Preachers, Partisans, and Rebellious Religion: Vernacular Writing and the Hussite Movement. By Marcela K. Perett. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018. Pp. viii + 290. Cloth $85.00. ISBN 978-0812250534.

The fifteenth century witnessed the creation of a large body of written work in the Czech vernacular. Against the backdrop of the religious, social, and political upheaval in Bohemia associated with the Hussite movement, this literary output emerges as an attractive research topic. The last conceptual framework for interpreting the vernacular writings of the Hussite period was formulated by literary historians in the 1960s. More studies aiming at a prospective reevaluation of this outdated paradigm only began to appear in recent years, chiefly authored by historians. Perett, herself a historian, focuses on the religious literature written in Old Czech in the first third of the fifteenth century. Her book examines the role of literature in forming religious factions in Bohemia, identifies the main topics of vernacular discourse, and points out the partisan character of the sources—something the author considers the price for the quick spread of religious writings in the vernacular. Perett's book encompasses the foundational figure of Jan Hus, Hussite and anti-Hussite "vernacular propaganda" (79) after his death at the stake in 1415, and the Bohemian controversies during the Hussite Wars (1419–1436).

The analyzed material is skillfully structured. The chapters are chronologically ordered and move from one subtheme to another: from faction formation to the relations between catechesis and polemic; from topical songs to long verse compositions and vernacular theological treatises. Less convincing is the integration of the last chapter dealing with two Latin chronicles, while the extensive ensemble of Czech vernacular chronicles from the Hussite period is not discussed at all.

The author repeatedly claims novelty for her treatment and conclusions, yet previous scholarship is often misrepresented. Neither Jan Hus's letters (59) nor the long verse compositions (144) have been ignored by researchers, but the relevant studies by František J. Holeček and Petr Čornej are not referred to. That John Wyclif was at the root of Bohemian debates about the Eucharist has not been overlooked (172), but this has been known since at least Jan Sedlák's foundational publication from 1918. I cannot agree that Hus's vernacular work is dismissed as unoriginal in the existing narrative and that his Latin theology is considered superior (216). On the contrary, Hus's theology has been increasingly seen as derivative from Wyclif, whereas his particular contribution is supposed to reside in vernacular popularization. Although the author aims for a "new way of telling the story" of Jan Hus (219), it must be noted that both Hus's emphasis on forming a group of adherents and his self-portrayal as an imitator of Christ and the apostles have been pointed out before.

The "original reinterpretation of Jan Hus" (225) offered by Perett consists of portraying Hus as someone who cast himself in the role of an unjustly persecuted hero; who offered his audience a partisan interpretation of the Bible in order to polarize society; and who, in order to win at least a moral victory, formulated his own logic of biblical exegesis that automatically vindicated all his choices. However, I believe the evidence gives a more complex picture than that of a cold manipulator. Hus's claims to imitate the apostles (57) were accompanied by doubts about fulfilling his mission and even about his own popular exegesis. Seeing Hus only as someone who did everything to gain the acclaim of the crowd eclipses the anxiety of salvation that was at the heart of the oppositional moves by Hus and the Hussites. Hus

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surely developed a "logic" that justified his criticisms, but this criticism had a material core inasmuch as it was based on principles and not on tactical needs or predilections of the moment. Therefore, instead of "selective obedience" (67), I would characterize Hus's subversive concept as conditional obedience, for an individual cannot select who to obey but is subordinate to certain principals.

Two larger problems are crucial for a discussion of Perett's topic: ascertaining the authors of and the audience for religious writings in the vernacular. In the case of anonymously transmitted works, Perett suggests seeking their authors among the clergy, often in connection with Prague University, thus refusing the thesis of Marxist literary history about the "democratization" and "laicization" of literature in the Hussite period (4, 114–15). More than once, Perett presupposes the existence of a mixed lay and clerical audience for vernacular texts (72, 168, 175). Based on apostrophes in Hus's vernacular expositions, the author suggests—contrary to František Šmahel's hypothesis about the lower clergy as the primary audience—that these writings directly addressed the laity (71), while Hus's *On Simony* was predominantly intended for a clerical audience (61). Wycliffite Eucharistic teachings were first simplified in Latin for the "ordinary clergy" and then presented in the vernacular to the laity (167).

The question of audience is answered using intra-textual evidence, that is, analysis of content and rhetoric. Perett does not examine the context for the transmission of the discussed works or reconstruct the broader cultural background, such as the level of lay literacy, ownership of manuscripts, and so on. The "preaching circles, religious fraternities, or communities" as points of contact between the clergy and laity (13) are not specified nor further investigated. As a result, the audience for vernacular propaganda remains rather obscure in the present study. In the end, I am not convinced that the part of the laity that could be attracted through subversive songs was of sufficient social status and political influence to secure the success of Hussitism (115, 225).

Answering such complicated questions would probably need a broader research basis. Although preachers feature in the very title of the book, little is said about preaching. With the exception of Jan Hus, homiletic works are missing from the discussion. Even more surprising is the almost total absence of Peter Chelčický's writings. Considered by many historians one of the most original thinkers of medieval Bohemia, he is mentioned only briefly in the context of the Eucharistic controversy (185–88). Naturally, every monograph must place limits on its own source base, but it seems to me that leaving Chelčický and others aside substantially limits the import of the interpretation. Perett considers the first third of the fifteenth century the most prolific and creative period of vernacular writing (219), but without the figures of the later fifteenth century like the Hussite archbishop Jan Rokycana and lay authors Petr Chelčický, Vaněk Valečovský, and Václav Koranda, the story of vernacular writing in the Hussite movement cannot be complete.

This said, Marcela Perett's *Preacher, Partisans, and Rebellious Religion* is an important book. It enters the flourishing field of research on religious literature in medieval vernaculars and makes substantial contributions to Hussite studies. Perett uses topical songs to create a coherent narrative for the first time; the entanglement of polemic and catechesis is well demonstrated in Taborite and anti-Taborite compositions, but also in Jan Hus, who emerges less black and white from the discussion than he would seem in the book's pithy conclusion. Against the background of the book's dismissive rhetoric in relation to previous scholarship, its central proposition hardly appears as groundbreaking as advertised because the

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propagandistic function and partisan nature of Hussite literature have been the main points of the current literary-historical paradigm. The subject remains open to further research. Combining Perett's findings with a complex analysis of additional sources from the fifteenth century may result in a comprehensive picture of religious writing for the laity in the Hussite period.

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Jan Hus: The Life and Death of a Preacher. By Pavel Soukup. West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2020. Pp. 238. Paper $49.99. ISBN 978-1557538765.

Pavel Soukup's book is a biography of the late medieval Czech university master and popular preacher, probably best known for being condemned at the Council of Constance and burned at the stake as a heretic in 1415. Originally written in German and published by W. Kohlhammer Press in Stuttgart in 2014, this slender book aims to "reduce Hus to his proper, original environs" (ix). The result is a scholarly yet highly readable account of Jan Hus's career and thought understood in the context of early fifteenth-century Prague. As told by Soukup, it is a tragic story of a saintly man overcome by ecclesiastical authorities, in whose efficacy he had long since lost faith.

Soukup frames the entire biography as a search to uncover the reasons behind Hus's conviction by the council, bookending the narrative with chapters about the trial proceedings at Constance and Hus's experience there (chapters 1 and 15). In order to understand Hus's death, the author looks to the society in which Hus lived for answers. He concludes that, within the milieu of the fifteenth-century church, scarred as it was by the Great Schism and the specter of John Wyclif's heresy, "the conflict between [Hus] and the representatives of ecclesiastical power was inevitable" (165). Faced with such powerful opponents, Hus was doomed no matter what.

Instead of choosing between a thematic and a chronological approach to the narrative, the author tries to do both. After a brief biography (chapter 3), he explores different aspects of Hus's career. Each of these becomes a thematic exploration of a different moment in Hus's life, such as his tenure at the Bethlehem Chapel (chapters 4, 10, and 11), his role at the synods of the church (chapter 6), his career at Prague University (chapters 7 and 8), his run-ins with the church authorities (chapters 5, 9, 12, and 15), and his academic and vernacular writings (chapters 13 and 14). In addition to biographical details, there are forays into political maneuvering at the university in Prague, effects of the papal schism, late medieval ecclesiology, and medieval reform in the church as a whole and in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Bohemia specifically, to name just a few topics covered. Each foray is brief, evokes the big picture, and contains a helpful bibliography. But this approach makes for difficult reading at times as details of this or that late medieval institution or development distract from the basic trajectory of Hus's life.

The author's compassion—even admiration—for Hus and his steadfastness in the face of bureaucratic cruelty is in evidence throughout. And while admiring a fine man is a fine thing, it can be problematic should admiration drive the interpretation as it sometimes does here.

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