhaps, but possible.)

The inquisitors, Bernard of Caux and John of St. Pierre, do not appear explicitly in the texts, but their presence is nevertheless felt everywhere. As the dominant voices in the polyphony, they would be in ultimate control of the chronotope and determine the speech genre for the other voices. By asking questions and for clarifications, they would shape the flow of the dialogue. The details of these have not been recorded, but we may get an impression of them by comparing the records with other sources, especially with inquisitors' manuals such as the one compiled by Bernard of Caux and John of St. Pierre in 1248 or 1249.⁵⁰

However, it should be noted that the present testimonies do not represent a typical interrogation before the inquisition, since the subjects are not suspected Cathars, but rather a group of Catholic friars whose orthodoxy does not appear to be in doubt. As a consequence, it is likely that this

47 Given: *Inquisition and Medieval Society*, pp. 141-166

48 For examples of the penalties facing perjurers under canon law, see e.g. *Dec. Grat.* C. VI q. 1 c. 17: "*Infames esse eas personas dicimus, que pro aliqua culpa notantur; id est omnes qui Christianae legis normam abiciunt, et statuta ecclesiastica contempnunt... similiter... periuros...*", and C. III q. 7 c. 1-2: "*Infamis persona nec procurator potest esse, nec cognitor...* [etc.]" ; also Burchard von Worms: *Decretorum Libri XX*, Lib. XII, cap. 14: "*Si quis vero perpetrato perjurio...ab Ecclesia repellendus est; sive a communione et consortio fidelium; ut nullus cum eo comedat, atque bibat, neque oret, neque in sua domo eum recipiat.*"

49 Pegg, 56

50 Wakefield

interrogation was quite different from the typical inquisition procedure, If the friars themselves were not under suspicion of heresy, the usual antagonistic dialogue between inquisitors and witnesses would be largely absent, as would the witnesses' motivation for resistance.

The scribe, the public notary Petrus Ariberti, is perhaps the most anonymous voice, but somewhat paradoxically also the most important one. The scribe interpreted and summarised the statements, translated them into Latin, and fixed them in writing, all of which are actions which entail a considerable amount of interpretation and add yet another link to the chain that separates us from the original utterance.

Petrus Garcia himself never appeared before the inquisitors himself, we do not know his side of the story (possibly a wise decision on his part, though unfortunate for us). However, even though he is not present in the text himself, each of the other voices relate to him and his utterances (at least allegedly) in one way or another; he is, as it were, a hidden protagonist (or perhaps antagonist, at least from the inquisition's point of view) of the event, the origin of the strand of speech chain present in the text.

And finally, there is the voice of **the historian**. It is often overlooked, but it is nevertheless present in the sense that the historian engages with the sources and the voices contained in them – a somewhat one-sided interaction, certainly, but not entirely so. In a certain sense, one could say that the historian establishes the ultimate chronotope for the other voices through his or her method and theoretical approach, biases, and the questions that are put to the sources. The sources do not speak for themselves, they can only reply to the historian, and therein lies a sort of dialogue as well.

So what is our conclusion regarding the value of this source? Is it trustworthy or not? Is it "true"? The concept of dialogism has certain consequences for how we understand 'truth'. It is not relativism, which Bakhtin saw as rendering all dialogue meaningless.⁵¹ But the idea that no utterance can stand completely on its own and that all speech chains are ultimately unfinalisable lead to the conclusion that truth should not be found in individual monologic utterances, but rather in the participation and interaction of a multitude of voices in a polyphony.

If we take our inspiration from this principle, our conclusion will to a large extent depend on which particular questions we ask of the text. If we are looking for information about actual 13th century heretical beliefs, I think we should probably look elsewhere. Indeed, a bit ironically, the very close correspondence between the different witness statements undermines their credibility in itself. It seems likely that the friars had discussed the events extensively among themselves and negotiated a final narrative of them. In this process, they were likely influenced as much by their personal beliefs and expectations about the topoi of heresy as by what was actually said.

That does not mean the whole thing is a fabrication, though. There are small things in the narrative which still gives it an air of authenticity in the general sense, if not in the specifics, especially the little ways in which the testimonies differ from one another, the non-topical content, the more

51 Thiselton: *Hermeneutics of Doctrine*, p. 136

unusual beliefs – these are things one would not expect to find if everything was a complete fabrication.⁵² So we can conclude that the event itself probably did happen, and that Petrus Garcias probably was a *credens* to some extent, but whether the source reflects his actual beliefs is questionable.

However, this does not mean that the source is useless – far from it. We just need to ask other questions. Precisely because of the topical nature of the sources, it would be useful for examining Catholic beliefs and expectations about Cathars during this period. This would be true even in the "worst-case scenario" – the unlikely event that the four friars are lying outright – because they would still have picked material that would ring true for the inquisition. As such, the source may not contain much in the way of "subaltern voices", but on the other hand, it can throw some light on how at least parts of the Church perceived their Cathar opponents during this period.

V

The records of the medieval inquisition are a complex group of sources which require a well-defined methodology, but which also lend themselves well to a range of different theoretical approaches. However, it must also be recognized that some of these approaches are better suited to the material and its historical context than others.

A Bakhtinian approach to the sources will be no different; it will have its strengths and weaknesses, and like any other method, it will serve to highlight certain areas, while downplaying others. However, taking Bakhtin's dialogism to its logical conclusion would suggest – and I hope the reader will excuse me if I turn 'meta-Bakhtinian' for a moment – that perhaps a *methodological* heteroglossia is in fact the best way to approach these sources. While no single method or theory is sufficient in itself, they each highlight different aspects of a very complex material. And just as importantly, they further the historiographical debate by both responding to earlier interpretation and in turn generating new responses, creating an unfinalisable dialogue between a pluralism of methods – or to paraphrase Bakhtin himself, "*Any historical study is a link in the chain of historiographical communion.*"⁵³

52 See Ginzburg's article 'Clues: Roots of an Evidential Paradigm' for a similar approach, in: Ginzburg, Carlo: *Clues, Myths and the Historical Method* (Baltimore, 1989), pp. 96-126, esp. pp. 96-101 and 118-125.

53 "*Any utterance is a link in the chain of speech communion.*" Bakhtin, M.: 'Speech Genres', in: *The Bakhtin Reader*, p. 84.