The Passion of Dolssa

Rachel Wadham
Botille is satisfied helping her sisters run their tavern, until she finds a girl dying on the side of the road. Moved with compassion, Botille rescues Dolssa even though she is fleeing the Church that has branded her a heretic. Keeping Dolssa safe from prying eyes is a challenge, but when miracles of healing spread through the town they can’t hide Dolssa’s real power. It’s soon clear that Dolssa’s presence has put the whole town in danger until they commit to renounce the heretic and repent. Unable to do anything but support Dolssa, Botille and her family find they must make difficult choices that could force them to lose everything.

Framed as a hidden record recently revealed, Berry creates a rich novel that delves into the world of female mystics and the inquisition. The setting of 12th-century France is emphasized by the stories shifting viewpoints which reveal the plot from the main characters’ views along with a number of supporting and minor characters weighing in. Some of the language use and tone tends to the modern, but the integration of select foreign phrases adds to the historical context. The ambiguity in the ending may be unsettling to some readers even though it adds greatly to the mysterious context that Berry has built. With much to say about the role of faith, family, and religion in the lives of women, this novel is a unique addition to the cannon that will appeal to devotees of vibrant historical fiction.

*Contains mild yet frank depictions of violence and human sexuality in a historical context.*