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Article abstract

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A Love That Reforms: Improving Gender Relations by Contesting Typologies of Women in *La Comédie de Mont-de-Marsan* and *L'Heptaméron* 10 and 42

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This article examines how two texts by Marguerite de Navarre contest the tendency in courtly and ecclesiastical literature to reduce women to typologies based on sexuality, spirituality, and notions of virtue. In place of simplified typologies, Marguerite's writings can be read as depicting women's multidimensional personhood as they strive to live out a sincere Christian faith in a society that fixates on their sexuality. Ultimately, this study argues that when read together, La Comédie de Mont-de-Marsan and L'Heptaméron 10 and 42 suggest the need for women to develop a practical brand of Christian wisdom that will help them to reform both gender relations and patriarchal institutions, thereby replacing misogynistic discourses and behavioural patterns with respect for women's humanity.

Cet article examine deux textes de Marguerite de Navarre qui contestent la tendance dans la littérature courtoise et ecclésiastique à réduire les femmes à des typologies basées sur la spiritualité, la sexualité, et des notions de vertu. Au lieu de proposer des typologies simplifiées, les œuvres de Marguerite peuvent être interprétées comme dépeignant l'humanité multidimensionnelle des femmes à travers l'effort de celles-ci de vivre en tant que chrétiennes sincères dans une société qui met au premier plan leur sexualité. Placées côte à côte, La Comédie de Mont-de-Marsan et L'Heptaméron 10 et 42 suggèrent que les femmes doivent développer une sorte de sagesse chrétienne pratique afin de réformer non seulement le rapport entre les hommes et les femmes, mais aussi les institutions patriarcales, remplaçant ainsi des discours et des comportements misogynes par un respect pour l'humanité des femmes.

From the twentieth century to the present day, gender, religion, and courtly life have emerged as major motifs in Marguerite de Navarre criticism. Scholars working on these topics have voiced diverging opinions about the extent to which the queen's writings might be said to take a particular interest in redressing abuses against women in religious and courtly contexts.¹ In

1. While Gérard Defaux has argued in "Marguerite de Navarre et la guerre des sexes: *Heptaméron*, première journée," *French Forum* 24.2 (1999): 133–61 and "De la Bonne Nouvelle aux nouvelles: Remarques sur la structure de *L'Heptaméron*," *French Forum* 27.1 (2002): 23–43 that the *Heptaméron*'s structure prompts readers to move beyond the battle of the sexes to questions of faith, other critics consider gender relations central to Marguerite's writings. See Patricia Cholakian, *Rape and Writing*

turn, critics have analyzed the ambiguity that results from these differing viewpoints and have asked whether Marguerite's writings can be thought to endorse any one outlook.² Much like the *Heptaméron's* *devisants*, readers face the formidable task of finding meaning in a corpus that reflects a variety of ideological influences.

This polyvalence can be understood as stemming in part from what Jonathan Culler considers one of literature's key characteristics: its capacity to function as a space that both transmits and challenges ideologies.³ If we approach Marguerite's writings as spaces of analysis that work through discourses on topics such as gender, religion, and the court, we may find hints as to how the position of simultaneous privilege and oppression in which the queen found herself may have coloured her texts' treatment of women and institutions.⁴

in the *Heptaméron* of Marguerite de Navarre (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991); Carla Freccero, "Rape's Disfiguring Figures: Marguerite de Navarre's *Heptameron*, Day 1:10," in *Rape and Representation*, ed. Lynn A. Higgins and Brenda R. Silver (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 227–47; Gary Ferguson, "Gendered Oppositions in Marguerite de Navarre's *Heptameron*: The Rhetoric of Seduction and Resistance in Narrative and Society," in *Renaissance Women Writers: French Texts/American Contexts*, ed. Anne Larsen and Colette Winn (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1994), 143–59; Judy Kem, "Fatal Lovesickness in Marguerite de Navarre's *Heptaméron*," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 41.2 (2010): 355–70; and Pollie Bromilow, *Models of Women in Sixteenth-Century French Literature: Female Exemplarity in the Histoires Tragiques (1559) and the Heptaméron (1559)* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 2007).

2. For analyses of ambiguity in the queen's writings, see Marcel Tetel, *Marguerite de Navarre's Heptameron: Themes, Language, and Structure* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1973); John D. Lyons, *Exemplum: The Rhetoric of Example in Early Modern France and Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), and Michel Jeanneret, "Modular Narrative and the Crisis of Interpretation," in *Critical Tales: New Studies of the Heptameron and Early Modern Culture*, ed. John D. Lyons and Mary B. McKinley (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 85–103.

3. In the epigraph to her article on female infidelity in the *Heptaméron*, Nancy Frelick pinpoints this dynamic via a quote from Jonathan Culler's *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997): "Both claims are thoroughly plausible: that literature is the vehicle of ideology and that literature is the instrument for its undoing." In Nancy Frelick, "Female Infidelity: Ideology, Subversion, and Feminist Practice in Marguerite de Navarre's *Heptaméron*," *Dalhousie French Studies* 56 (2001): 17–26, 17.

4. Elizabeth Chesney Zegura contends that the *Heptaméron* reveals Marguerite's awareness of injustices surrounding gender and class, despite her relative privilege: "Marguerite's heterogeneous perspectives and experiences—as a privileged, yet oftentimes disempowered, woman—can offer a useful context for studying the shifting gaze(s) within her text." In Elizabeth Chesney Zegura, *Marguerite de Navarre's*

After all, as sister to François I, Marguerite de Navarre enjoyed economic and social privilege, as well as proximity to—and a measure of influence within—religious and courtly *milieux*. At the same time, as a woman who lived and wrote at the nexus of male-dominated institutions, Marguerite was positioned to perceive the injustices that each institution perpetrated against women through misogynistic discourses and the subsequent embedding of misogyny into real-world interactions.

Although the queen's writings acknowledge the reality of patriarchal abuse, there are also moments in which her texts appear to envision new possibilities for women.⁵ In this study, I will analyze several such moments to investigate not only how Marguerite's works dissect social phenomena, but also how they might imagine ways in which to alter them, such that both men and the institutions they dominated might come to recognize and respect women's full-fledged humanity. In proposing this analysis, I seek to build upon recent studies that have examined how the queen's writings work through and contribute to the domains of politics and religion.⁶ Rather than privilege gender over spirituality or vice versa, I will examine how the convergence of the two in certain of Marguerite's works suggests new strategies for women to contest misogynist abuses and to effect positive change.

Shifting Gaze: Perspectives on Gender, Class, and Politics in the Heptaméron (New York: Routledge, 2017), 5.

5. "Indeed, the *Heptaméron*, which portrays the unequal relationship between men and women, can be said to reproduce the discourses of patriarchy and hence help to preserve the status quo. Yet, there are stories in the work in which female characters appear to subvert the system. If one looks at those stories, the sixteenth-century text can seem quite revolutionary" (Frelick, "Female Infidelity," 18).

6. For analyses of how Marguerite's works engage with courtly politics and the misogynist abuses perpetrated by political institutions, see Zegura, *Marguerite de Navarre's Shifting Gaze*; Barbara Stephenson, *The Power and Patronage of Marguerite de Navarre* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), and Cholakian, *Rape and Writing*. Studies that discuss how the queen's writings disseminate religious ideologies include Jonathan Reid, *King's Sister—Queen of Dissent: Marguerite of Navarre (1492–1549) and her Evangelical Network* (Leiden: Brill, 2009); Carol Thysell, *The Pleasure of Discernment: Marguerite de Navarre as Theologian*, Oxford Studies in Historical Theology (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Nicolas Le Cadet, *L'Évangélisme fictionnel: Les Livres rabelaisiens, le Cymbalum Mundi, L'Heptaméron (1532–1552)* (Paris: Éditions Classiques Garnier, 2010); and Catharine Randall, *Earthly Treasures: Material Culture and Metaphysics in the Heptaméron and Evangelical Narrative* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2007).

To pursue this line of inquiry, I analyze the interplay between gender and genre in two of Marguerite's texts, which contest the misogynistic tendency in courtly and ecclesiastical literature to reduce women to typologies based on sexuality, spirituality, and notions of virtue. The first text, *La Comédie de Mont-de-Marsan*, foregrounds women's experiences of spirituality while also developing a commentary on sexuality.⁷ The second text, *L'Heptaméron* (specifically, tales 10 and 42, which Parlamente contrasts with one another in her narrative commentary),⁸ brings women's experiences of court culture to the fore even as it also considers spirituality. These two texts were both written at the end of the queen's life, when her reflections on women and institutions had reached their fullest maturity.⁹ I argue that these works oppose the reduction of women to typologies by illustrating the complex humanity of female protagonists who struggle to live out a sincere, Christian faith in a society that fixates on their sexuality. I also contend that both *Mont-de-Marsan*

7. Régine Reynolds-Cornell explains that although *Mont-de-Marsan* has often been considered a part of Marguerite's "théâtre profane," following V. L. Saulnier's terminology in his 1946 edition of the queen's plays, *Théâtre profane* (Paris: Droz, 1946), its evangelizing message is the same as that of her *Comédies bibliques*, whose titles contain religious allusions. See Régine Reynolds-Cornell, "Comédies bibliques, comédies profanes de Marguerite de Navarre: Deux faces d'un Janus évangélique," *Renaissance and Reformation* 26.4 (2002): 11–31, 15. Jelle Koopmans likewise questions the labelling of Marguerite's plays as "secular" or "religious," in "L'allégorie théâtrale au début du seizième siècle: Le cas des pièces 'profanes' de Marguerite de Navarre," *Renaissance and Reformation* 26.4 (2002): 65–89, 73.

8. Parlamente's intertextual linking of tales 10 and 42 has its origins in the tale 10 debate, during which Longarine locates virtue in a person's conscience, while Saffredent implies that a benevolent appearance can facilitate vice: "[d]e bien server et loyal estre, de serviteur on devient maistre" (153). Parlamente cites Saffredent's assertion explicitly when she delivers the moral to tale 42: "Que dirons-nous icy, mes dames? Avons nous le cueur si bas que nous facions noz serviteurs, noz maistres?" (536). Citations from the *Heptaméron* refer to the 2013 edition by Nicole Cazauran and Sylvie Lefèvre (hereafter cited in the text). Marguerite de Navarre, *Œuvres complètes. L'Heptaméron*, 3 vols. (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2013).

9. Earlier texts by Marguerite also grapple with women's relationship to religious and aristocratic discourses through meditations on Christian spirituality and gender relations at court. See for example *Dialogue en forme de vision nocturne* (1524), *Le Miroir de l'âme pécheresse* (1531), *La Coche* (1541), and *La Comédie des quatre femmes* (1542). The present analysis will examine two of her later works to consider her most mature reflections on spirituality and gender relations and to determine how these topics implicate institutions in addition to the ideologies of love that the following critics have analyzed: Lucien Febvre, *Amour sacré, amour profane: Autour de l'Heptaméron* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1944); Christine Martineau, "Le Platonisme de Marguerite de Navarre," *Bulletin de l'Association d'étude sur l'humanisme, la réforme et la renaissance* 4.1 (1976): 12–35; and Tetel, *Marguerite de Navarre's Heptameron*.

and *Heptaméron* 10 and 42 suggest the need for women to develop a practical brand of Christian wisdom that enables them to persuade men of their shared and equal humanity with women while also teaching both sexes what it means to be “in the world but not of it.”¹⁰ To make this case, I first situate *Mont-de-Marsan* and the *Heptaméron* against the historical backdrop of church reform efforts in France and against the misogynistic literary discourses that reduced women to categorical labels during Marguerite’s lifetime.¹¹ I show that while some of Marguerite’s male contemporaries employed the allegory and *exemplum* genres to produce reductive discourses, *Mont-de-Marsan* and *Heptaméron* 10 and 42 manipulate the same genres to demonstrate their female characters’ multidimensional personhood and suggest women’s potential to effect relational and institutional reform.

1. From the Reformation to the reform of literary discourses about women

The problem of institutional reform and its connections to women’s full-fledged humanity in *Mont-de-Marsan* and the *Heptaméron* occurs against the real-world, historical backdrop of the Reformation. While a full accounting of doctrinal distinctions between orthodox Catholicism and various reform-oriented movements is beyond the scope of this study, some key historical and ideological points will provide useful context for an analysis of Marguerite’s challenge to literary currents that assigned simplistic labels to women.¹²

Turning, then, to the Reformation, many critics have explored how Marguerite de Navarre employed her political influence as sister to François I

10. John 17:14–16: “I have given them thy word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I do not pray that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world.” All biblical citations refer to *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha*, ed. Herbert G. May and Bruce M. Metzger (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977).

11. In this study, the word “church” takes on two different meanings depending on context. In some instances, especially those that foreground historical reform efforts, the term points toward the Catholic Church as an institution. In other instances, “church” means “a community of Christians,” whether locally or globally. This second meaning occurs most often when discussing the metaphor of Christ and the church in scripture or characters who can be read as forming a Christian community.

12. The present study does not aim to analyze specific categories of women in male-authored literary texts, but rather to examine the reductionist act of creating typologies and the implications of that act for women.

to garner support for non-schismatic church reform.¹³ From the early years of François I's reign to the *affaire des placards* (1534) and beyond, religious reformers in France who derived inspiration from Martin Luther's 95 *Theses* (1517) held out varying degrees of hope that the French monarchy would support church reform. One important reformist movement, the *cercle de Meaux*, emerged in 1521 when bishop Guillaume Briçonnet assembled a group that critics have called *les évangéliques* and enlisted Marguerite's support for efforts to bring religious doctrine and practice more closely in line with the gospel while rejecting schism with the Catholic Church.¹⁴

Although the king was initially tolerant toward the group, he adopted a less lenient stance following the *affaire des placards*, as evidenced by initial reprisals in 1534 against reform-minded individuals, some of whom had connections to the queen of Navarre.¹⁵ Critics have often interpreted this shift as evidence that the *évangéliques*' activities and influence waned after 1534;¹⁶ however, Jonathan

13. The desire for non-schismatic reform was not limited to the French context. As Konrad Eisenbichler explains, a non-schismatic reform movement called the *Spirituali* existed in Italy in the 1530s and 1540s, and its influence can be seen in the writings of several female poets of the period. See Konrad Eisenbichler, *The Sword and the Pen: Women, Politics, and Poetry in Sixteenth-Century Siena* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012), 36. Torrance Kirby adds that moderate, evangelical reform movements existed in England during the 1530s, as well, and compares the English monarchy's response to reformist initiatives with those of François I, in "Emerging Publics of Religious Reform in the 1530s: The Affair of the Placards and Antoine de Marcourt's *Livre des marchans*," in *Making Publics in Early Modern Europe: People, Things, Forms of Knowledge*, ed. Bronwen Wilson and Paul Yachnin (New York: Routledge, 2010), 37–52, 45.

14. Reid explains that Briçonnet began planning his reform program in 1518 but encountered resistance among the clergy and therefore decided to bring together figures such as Lefèvre d'Étaples, Michel d'Arande, Guillaume Farel, Gérard Roussel, Pierre Caroli, Martial Mazurier, and François Vatable to help him implement his ideas (Reid, 20). Reid also explains that the group's main goal was to promote the gospel and that their "preeminent champion" was Marguerite de Navarre (Reid, 35–36). Thysell adds that the queen's works testify to her belief in "justification by faith through grace, the priesthood of all believers, and the freedom of the Christian conscience in matters of external rituals, works, and institutional structures" (Thysell, 8).

15. Zegura notes that Clément Marot sought asylum at Nérac and that Antoine Augereau, "publisher of the second edition of *Le Miroir de l'âme pécheresse*," was burned at the stake; Pierre Caroli and Gérard Roussel were tried for reformist sympathies (Zegura, 48).

16. Reid asserts that many critics have accepted the idea, advanced by Pierre Jourda in *Marguerite d'Angoulême, duchesse d'Alençon, reine de Navarre (1492–1549): Étude biographique et littéraire* (Paris: Champion, 1930), that the queen's influence decreased after the scandal (Reid, 498).

Reid, Barbara Stephenson, Carol Thysell, Nicolas Le Cadet, and Catharine Randall argue that Marguerite de Navarre continued to work strategically for the evangelical cause behind the scenes, whether through diplomatic relations or through her literary output.¹⁷ Indeed, it was during the 1540s that Marguerite wrote the *Comédie de Mont-de-Marsan* and the *Heptaméron*, both of which represent women and institutions in such a way as to suggest that institutional reform may have continued to preoccupy the queen until her death. Given the environment of political and religious tension following both the *affaire des placards* and the Sorbonne's condemnation in 1533 of *Le Miroir de l'âme pécheresse*, the queen could not have written explicitly about why or how to reform the church or court culture, nor about women's potential role in reform efforts. Nevertheless, *Mont-de-Marsan* and certain intertextually connected tales in the *Heptaméron* can be read as challenging the idea that women can be classified according to sexuality, spirituality, and concepts of virtue.

Such patriarchal classifications can be understood as stemming from the fact that the church and aristocracy could only perpetuate themselves by imposing on women two sexual states that entered into religious discourse: chastity and marriage. Before marriage, women needed to remain chaste to show respect toward their families' choice of partner. By accepting said partner, they displayed selfless obedience to the social order and its institutions, whereas resisting could mark them as selfish and worldly.¹⁸ Once married, women

17. Stephenson contends that Marguerite "remained as powerful on her return to court in 1535 as she had been before *l'affaire* took place" (Stephenson, 8). Reid likewise argues that evangelicals, including Marguerite, continued to promote reform through diplomacy during the 1540s (Reid, 499–500). He adds that "evangelical writing took a literary turn" during this time (31). As such, Thysell views the *Heptaméron* as Marguerite's response to Calvin's "Against the Spiritual Libertines" (Thysell, 9–10). Le Cadet also considers the *Heptaméron* an evangelical text (Le Cadet, 413). Finally, Randall contends that the *Heptaméron's* treatment of material objects reveals its evangelical underpinnings (Randall, 5).

18. We see an example of this dynamic in *Heptaméron* 21, which recounts the clandestine marriage of Rolandine, an aristocratic woman whose family neglects to find her a spouse. Rolandine suffers disappointment when her secret husband proves unfaithful and then dies. However, she finds well-being when her father proposes a marriage that both she and her family find agreeable. The tale can thus be read as highlighting the mutual obligations of family members to one another in the marriage scenario, a message that finds particular significance against the backdrop of the Council of Trent, which broached the topic of matrimonial reform. See Reinier Leushuis, "*La Chatelaine de Vergy* comme histoire tragique matrimoniale: De Marguerite de Navarre (1558) à Bandello (1573) et *Le sixiesme tome des histoires tragiques* (1582)," *Renaissance and Reformation* 32.2 (2009): 5–31, 6–7.

had to remain faithful to their husbands to guarantee the line of succession. Whether during marriage or beforehand, then, women who demonstrated selfless obedience could subsume their sexual role under an overarching spiritual identity founded on Christian altruism. Regardless of whether they succeeded or failed in this venture, women's perceived virtue resulted from an amalgamation of sexual and spiritual considerations.

One notable courtly trend that treats this dynamic, and with which Marguerite's final writings engaged, derived inspiration from new translations of texts by Italian writers such as Boccaccio and Castiglione.¹⁹ Indeed, French versions of Boccaccio's *Decameron* (1349–52) and Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier* (1528) prompted the *Querelle des amyes*, in which four male writers of Marguerite's court, Antoine Héroët, Charles Fontaine, Bertrand de la Borderie, and Paul Angier, responded to Castiglione's formulation of the ideal noblewoman via portraits of love-struck ladies.²⁰ As a courtly literary debate that engaged with a Christianized form of Neoplatonism, the *Querelle des amyes* analyzed female characters' sexuality and spirituality to produce discourses on virtue.²¹ Critics have not always agreed about which female characters readers should

19. A French translation of Boccaccio's *Decameron* appeared in 1545 (Antoine Le Maçon's edition replaced the 1485 text attributed to Laurent de Premierfait). See Ferguson and McKinley, "The *Heptaméron*: Word, Spirit, World," in *A Companion to Marguerite de Navarre* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 323–37; see pp. 14 and 324 for the above publication dates. Jacques Colin translated Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier* into French in 1537; see Régine Reynolds, "L'*Heptaméron* de Marguerite de Navarre: Influence de Castiglione," *Studi di Letteratura Francese* 5 (1979): 25–40, 39.

20. Wayne A. Rebhorn proposes 1349–52 as the date range in which Boccaccio composed the *Decameron*; see Rebhorn's "Introduction," *The Decameron*, trans. Wayne A. Rebhorn (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2013), xxix. The publication date for the Italian text of Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier* is 1528. The following titles from the *Querelle des amyes* were published together in 1547: Borderie's *L'Amie de court*, Fontaine's *La Contr'ameye de court*, Angier's *L'expérience de l'ameye de court contre la contre amye*, and Antoine Héroët's *La Parfaicte Amye* (Ferguson and McKinley, 342).

21. Critics have considered to what extent the *Querelle des amyes*' various texts criticize or champion women's behaviour toward men, as well as Ficinian Neoplatonism; however, there seems to be agreement that questions of virtue inform the *Querelle*'s treatment of women, sexuality, and spirituality (in this case, a Christianized brand of Neoplatonism.) See, for example, Emile Telle, *L'Œuvre de Marguerite d'Angoulême, reine de Navarre, et la querelle des femmes* (Toulouse: Imprimerie Toulousaine Lion et Fils, 1937); Robert Cottrell, "Le déplacement d'*eros* par *anteros* dans *L'Amie de Court* de La Borderie," in *Anteros*, ed. Ullrich Langer and Jan Miernowski (Orléans: Paradigme, 1994), 117–35; M. A. Screech, "An Interpretation of the *Querelle des Amyes*," *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 21.1 (1959), 103–30; Olivier Pot, "La Parfaicte Amye ou une belle infidèle (Héroët et Ficin)," in *Par élévation d'esprit*, ed.

view as virtuous. They have likewise disagreed over which characters function the most like philosophical abstractions and which ones convey more complex musings on human psychology.²² Ultimately, though, the female characters in the debate bear typological names, such as “L’Amye de Court,” “La Contr’Amye de Court,” and “La Parfaicte Amye.” Such categorical labels invite us to read these female figures as transmitting ideologies about women. Specifically, these labels can be said to frame the characters’ stances as contributing to the development of a Neoplatonic concept of romance called *parfaicte amitié* (perfect friendship), which moved away from the consummation that the courtly love tradition permitted.²³ By employing female figures with categorical labels as instruments in a male-dominated debate, the *Querelle*’s writers elaborated a value system that replaced women’s lived experiences of love with ideologically-based typologies. In response, Marguerite de Navarre’s writings provided a female-authored account of women’s desire and religious devotion that helped counterbalance the androcentric perspective her contemporaries imparted.

The queen’s challenge to male-generated typologies can be read as extending beyond the secular context of the *Querelle des amyes*, however, to implicate religious discourses as well. This second literary trajectory privileged several themes prevalent in the Pauline epistles and in Marguerite’s correspondence with Briçonnet, such as love, wisdom, and folly.²⁴ The Pauline antithesis of wisdom and folly as stated in 1 Corinthians 1:18 and 3:18 shows

André Gendreau and Loris Petris (Paris: Champion, 2007), 271–301; and Jonathan Patterson, *Representing Avarice in Late Renaissance France* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

22. Screech, for instance, views the Parfaicte Amye as displaying greater psychological depth and realism than the other female characters, since she speaks about her personal experience of love (Screech, 118). Cottrell disagrees, instead arguing that the Parfaicte Amye is an abstraction that permits Héroët to develop a discourse in which *anteros* (or reasonable love) replaces *eros* (or carnal love) (Cottrell, 120). Telle sketches out a kind of middle way by implying that the text’s presentation of the Parfaicte Amye’s psychology facilitates the development of a Neoplatonic discourse on love (Telle, 164).

23. The *Heptaméron*’s nineteenth tale describes perfect friendship as a sublimated love that makes virtue its aim. For an in-depth analysis of *parfaicte amitié*, see Ullrich Langer, *Perfect Friendship: Studies in Literature and Moral Philosophy from Boccaccio to Corneille* (Geneva: Droz, 1994), especially pages 115–37, which analyze the notion of perfect friendship in *Heptaméron* 10 against models of male friendship from Antiquity.

24. See Ehsan Ahmed, “Guillaume Briçonnet, Marguerite de Navarre and the Evangelical Critique of Reason,” *Bibliothèque d’Humanisme et Renaissance* 69.3 (2007): 615–25, especially 616–21.

that Christian altruism appears foolish to self-centred sinners, but that to gain true sapience, one must become selfless and thus a fool by earthly standards.²⁵ Both individually and collectively, Christians must therefore choose love for God and others over egotistical self-love.²⁶

Discourses on the Pauline notions of wisdom, folly, and love converge around a female allegorical figure in the work of another of Marguerite's male contemporaries: Erasmus. One of Erasmus's texts that predated the *évangélique* movement, *In Praise of Folly* (1511), serves as a meaningful context for the thinking of such figures as Briçonnet and Marguerite.²⁷ In Erasmus's text, Folly takes the form of a feminized, allegorical figure who blinds human beings to each other's faults, thereby permitting society to function.²⁸ Folly cannot exist apart from egotistical Self-Love (or *Philautia*), her sister and supporter, who "everywhere plays [Folly's] part with fidelity."²⁹ We can read Folly as embodying sinfulness and delusion. At the same time, Folly does not exist only in the form of sinful self-gratification, since as Paul states in 1 Corinthians, spiritual wisdom looks like folly to worldly observers. Erasmus's text thus offers a second context in which to view Folly, one that would inform Marguerite de Navarre's corpus: mysticism. In his text's final pages, Erasmus considers those who lose themselves so fully in loving God and being loved in return that they obtain a

25. Barbara Marczuk likewise considers this reversal of wisdom and folly in her analysis of *folie spirituelle* and *folie-péché* in Marguerite de Navarre's plays, in "'Vrayment voicy de plaisans fous': La folie dans le théâtre profane de Marguerite de Navarre," *Renaissance and Reformation* 26.4 (2002): 33–49, 35.

26. Jacob Vance explains that for the *cercle de Meaux*, self-love "governs the pursuit of all forms of worldly increase. However, they particularly criticized the search for increases in pleasure, profit, and honor." In Jacob Vance, "Humanist Polemics, Christian Morals: A Hypothesis on Marguerite de Navarre's *Heptaméron* and the Problem of Self-Love," *MLN* 120.1 (2005): S181–95, S186.

27. This inspiration makes sense when one considers that, like Marguerite and Briçonnet, Erasmus did not break with the church, despite his criticisms of it. For more on how Erasmus tolerated the church and vice versa, see Hilmar Pabel's "Praise and Blame: Peter Canisius's Ambivalent Assessment of Erasmus," in *The Reception of Erasmus in the Early Modern Period*, ed. Karl A. E. Enenkel (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 129–59.

28. In the foreword to his critical edition of Erasmus's text, Anthony Grafton states that "Folly tricks everyone into seeing nonexistent good qualities in themselves and others. Her magic enables husbands to tolerate wives, wives to tolerate husbands, and teachers to tolerate students. Without Folly, no one could bear his companions, to say nothing of himself." See Erasmus, *The Praise of Folly* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), ix.

29. Erasmus, 29.

foretaste of paradise. The text implies that despite their appearance of madness, such individuals actually represent the highest form of revelation available to human beings on Earth, since “they know one thing, that they were at their happiest while they were thus out of their wits.”³⁰ Mysticism thus encapsulates discourses on foolishness, wisdom, selfishness, and altruistic love, within a female figure with the allegorical title of “Folly.” Although Folly claims to be a woman,³¹ she has no human life experience that would enable her to empathize with the struggles of actual women; instead, she functions as a mouthpiece for a male author’s analyses of an abstract concept and its many facets, both earthly and spiritual.

Marguerite de Navarre provides a woman’s perspective on such feminized figures by drawing on allegory and the *exemplum* in *La Comédie de Mont-de-Marsan* and *L’Heptaméron* to defend and affirm women’s humanity. Specifically, these texts rethink the sexual states of chastity and marriage that the church and aristocracy sought to impose upon women and recast them as sites at which women can effect relational and societal change.³² Such a choice makes sense when one considers that for Marguerite and her contemporaries, the marriage scenario could be said to function as the point at which women’s spirituality and sexuality converged, since women’s attitudes toward marriage or its impossibility could be read as windows into their spiritual outlook. As the next section will show, *Mont-de-Marsan* and the *Heptaméron* enable this spiritual reading of sexual states while also redefining chastity and marriage to highlight the female protagonists’ human struggle to navigate such influences as wisdom, folly, and love on their engagement with institutional reform.

30. Erasmus, 124.

31. Toward the end of her speech, Folly exclaims: “If anything I have said shall seem too saucy or too glib, stop and think: ’tis Folly, and a woman, that has spoken” (Erasmus, 125).

32. See Merry Wiesner-Hanks’s *Christianity and Sexuality in the Early Modern World: Regulating Desire, Reforming Practice* (New York: Routledge, 2000) for analyses of how institutions and social relationships influenced women’s experiences of sexuality, whether through “social discipline” or “confessionalization” (10). For studies of how women’s writings and behaviours encourage a rethinking of social dictates and anxieties surrounding women, such as the admonition to silence or concerns about female rule, see Christina Luckyj, “A moving rhetorick”: *Gender and Silence in Early Modern England* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2002), 1–12, and Anne J. Cruz and Mihoko Suzuki, eds., *The Rule of Women in Early Modern Europe* (Urbana–Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 1–10.

2. Women unbound: the *Comédie de Mont-de-Marsan*

In the *Comédie de Mont-de-Marsan*, several female speakers defend their views on spirituality and material existence. First comes the Mondainne, who loves her body and its pleasures. Next is the Supersticieuse, a devout Catholic who believes in the power of ritualistic religion. She attempts to persuade the Mondainne to abandon her pursuit of material satisfaction and mortify her body instead. When the Sage makes her entrance, she critiques her forerunners' trust in control over the body rather than in salvation by grace. The Sage's authoritative bearing and allusions to scripture convince the Mondainne and the Supersticieuse to follow her and to listen to her Bible-centred interpretations of Christianity. Yet the Sage does not have the last word. The final character to speak is the Ravie de l'amour de Dieu, an ecstatic shepherdess who confounds the other women with her ineffable experience of divine love. The songs she sings in praise of God's love confuse her peers, who believe she is describing an unnamed suitor. The Sage, in particular, finds the Ravie perplexing and labels her foolish because her experience fails to translate into earthly terms.

Numerous scholars have commented on the friction between the Ravie and the Sage and have considered whether one or the other embodies a spiritual ideal founded on the notions of wisdom, folly, and love.³³ What I want to add is a gender-specific analysis of these characters that juxtaposes their status as women with their categorical titles, which invite an allegorical reading of the text.³⁴ In this section, I aim to show how the Mondainne, the Supersticieuse, and the Sage experience spiritual tensions as they seek to be in the world but not of it, and how those tensions force them to negotiate positive and negative spiritual impulses, such as folly, wisdom, egotistical self-love, love for others, and love for God. Although certain impulses might seem to encompass a character's entire spiritual identity—such as wisdom in the context of the

33. See Félix Atance, "Marguerite de Navarre et la Réforme dans *La Comédie de Mont-de-Marsan*," *Bulletin de l'APFUC* (1975): 38–63; Hélène Basso, "La Structure de *La Comédie de Mont-de-Marsan*," *Bulletin de l'Association d'étude sur l'humanisme, la réforme et la renaissance* 49.1 (1999): 37–54; and Nicole Cazauran, "Marguerite de Navarre et le vocabulaire de l'ignorance," in *Du Pô à la Garonne: Recherches sur les échanges culturels entre l'Italie et la France à la Renaissance*, ed. Jean Cubelier de Beynac and Michel Simonin (Agen: Centre Matteo Bandello, 1990), 231–52.

34. I call the characters' titles "categorical" rather than "allegorical" because as Koopmans observes, a character may invite an allegorical reading of a text without having an allegorical name (Koopmans, 74).

Sage—each character’s words and actions actually demonstrate the influence of multiple impulses on her spiritual state.³⁵ As such, no character can be reduced to a single essence. Instead, the Sage, the Supersticieuse, and the Mondainne exceed the boundaries that their names attempt to impose upon them and thus demonstrate the complex humanity of Christian women in the world. In contrast, the Ravie’s spiritual cohesion and fulfillment of her title mark her as an otherworldly ideal. When read alongside one another, these four characters reveal the need for a practical Christian wisdom that will enable women to live out their faith in the world.

Two characters who demonstrate their concern for lived experience, and especially the role of the body in Christian life, are the Mondainne and the Supersticieuse. Although both fixate on the body, they do so for different reasons. The Mondainne seeks physical gratification and fears pain. Her consciousness merges with her body to the point of excluding spiritual reflection, at least at the beginning of the play. She demonstrates through her reduction of life to material existence that worldly folly and self-love colour her perspective. However, when the Mondainne meets the Sage later in the play, she repents of her hedonism and seeks earnestly after God, as her enthusiasm in receiving a copy of the Bible attests: “Puis qu’il vous plaist de le me dire, / Incessamment je le veux lire / Pour y chercher mon sauvement” (381–83).³⁶ By accepting the Sage’s teaching, she engages in a process of spiritual navigation that permits change and growth. She decides to pursue spiritual wisdom and learn more about the divine love that has pardoned her previous sins, and elects a path of spiritual instruction that contradicts her name.

Like the Mondainne, the Supersticieuse negotiates positive and negative spiritual impulses as she seeks to understand the role of the body in Christian life. Although the Supersticieuse affirms her eagerness to please God, as one might expect an ardent observer of religious rituals to do, she also echoes the Mondainne’s interest in the flesh by insisting that in mortifying the body

35. In making this case, I aim to build upon Scott Francis’s assertion that critics should not read the Sage as an embodiment of pure wisdom or consider the characters mere allegories. Scott Francis, “Guéris-toi toi-même: La réflexivité du jugement dans *La Comédie de Mont-de-Marsan* de Marguerite de Navarre,” *Nottingham French Studies* 51.2 (2012): 125–35, 128.

36. Citations from the *Comédie de Mont-de-Marsan* refer to the edition by Geneviève Hasenohr and Olivier Millet under the direction of Nicole Cazauran: Marguerite de Navarre, *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 4 (Paris: Champion, 2002).

through penance and self-denial, she can earn salvation: “Car je n’ayme riens que mon ame / Et ne veulx, sinon la saulver. / Et pour la rendre necte et pure, / Mal et peine en mon corps j’endure, / Pour ma vertu mieulx esprouver” (220–24). The Supersticieuse’s claim that salvation depends upon the body reveals that her vision of Christianity remains rooted in the material world. This focus on material existence renders her foolish, first because it replaces grace with earthly circumstances that she can control and second because making this exchange enables her to glorify herself rather than God, a gesture that reveals her self-love. Moreover, the foolish, worldly pride that the Supersticieuse exhibits—known as *cuyder* in the queen’s lexicon—prevents her from loving others well.³⁷ Even as the Supersticieuse expresses supposed concern for the Mondainne’s lifestyle and attempts to convert her to a ritualistic form of Christianity, she communicates a judgmental attitude that stems from her mistaken equation of God with wrath. Yet despite her flawed understanding of Christianity and her foolish self-love, the Supersticieuse eventually takes the Bible that the Sage offers her and agrees to read it, since even if she does not feel herself to be spiritually ill, she has begun to trust the Sage’s instruction and wants to please her: “Bien que malade ne me sens, / Toutesfoys à vous me consens” (558–59). Through a process of navigating spiritual influences, the Supersticieuse expresses openness toward a new understanding of Christianity based on exegesis rather than superstition. In so doing, she surpasses the bounds of her typological title.

The catalyst behind the unbinding of the Supersticieuse and the Mondainne is the Sage, whose well-reasoned arguments might appear, at first blush, to confirm her title. The Sage’s initial remarks convey praise for reason, a capacity that she considers a divine gift capable of revealing celestial insights to human beings. Through her citation of scripture, the Sage frames herself as a learned exegete who can access spiritual truth through her mind alone. In placing excessive faith in her intellect, the Sage demonstrates that she suffers from the same *cuyder* as those she converts. Like the Supersticieuse and the Mondainne, she ends up worshipping herself, and more specifically, her limited, human ability to understand scripture. She thereby reveals her self-love and foolishness even as she seeks to convince others of her perspective.

Indeed, the Sage’s failure to attain true spiritual wisdom becomes evident when she encounters the Ravie, whose mystical musings elude the grasp of

37. See Marczuk, 39–42, for a discussion of *cuyder*, wisdom, and folly in *Mont-de-Marsan*.

reason. On one level, we could interpret the *malentendu* between the Ravie and the other characters as deriving from the rejection of passionate, romantic love that the Sage and her followers believe essential to their spiritual life. Yet, these three characters do not only express disapproval of the Ravie's amorous songs, they also complain that they cannot understand what she is saying. Their lack of comprehension implies that they have never experienced divine love. At best, they possess a limited knowledge of God, which they derive from reliance on human practices and abilities that remain tainted by self-love. Within the context of the scriptures that the Sage and her followers cherish, those who boast spiritual gifts and insights, but who do not love, have nothing.³⁸ Failing to understand this, the Sage insults the Ravie and storms off with her converts, thus depriving herself and her companions of divine revelation. In this way, the Sage falls short of exhibiting sufficient love for God and others, even though she expresses her desire to love well through her study of scripture and her discussions with her peers.

While these three characters frustrate typologies, the Ravie fulfills her label and thereby identifies herself as an abstract spiritual ideal. Although her interlocutors find her unworldly persona perplexing and call her foolish, from a Christian perspective, the Ravie represents spiritual wisdom, since she has forgone the world in favour of the spirit. She experiences none of the tensions between spirit and materiality that the others face. Instead, like Paul, she has been "caught up into Paradise," and therefore states, "Mon corps ne sens ny n'ayme poinct" (858).³⁹ In making this statement, the Ravie confirms, as her name suggests, that her soul has been transported to a spiritual realm and has taken her consciousness with it. She therefore ceases to experience the union of body and spirit, as well as the resulting capacity for meaningful action that the Sage identifies as essential to human life.⁴⁰ In defining herself as pure spirit, the Ravie leaves human existence behind to become a spiritual ideal.

38. See 1 Cor. 13:1–3. The Ravie alludes to the spiritual lack her peers experience, as well as her own fulfillment in divine love, when she says, "Vous qui estes ignorantes / Que c'est que la ferme foy: / O combien seriez contantes / Sy le saviez comme moy!" (692–95).

39. For the biblical allusion, see 2 Corinthians 12:2–4.

40. "Corps sans ames sont cadavers, / Charongnes pour nourrir les vers, / Qui de l'homme n'ont nul effect; / L'ame sans corps ne peult veoir / Et des euvres pert le pouvoir, / Dont elle n'est l'homme parfait. / Mais l'ame au corps joincte et unie, / C'est l'homme" (315–22).

Since the Ravie is neither in the world nor of it, she cannot reflect or relate to women's lived experiences. Her inability to relate to the Mondainne, the Supersticieuse, and the Sage becomes apparent when these three characters fail to comprehend her attempt to convey her elation by transposing it onto the earthly scenario of romantic love. To her credit, the Mondainne is the only one of the three characters to identify, on a literal level, with the Ravie's words and to wonder whether they might prove meaningful.⁴¹ The Mondainne thus identifies a tacit link between earthly and ethereal experiences of love, even if she and her peers remain unable to grasp the Ravie's allusions to the recurring metaphor of marriage in scripture, which describes God's relationship to the Israelites in the Song of Solomon and Hosea, as well as Christ's relationship to the church—in the sense of a community of believers—in Ephesians and Revelation.⁴² The marriage metaphor set forth in these texts figures God's love and fidelity toward His chosen people. In the Old Testament book of Hosea, God's faithfulness stands in stark contrast to the betrayal of the Israelites, who have committed adultery on a symbolic level by worshipping other gods.⁴³ In the Christian tradition, God's faithfulness as a metaphorical husband to the church extends even further through Christ's atoning sacrifice, which restores the believer to God. What the Ravie illustrates, then, is the effusive joy of a saved church, or "bride of Christ" in Paul's terminology, that has been pardoned. Like the female speaker in the Song of Solomon, who praises her beloved—a shepherd—Marguerite de Navarre's enraptured shepherdess praises the Good Shepherd.

In theory, the Sage, Mondainne, and Supersticieuse should comprehend the scriptural allusions the Ravie makes when she refers to her Beloved, since

41. After the Mondainne asks "Nous direz vous nulle parole ? / Au moins pour l'amour de l'amy, / Dictes nous ung mot ou demy," the Ravie begins speaking directly to the other characters, who were about to leave her but who come back and attempt to converse with her one more time (711–13).

42. Hosea takes back his adulterous wife as a public display of the mercy God will have on the Israelites despite their idolatry; see R. Lansing Hicks, "The Book of Hosea," in *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha*, ed. Herbert G. May and Bruce M. Metzger (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 1088. The Song of Solomon has been read in conjunction with Hosea as a marriage metaphor that describes God's relationship to His chosen people. Within the Christian tradition, this book has been interpreted as representing Christ and the church. R. B. Y. Scott, "The Song of Solomon," in *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 815. Revelation describes the church as "a bride adorned for her husband" (Rev. 21:2), and Ephesians describes Christ's self-sacrifice and the church's reverence of him via a marriage metaphor (Eph. 5:22–33).

43. See Hosea 2:16–20.

the Sage bills herself as an enlightened exegete and has begun to instruct her converts in the Bible when the Ravie appears on the scene. The Sage had even mentioned the analogy of God as husband earlier in the play when she asked the Supersticieuse, “Le vray mary, le Dieu puissant, / Ne l’allez vous pas delaissant, / Mectant en autre vostre appuy?” (516–18). Still, the Sage, Mondainne, and Supersticieuse remain baffled by the Ravie’s words. Despite their joint focus on the Bible, these characters cannot access divine revelation, since they view God as a concept rather than an experience of love.⁴⁴

The Ravie, however, emulates Erasmus’s mystic from *In Praise of Folly* by equating the selfless love of God with revelation, such that love becomes true wisdom. As she explains to the Sage, “Je ne sçay rien sinon aimer. / Ce sçavoir là est mon estude” (819–20). Through this statement, the *Ravie* shows that she considers divine love true wisdom and values love for God above all else. In this, she embodies the first great commandment that Jesus identifies: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.”⁴⁵

The Ravie’s experience of divine love is ineffably powerful for her, personally, and while she cannot be blamed for being caught up in it, the text does imply that it would be best if others could, like her, have some firsthand experience of God as love, even if not in quite so mystical a sense. Indeed, the text suggests that ideally, the Ravie should help others come closer to her experience of God, since she identifies herself as a shepherdess and explains to the other women that her goal is to watch over her sheep: “Je garde mes brebiettes” (610). To communicate effectively with her “sheep,” which could include the other female characters, the Ravie would need to be in the world with them, but not of the world, as they are. As it happens, she is neither of the world nor in it. To complicate the situation further, her potential *briebiettes* continue to struggle with self-love as they seek to draw nearer to the Almighty. A chasm thus widens between two perspectives: one based on (disguised) self-reliance in the world and the other based on an otherworldly absorption in the divine. Of the two, only the first perspective—however flawed—permits meaningful action. As a result, the Sage, who has retained the power of action

44. The Ravie makes this clear when she says to her three interlocutors, “Vostre amour froide et lante / N’entend point ce secret” (934–35).

45. See Matthew 22:37.

along with her unified body and spirit, usurps the role that the Ravie might have filled. At the end of the play, the Ravie stands alone as the Sage leads the others offstage and into society, where she will transmit to her students the same worldly perspective that she projects.

Through this unsatisfactory ending, *Mont-de-Marsan* suggests the need to create effectual Christian leadership by reconciling ethereal ideals with earthly realities. An effective spiritual guide would need to combine the Sage's plain-spokenness and sociability with the Ravie's experience of wisdom as self-sacrificing love. She would also need to acknowledge the interactions between earthly love and *agape*, since like the Mondainne, women in the world may encounter both and therefore require the spiritual wisdom to negotiate them. To consider how women might develop such a Christlike wisdom and implement it in the world, I turn now to the *Heptaméron*, which invites fruitful comparisons with *Mont-de-Marsan* through its promise to illustrate women's lived realities using the *exemplum* genre.

While Edwin Duval has argued that the *Heptaméron*'s male and female storytellers form a community of believers, and thus a church, critics have yet to consider how female figures—both the *devisantes* and their heroines—might emulate Oisille in adopting instructional roles that foster institutional church reform.⁴⁶ I argue that Parlamente, who views Oisille as a mother figure and so implies a certain appreciation for the older woman's instructional role,⁴⁷ provides insights into how women might address gender-based injustices

46. See Edwin Duval, "Et puis, quelles nouvelles?": The Project of Marguerite's Unfinished Decameron," in *Critical Tales: New Studies of the Heptameron and Early Modern Culture*, ed. John D. Lyons and Mary B. McKinley (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), 241–62, in which Duval argues that the group forms a church "founded on a spiritual consensus greater than any of their particular disagreements" (255). One notes, however, that the storytellers demonstrate varying levels of piety throughout the text, with characters like Hircan and Saffredent sometimes twisting biblical passages to hedonistic purposes. In the tale 72 debate, for example, Saffredent argues that a prior who coerced a nun into sleeping with him adopted the same perspective as Lot's daughters because he sought to procreate (779). While it is important to note the complexity of character development in the text and its relationship to narration, as Deborah Losse does in "Authorial and Narrative Voice in the *Heptameron*," *Renaissance and Reformation* 11.3 (1987): 223–42, this article does not aim to resolve the question of each storyteller's spiritual sincerity.

47. Parlamente says to Oisille, "aux femmes tenez lieu de mere" (11). For more on Oisille as a figure of feminine authority, see Paula Sommers, "Feminine Authority in the *Heptaméron*: A Reading of Oysille," *Modern Language Studies* 13.2 (1983): 52–59.

and help promote church reform when she narrates the struggle that female characters face as they attempt to live as Christians in the world.

In particular, the next section of this study considers two intertextually linked tales—10 and 42—that feature female protagonists who can be read as pursuing these goals by challenging masculine predation, foregrounding women’s complex experiences of spirituality and sexuality, and demonstrating the link between wisdom and divine love. Since women’s efforts to negotiate between spirit and world become especially salient in the marriage scenario, I will emulate the Sage, the Mondainne, and the Supersticieuse by taking the Ravie’s love songs at face value, as it were, and considering the tales’ representations of real-world interactions between men and women. However, I will also extend beyond the literal to examine how these relational exchanges intersect with the marriage metaphor of Christ and the church that the Ravie evokes. This two-pronged approach will help uncover how women’s reactions to the impossibility of romantic relationships outside of marriage provide insights into their negotiation of sexuality and Christian spirituality, as well as their ability to foster institutional reform.

3. Ambiguous examples: women and wisdom in *Heptaméron* 10 and 42

In *Mont-de-Marsan*, women’s fluctuating responses to spiritual influences release them from the bounds of categorical titles that invite an allegorical reading of the text. Similarly, in the *Heptaméron*, each woman’s struggle to be in the world but not of it reveals her complex humanity, which cannot be reduced to the typology into which the *exemplum* genre seeks to place her.⁴⁸ Because Parlamente identifies the tales’ heroines as examples of chaste virtue, one might reasonably expect that each heroine would exemplify the categories of “chaste” and “virtuous” as understood by the courtly society in which both Parlamente and her listeners take part. Yet tales 10 and 42 suggest instead that Floride’s and Françoise’s motives for defending chastity derive not from a purely social

48. While Zegura, Bromilow, and David LaGuardia have shown that real-life experiences pertaining to gender and infidelity temper the simplifying tendencies of the *exemplum* genre, the present study argues that the lived circumstances of the tales’ heroines help to redefine and reorient the typological labels upon which *exempla* depend. David LaGuardia, “Exemplarity as Misogyny: Variations on the Tale of the One-Eyed Cuckold,” in *Narrative Worlds: Essays on the Nouvelle in Fifteenth- and Sixteenth-Century France* (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2005), 139–58.

understanding of chastity, but rather from a complex intermingling of spiritual factors.⁴⁹ Thus, the protagonists' spiritual identities and perspectives on male–female relations develop in a space of tension.⁵⁰

That tension results in part from the Christian perspective on wisdom that undergirds certain passages in the book of Romans, which the storytellers are studying on the days when tales 10 and 42 are told.⁵¹ For instance, Romans 8 juxtaposes the Christlike altruism that the Spirit inspires with selfishness; the former represents a wiser way because it brings “life and peace,” whereas the latter brings “death.”⁵² One can see such causalities at work in tales 10 and 42, as well as a broader reflection on wisdom, folly, and love that conveys Marguerite's knowledge of the Bible. In the two tales, a wisdom based on love for God and neighbour means turning unmarriageable suitors away from conquest and toward Christlike abnegation. The heroines of these stories can only hope to achieve that feat by preserving their chastity—despite finding their suitors attractive—since giving in would reward the noblemen's self-centred mindset. By teaching their admirers altruism, these heroines have the chance to become spiritual guides and thereby suggest women's ability to participate meaningfully in institutional reform, beginning at the level of gender relations.

Revising male–female relations would necessitate a rejection of perfect friendship (*parfaicte amitié*), since this model framed chastity as a social mandate rather than a possible avenue for defying the courtly reduction of women to sexuality. Moreover, perfect friendship contradicted core tenets of Christianity by implying that people could love one another perfectly through force of will. It thereby tempted women to substitute their admirers' attentions for the

49. The Cazauran-Lefèvre edition of the *Heptaméron* employs Gruget's spelling (“Florinde”) rather than “Floride,” the more widely used spelling that features in manuscript-based versions of the *Heptaméron*, such as Renja Salminen, *Heptaméron: Édition critique par Renja Salminen* (Geneva: Droz, 1999).

50. In advancing this argument, I adopt a gendered perspective that brings women's spirituality to bear on the crisis of meaning that John D. Lyons analyzes in his chapter titled “The *Heptaméron* and Unlearning from Example” (Lyons, 72–117).

51. “The Epistle to the Romans is read every day for the first five days” (Duval, 261).

52. See Romans 8:6. Mary McKinley develops a reading of tale 2 based on this Spirit/flesh distinction in “Agony, Ecstasy, and the Mulekeeper's Wife: a Reading of *Heptaméron* 2,” in *A French Forum: Mélanges de littérature française offerts à Raymond C. et Virginia A. La Charité*, ed. Gérard Defaux and Jerry Nash (Paris: Klincksieck, 2000), 129–42. In subsequent passages, such as Romans 11:33–36 and Romans 16:27, Paul underscores the association between wisdom and divinity.

perfect love of God and enabled predatory men to assume a non-threatening demeanor that lowered women's defenses. To refuse sexual objectification, the female protagonists in tales 10 and 42 must therefore associate their chastity with Christianity rather than perfect friendship.

Ultimately, however, Françoise from tale 42 succeeds in this objective, and Floride does not. Parlamente invites readers to compare these outcomes when she creates an intertextual link between the two tales by framing her moral for tale 42 as a commentary on the tale 10 debate, in which Saffredent asserts that men who employ the language of perfect friendship will always succeed in duping women, and in which Longarine champions "vray honneur" over socially-constructed virtue.⁵³ In making this rhetorical move, Parlamente presents Françoise's successful navigation of spirit and world as an explicit rebuttal to Saffredent's claim and, I argue, as an implicit affirmation of Longarine's assertion that true virtue depends upon a person's conscience.⁵⁴ Indeed, the tales' treatment of each woman's conscience suggests that although Françoise's story recounts a successful implementation of Christlike wisdom, and although Floride's tale highlights the dangers of confronting suitors without this tool, both women face multiple spiritual influences. Their success or failure depends upon spiritual education rather than simplified typologies.

The issue of spiritual education underlies Parlamente's narration of tale 10, which features a female protagonist who learns the value of Christian wisdom only after suffering heartache. In the story, Floride falls victim to the false promise of *parfaicte amitié* when she meets Amadour, a knight of lesser standing whom she cannot marry.⁵⁵ Nineteen-year-old Amadour preys upon the naïveté of twelve-year-old Floride. Through social manipulation, he wins the

53. Colette Winn has pointed out that the *Heptaméron's* tales often echo one another, thereby creating intertextual commentaries within the overarching frame. See the chapter titled "Jeux de mémoire: Le fonctionnement d'un texte-écho," in Winn's *L'Esthétique du jeu dans l'Heptaméron de Marguerite de Navarre* (Paris: Vrin, 1993), 151–76.

54. Francis analyzes the importance of conscience in the *Heptaméron* by comparing the text's treatment of *adiaphora*, or religious matters of conscience, with the perspectives of schismatic and non-schismatic reformers. See Scott Francis, "Marguerite de Navarre, a Nicodemite? *Adiaphora* and Intention in *Heptaméron* 30, 65, and 72," *Renaissance and Reformation* 39.3 (2016): 5–31.

55. Frelick examines uses of the terms "amour" and "amitié" in tale 10 to highlight the diverging meanings of "love" in Christian and courtly contexts. See "Speech, Silence, and Storytelling: Marguerite de Navarre's *Heptameron* and Narrative Therapy," *Renaissance and Reformation* 36.1 (2013): 69–92, 80–83. Jan Miernowski likewise analyzes the impact of blurred boundaries between secular and spiritual

trust of her friends and family and slowly ingratiates himself with her. Floride does not suspect that Amadour finds her attractive, so when he declares his supposed love for her, she is surprised, and she worries that he might consider her a potential conquest. Despite her concerns, however, she accepts him in secret as a perfect friend. In time, Floride's mother arranges for her to marry a man other than Amadour. She accepts but continues to cultivate her relationship with him, as she believes that he will adhere strictly to the Neoplatonic model of perfect friendship, which does not allow for consummation. To her surprise, Amadour attempts to rape her before leaving for battle. Eventually, he seeks a soldier's death to end his sexual frustration. Floride's husband also dies, and she decides to enter a convent. She only attains true happiness in her dying moment, when God's perfect love erases the memory of her suffering.

At the end of the story, Floride receives wisdom by learning to value divine love the way the *évangéliques* would have wanted, but as she interacts with Amadour in earlier portions of the tale, her words and actions imply that her love for God and others coexists with her acceptance of courtly constructs of feminine virtue.⁵⁶ By attempting to locate her self-worth in worldly dictates rather than in God, Floride falls prey to folly without realizing it. For instance, Floride tells herself that she can hide her disappointment in her arranged marriage by fixing her thoughts on "God and honour," a conceptual pairing that implies that, for her, social conventions seem like divine imperatives: "se delibera de mettre Dieu et l'honneur devant ses yeux" (128). At first glance, the word "honneur" could appear ambiguous here. Should we read it as socially constructed virtue or as the "vray honneur" that Longarine describes? While the narrator does not clarify this point, looking to Floride's understanding of honour at other moments in the story can help. When Amadour first leaves for battle after his confession of love, Floride strives to embody a courtly ideal of feminine virtue because she wants others to perceive her as worthy of Amadour's affections: "elle se meit à faire toutes choses si bonnes et vertueuses, qu'elle eseroit par cela atteindre le bruit des plus parfaites dames, et d'estre

perspectives on love in the queen's poetry, in "La contradiction amoureuse de Marguerite de Navarre. La poétique de la mésentente," *Réforme, Humanisme, Renaissance* 72.1 (2011): 43–51.

56. Nora Peterson has pointed out Floride's struggle to conceal her desire in tale 10 and has argued that her involuntary blushing foregrounds the tensions between the spiritual and the carnal. See the chapter titled "Confessing the Body's Truths in the *Heptaméron*," in Peterson's *Involuntary Confessions of the Flesh in Early Modern France* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2016), 25–46.

reputée digne d'avoir un tel serviteur" (124).⁵⁷ Through this behaviour, Floride suggests that, for her, social perceptions of virtue are of primary importance. She aspires to embody the typology of the chaste, virtuous woman but does not appear to consider whether she is chaste and virtuous in a spiritual sense. The text raises that question later on when Amadour reveals the incompatibility of chaste femininity with conquest-oriented masculinity and so prompts Floride to reconsider her identity, as well as Amadour's, outside the paradigm of gendered virtues.⁵⁸ Having witnessed the disintegration of the two typologies she worshipped—that of the chaste, virtuous woman and the selfless knight—she can only realize that her acceptance of worldly gender norms has clouded her perspective, despite her desire to love God and others well.⁵⁹

Unfortunately, Floride's newfound awareness of human sinfulness and folly comes as a result of great suffering in society, and she can see no way of reconciling life in the world with her wish to shift her allegiance entirely to God. She therefore retreats to a convent, where she spends her days contemplating divine love and ultimately finds joy in death: "[elle] luy rendit son ame en telle joye, que l'espouse a d'aller veoir son espoux" (151). Thus, in death Floride becomes *ravie de l'amour de Dieu*, but the text implies that unlike the shepherdess in *Mont-de-Marsan*, she only attains this state upon leaving the world for eternity.⁶⁰

57. This striving might be said to resemble the folly of seeking to earn one's salvation through one's behaviour, without the intervention of divine grace. See B. Jane Wells, "Folly in the *Heptaméron* of Marguerite de Navarre," *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 46.1 (1984): 71–82, 73.

58. While Mary J. Baker reads tale 10 as a commentary on the failure of courtly love and its expectations for gendered behaviour in "Didacticism and the *Heptaméron*: The Misinterpretation of the Tenth Tale as an Exemplum," *The French Review Special Issue, Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 45.3 (Autumn 1971): 84–90, 90, the present analysis considers how the tale complicates the category of the "chaste, virtuous" woman by contrasting women's humanity with *exempla*.

59. We see a glimpse of this desire when Floride mars her face, sacrificing her beauty in an attempt to dissuade Amadour from pursuing sexual conquest: "Parquoy aimant mieux faire tort à sa beauté en la diminuant, que de souffrir par elle le cueur d'un si honneste homme brusler d'un si meschant feu, prit une pierre qui estoit dedans la chappelle, et s'en donna par le visage si grand coup, que la bouche, et les yeux, et le nez en estoient tous difformés" (142).

60. The notion of death as a release from earthly restrictions and entrance into new life also figures in the *Tombeaux de Marguerite de Navarre*, to which leading poets such as Ronsard and Du Bellay contributed upon the queen's death. See François Rouget, "Entre l'offrande chrétienne et le don poétique: Les tombeaux latin et français de Marguerite de Navarre (1550–1551)," *Bibliothèque d'Humanisme et*

Floride's joy in death contrasts sharply with the effervescent vitality that the shepherdess conveys in *Mont-de-Marsan* and leads the reader to wonder what Floride's life would have been like if she had realized from the beginning that secular creeds could not help her to exist as a Christian in the world. Parlamente suggests in delivering the moral to the story that Floride's life could have been joyful and that she could have helped others find joy, as well, if she had approached her interactions with Amadour from a Christian, rather than courtly, perspective. To her fellow noblewomen, Parlamente recommends, "ne croire point tant de bien aux hommes, qu'il faille par la congnoissance du contraire leur donner cruelle mort, et à vous une triste vie" (151). As Parlamente's moral suggests, Floride's misery results not from an innate affiliation with any particular typology or spiritual impulse, but rather from her lack of an explicit spiritual education. Such an education could have helped her to locate her identity and self-worth in God, rather than in social discourses about feminine virtue. Indeed, Floride could have considered more spiritually-oriented meanings of the term "chaste," such as "pure," "moral," and "sacred."⁶¹ Doing so could have allowed her to point Amadour away from socially-constructed gendered virtues and toward the spiritual ideal of Christlike altruism as wisdom. She might thereby have helped rehabilitate male–female relations as part of a larger effort to reform how sixteenth-century institutions viewed women.

To consider how Floride's story might have played out differently had she received the right instruction, I turn now to tale 42, in which Parlamente recounts how a *bourgeoise* named Françoise defends herself against a prince's advances. Françoise's success stems from her education in matters both spiritual and courtly.⁶² Although she hails from the *bourgeoisie*, Françoise's

Renaissance 62.3 (2000): 625–35, 627. See also Richard Regosin for analyses of other *Heptaméron* tales that treat sensuality, spirituality, and death: "Death's Desire: Sensuality and Spirituality in Marguerite de Navarre's *Heptameron*," *MLN* 116.4 (2001): 770–94.

61. Robert Estienne provides the Latin translations "pudicus" and "castus" for the French term "chaste" in his 1539 *Dictionnaire françois-latin, contenant les motz et les manières de parler françois, tournez en latin* (Paris: L'imprimerie de Robert Estienne), accessed 4 February 2019, gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k505878/f1.image.

62. Margaret Ferguson views female literacy as foundational to the *Heptaméron*'s treatment of reform. See "Making the World Anew: Female Literacy as Reformation and Translation in Marguerite de Navarre's *Heptaméron*," in *Dido's Daughters: Literacy, Gender, and Empire in Early Modern England and France* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 225–64. Joan Gibson notes that women's education

parents became *protégés* of the royal family (803). With time, she was able to obtain the same education in courtly etiquette and Christian morality as a noblewoman. In her adulthood, she looks back on her education at the castle and says that the most important lesson she learned there was the meaning of love. This assertion appears at first to conflate or combine spiritual and aristocratic definitions of love the way that Floride did in tale 10; as the plot progresses, however, Françoise indicates through her response to romantic impossibility that she adopts a Christian perspective on love, rather than one rooted in *parfaite amitié*.

Indeed, Françoise's reaction to the appeal of a fifteen-year-old prince—the brother of her childhood friend, the princess—shows her dismissal of perfect friendship. She demonstrates her understanding of sexuality's spiritual implications through her verbal responses to the prince, in which she rejects materialistic folly and provides an intelligent analysis of the social and spiritual factors that motivate his behaviour. Gary Ferguson has argued that Françoise's rejection of the prince's proposition should be read in tandem with her *bourgeois* status as evidence that she favours long-term stability in marriage over short-term gratification.⁶³ That interpretation finds support in Françoise's pragmatic outlook on the prince's advances; unlike Floride, she knows that her suitor seeks to exploit her. Françoise therefore has practical reasons for rejecting the prince. However, the tale's narrator, Parlamente, does not view Françoise as purely pragmatic; in the debate that follows the tale, she holds her protagonist up as an example of self-control and integrity, two traits that locate honour in the individual conscience rather than in social standards for female behaviour.⁶⁴ Parlamente asserts that Françoise loved the prince and thus experienced genuine temptation in responding to his confession of romantic interest.⁶⁵ The conflict that Parlamente believes her protagonist

in the sixteenth century normally included training in language and Christian morality, in "Educating for Silence: Renaissance Women and the Language Arts," *Hypatia* 4.1 (1989): 9–27, 12–15.

63. "Françoise exemplifies a bourgeois morality of thrift, economy, and investment and of the deferral of pleasure" (Ferguson, "Gendered Oppositions," 153).

64. For another famous tale that deals with the distinction between social dictates and an individual woman's conscience, see tale 43, which recounts how Camille (or Jambicque) maintains a false appearance of chastity.

65. Parlamente counters Hircan's suggestion during the tale 42 debate that Françoise had a secret *bourgeois* lover: "jamais n'avoit eu opinion à homme vivant, qu'à celui qu'elle aimoit plus que sa vie, mais non pas

to have experienced underscores Françoise's efforts to confront the tensions between spirit and world and suggests that in addition to being a *bourgeoise* with a practical mindset, she is a sincere Christian.

I propose, then, that we read Françoise's rejection of the prince's overtures as suggesting her commitment to honour—or chastity—not only in the physical sense of the term, but also in the sense of spiritual integrity, or as Longarine might say, “vray honneur.” This dual meaning emerges from the opposition Françoise posits between honour and pleasure/world in her response to the prince: “Non, monsieur, non, ce que vous cherchez ne se peult faire [...] j'ay mon honneur si cher, que j'aymerois mieux mourir, que l'avoir diminué, pour quelque plaisir que ce soit en ce monde” (530). Already in the first sentence of her speech, Françoise alludes to spiritual concerns even as she discusses chastity as a social dictate. In asserting that she would rather die than forfeit her chastity, Françoise implies that although social reputation, the marriage market, and financial well-being exert pressure on her, she would willingly forfeit her life—and thus all of these material considerations—to preserve her chastity. As such, it would seem that for Françoise, chastity cannot be reduced to a physical state, as it points toward an imperative that rises above earthly concerns: namely, spiritual integrity, a concept that frames her entire speech.

In the remainder of her monologue, Françoise seeks to prove her spiritual integrity by drawing on her courtly and Christian education, refusing self-love and indicating to the prince that self-love drives his behaviour. Since the prince's classist outlook may render him unreceptive toward the lesson that Françoise wants to deliver, she adopts a two-part approach to achieving her objective. First, she analyzes the prince's actions to argue that his predatory mentality derives from a class-based understanding of virtue that she will show to be flawed. Second, rather than state outright her belief that virtue means Christlike altruism, she performs it via her words.

Toward the beginning of her speech, Françoise speaks plainly to the prince about the class-based assumptions behind his ill-meaning behaviour. She claims that the reason the prince has pursued her is that the noblewomen at court would refuse his advances, and he hopes that a *bourgeoise* will prove less

plus que son honneur” (537). For an analysis of how female storytellers deal with the topic of female sexual desire in their narration, see Gary Ferguson, “Puns, Exemplarity, and Women's Sexual Agency: Nomerfide and Oisille, *Heptaméron* 5 and 6,” in *Itineraries in French Renaissance Literature: Essays for Mary B. McKinley*, ed. Jeff Persels, Kendall Tarte, and George Hoffmann (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 25–40.

virtuous: “vous n’osez leur demander, ne esperer avoir d’elles, ce que la petitesse de mon estat vous faict esperer avoir de moy” (531). Françoise then challenges the prince’s classist attitude toward virtue by reminding him that although she is a *bourgeoise* by birth, she received a social and moral education at court: “J’ay esté nourrie en vostre maison, où j’ay appris que c’est d’aymer” (531). In this way, Françoise asserts that virtue can be learned, and that the desire to exhibit virtue transcends social class. She explains directly that the prince’s understanding of virtue is too narrow and that he must replace it with another definition.

Having completed phase one of her speech, Françoise moves on to phase two, in which she performs through her words the new understanding of virtue that she would like the prince to espouse: one rooted in Christlike altruism. She achieves this goal by contrasting her desire for the prince with her decision to reject his advances, which represent for her the temptation of selfish folly: “Mais dequoy me sert cela [mon désir]? veu que ce n’est pour moy, ny pour femme de ma sorte, et que seulement le desirer, seroit à moy parfaicte folie” (530). Instead of giving in to temptation, Françoise denies herself, not only to preserve her marriage prospects but also to show proper respect for the prince’s higher standing. To aspire to his heart and body would be self-seeking, since she considers that her *bourgeois* status makes her a “ver de terre” in terms of prestige and thus an unsuitable companion for a prince (530). In valuing her suitor’s best interests over her own gratification, Françoise aims to emulate the selfless love of Christ. She makes that objective explicit by assuring the prince that she does love him—with a Christlike, self-sacrificing love:

[N]e travaillez plus celle qui vous aime plus que soyemesmes. Car s’il failloit aujourd’huy que vostre vie ou la mienne fust demandée de Dieu, je me tiendrois bien heureuse, d’offrir la mienne, pour sauver la vostre. Ce n’est faulte d’amour, qui me faict fuyr vostre presence: mais c’est plustost, pour en avoir trop en vostre conscience, et en la mienne. (531)

By defining love as self-sacrifice, and by claiming that she would gladly die for a man who has made himself her enemy, Françoise exhibits her familiarity with a divine love that defies self-interest. She performs the kind of love that she would like the prince to imitate and emphasizes the role of the conscience in encouraging spiritually oriented virtue.

Françoise's performance proves successful in guiding the prince away from foolish self-love and toward selfless wisdom, as he trades his courtly notion of masculinity, which depends upon conquest, for Christlike magnanimity.⁶⁶ Having adopted a spiritual perspective on his interactions with others, including women, the prince decides to use his authority to bless Françoise rather than intimidate her. He showers her with gifts and arranges a suitable marriage for her, ensuring her material prosperity. In the end, Françoise receives provision for her needs because she sought God's kingdom and righteousness first.⁶⁷ Her recompense relates a spiritual lesson that tales 42 and 10 reveal when read together: those who seek to save their life will lose it, but those who lose their life for Christ's sake will find it.

4. Coda for a queen

Although this principle is foundational to Christianity, tales 42 and 10 show that members of courtly society do not necessarily adhere to it, and consequently, animosity develops between the sexes. Such hostility counters the goal of non-schismatic church reform that the queen of Navarre and her *évangéliques* pursued. Just as Marguerite promoted *évangélisme* through practical means, such as the strategic placement of sympathetic preachers or the dissemination of biblical texts in French, so her heroines reveal that with the right education, they can demonstrate spiritual wisdom and contribute in meaningful ways to reform.

Moreover, tales 10 and 42 suggest that male–female relations furnish an opportunity for each sex to show selfless love toward the other and thereby to imitate the metaphorical model of marriage that Paul describes in Ephesians 5:21–35. Although many exegetes over the centuries have interpreted these verses as affirming a husband's total authority over his wife, the *Heptaméron*

66. Some scholars, such as Cholakian ("My Brother, My Hero," in *Rape and Writing*, 167–81) and François Rigolot ("Magdalen's Skull: Allegory and Iconography in *Heptaméron* 32," *Renaissance Quarterly* 47.1 [1994]: 57–73, 62), have argued that Marguerite tends to portray positively those characters that resemble her brother, while others, such as Francis, view her depictions of brotherly figures as part of a theological reflection on the flesh and the Spirit; see Scott Francis, "François I^{er} 'trop en corps' in Marguerite de Navarre," in *François I^{er} et la vie littéraire de son temps*, ed. François Rouget (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2017), 201–15. In either case, the text ultimately shows us an heir to the throne who changes his attitude and behaviour toward women.

67. See Matthew 6:33.

suggests that a figurative reading based on the marriage metaphor of Christ and the church retains the potential to reconcile the sexes.⁶⁸ As Parlamente points out in the debate following tale 54, husbands would need to be more like Christ—that is to say, selfless and devoted to the church’s welfare—if they wanted to claim any kind of authority, and even then, that authority would follow the example of Christ, for whom power has nothing to do with worldly gain. Instead, Christ defies concepts of authority based on selfishness, violence, and egotism and replaces them with self-sacrificing, other-oriented love. Ultimately, then, Marguerite implies that husbands must give up their desire to dominate and instead view themselves as emulators of Christ, which is the same identity that their wives adopt.

The fact that men and women share a common self-understanding as imitators of Christ within the marriage metaphor follows logically from Paul’s assertion in Galatians 3:28 that “there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” Tales 10 and 42 echo Galatians 3:28 by implying that although the individual members of the church may have temporal identities based on biological sex, these differences must cede before a new, shared identity: that of the church. Whether male or female, members of the church make up one Body and must therefore eschew earthly power struggles in favour of a unified vision and purpose. Moreover, the collective identity of the church within the marriage metaphor is feminized, since Revelation calls the church “the bride of Christ.” This biblical allusion further underscores the importance of a female vantage point on spirituality and sexuality that many male writers in the queen’s time failed to fully appreciate. Perhaps most audaciously of all, Marguerite’s textual support for women’s ability to effect reform derives from the very scriptures that the *évangélique* movement privileged. In *Mont-de-Marsan* and the *Heptaméron*, the *évangéliques*’ mission of redressing injustice and preventing schism depends upon Christian women who have become wise, who can teach others, and who can work actively toward righting institutional wrongs.⁶⁹

68. For more on the metaphor of Christ and the church in Marguerite’s works, see Telle, 341.

69. I thank my anonymous reviewers, who through insightful comments and collegiality have greatly improved this study.