



## **What the Monk's Habit Hides: Excavating the Silent Truths in Marguerite de Navarre's Heptaméron 31**

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Résumé de l'article

Marguerite de Navarre, dans le conte 31 de L'Heptaméron, dépeint un « cordelier » (franciscain) luxurieux qui, en l'absence du mari, s'empare du foyer d'une dame, tue ses serviteurs, la déguise en moine et l'enlève. Malgré la ressemblance avec le « Frère Denise » de Rutebeuf, qui met aussi en scène un franciscain débauché, le récit de Marguerite n'est pas une simple satire anticléricale. On y trouve en effet d'autres éléments: une critique du mari trop confiant, des métaphores de la censure, une exploration de la dialectique entre silence d'une part et vue (et perspicacité) de l'autre, le spectacle du langage corporel des victimes, et des analogies entre les corps politique et le corps familial. Par ces moyens, Marguerite insère dans sa nouvelle une allégorie de la lecture, une mise en garde contre le danger de méprendre les « actes » visibles pour de l'authentique bonté et, enfin, une histoire tragique aux accents politiques où se donne à lire une crise de légitimité opposant les « deux royaumes » de la théologie de la Réforme dans la France du seizième siècle: le gouvernement d'ici-bas et le gouvernement sacré.

# What the Monk's Habit Hides: Excavating the Silent Truths in Marguerite de Navarre's *Heptaméron* 31

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*“L’abit est si loing de faire le moyne, que bien souvent par orgueil il le deffaict”* (317)<sup>1</sup>

In *Heptaméron* 31, Marguerite de Navarre portrays a lascivious “Cordelier” or Franciscan who takes over a matron’s household during her husband’s absence, kills her servants, and disguises the woman as a monk before abducting her. Despite its surface resemblance to Rutebeuf’s “Frère Denise,” which also unveils a Franciscan’s lechery, Marguerite’s narrative is not a simple anticlerical satire. Within it we find a critique of the over-trusting husband, metaphors of censorship, an inquest into the dialectics of silence and (in)sight, a foregrounding of the victims’ body language, and analogies between the body politic and the body of the family. With these tools Marguerite folds into her *nouvelle* an allegory of reading; a cautionary tale about the dangers of mistaking outward “works” for true godliness; and an *histoire tragique* with political overtones that figure a crisis of authority between Reform theology’s “two kingdoms,” or secular and sacred governance, in sixteenth-century France.

Marguerite de Navarre, dans le conte 31 de L’Héptaméron, dépeint un « cordelier » (franciscain) luxurieux qui, en l’absence du mari, s’empare du foyer d’une dame, tue ses serviteurs, la déguise en moine et l’enlève. Malgré la ressemblance avec le « Frère Denise » de Rutebeuf, qui met aussi en scène un franciscain débauché, le récit de Marguerite n’est pas une simple satire anticléricale. On y trouve en effet d’autres éléments: une critique du mari trop confiant, des métaphores de la censure, une exploration de la dialectique entre silence d’une part et vue (et perspicacité) de l’autre, le spectacle du langage corporel des victimes, et des analogies entre les corps politique et le corps familial. Par ces moyens, Marguerite insère dans sa nouvelle une allégorie de la lecture, une mise en garde contre le danger de méprendre les « actes » visibles pour de l’authentique bonté et, enfin, une histoire tragique aux accents politiques où se donne à lire une crise de légitimité opposant les « deux royaumes » de la théologie de la Réforme dans la France du seizième siècle: le gouvernement d’ici-bas et le gouvernement sacré.

1. “It’s far from the truth to say that the habit makes the monk; on the contrary, they become so arrogant because of it that it often unmakes them” (414). All quotations in French of Marguerite de Navarre’s prose are from *L’Heptaméron*, ed. Michel François (Paris: Garnier, 1960), hereafter cited in the text. Unless otherwise noted, all translations of the work in English are from *The Heptameron*, trans. P. A. Chilton (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), hereafter cited in the text. A very early version of this study was presented under the title “Silence and Seeing in Marguerite de Navarre’s *Heptaméron*: An Analysis of the Thirty-First Nouvelle,” in a special session of the South Central Modern Languages Association Meeting (November 2000) entitled “Taming the Renaissance Tongue.”

Of all the French proverbs, “l’habit ne fait pas le moine” may best capture the spirit of Marguerite de Navarre’s *Heptaméron*, a collection of seventy-two short stories and frame discussions that she wrote primarily in the 1540s, during a time of civil unrest, religious ferment, and ecclesiastical censorship in France.<sup>2</sup> Translated literally as “the habit does not make the monk,” and figuratively as “you can’t judge a book by its cover,” the saying might easily serve as the motto for the queen of Navarre’s unflattering portraits of the clergy, which reflect both the anticlerical comic tradition of the Middle Ages and the religious strife and ecclesiastical abuses of her own era, the latter of which were serious enough to provoke the major revolutions of the Protestant Reformation. Yet at the same time, the “monk’s habit” or cloak of ecclesiastical respectability is clearly a metonym for other types of duplicity as well, ranging from the hypocrisy of ostensibly virtuous ladies such as Jambique (N. 43) and the incestuous mother (N. 30) in the *Heptaméron*, to the gap between the proverbial book and its cover, or between the outward and hidden meanings of the short stories themselves. In this study, I will propose in part that Marguerite dissimulates insights into early modern France’s religious and sociopolitical crises beneath the unprepossessing cover of her *Heptaméron*, not only through her literal criticism of ecclesiastical abuses or her integration of evangelical discourse into the narratives and frame discussions, but also through the incorporation of reflections on the *res publica* into small-scale family dramas. Some of these ruminations stem directly from the subject matter of overtly political narratives such as *nouvelles* 12 and 51, which the author downsizes and recasts as household tragedies, perhaps to camouflage their “unfeminine” focus on *lèse majesté* (N. 12), princely abuses (N. 12, 51), and civil dissent (N. 12, 51); and others are discursive, literal in nature, and readily legible, such as Dagoucin’s comment that “princes [...] should beware of offending those

2. In his *Marguerite d’Angoulême*, 2 vols. (Paris: Champion, 1930), 2:664–75, Pierre Jourda hypothesizes that the *Heptaméron* dates primarily from the period between 1542 and Marguerite’s death in 1549. While acknowledging that she may have sketched out “quelques nouvelles isolées” (675) much earlier, Jourda concludes that “l’*Heptaméron* grandit surtout après 1544” (673), and that Marguerite had composed most, but not all, of the stories by 1546 (675). According to this scenario, the queen would have added the prologue in 1546 to a work that was already “assez avancée” (672). Jourda notes that she wrote at least two more *nouvelles* (N. 12, 66) after this date, and speculates that she continued to edit the volume, develop her frame discussions, and organize the short-story collection during her remaining years.

beneath them" (163), lest God turn the "menus gens" against their rulers to "inflict harm" (163) on the princes themselves. In this paper, I argue that still other allusions to governance, such as those in *nouvelle* 31, are enfolded figuratively and allegorically into texts that seem apolitical, buried beneath the proverbial monk's habit and yet signalled by a politicized vocabulary, analogies between the body of the family and the body politic, and references to the political and religious landscape in sixteenth-century France.<sup>3</sup>

Not only do tales of clerical deceit and malfeasance abound in the queen of Navarre's masterwork, but even those *nouvelles* devoid of references to the clergy typically illustrate the "monk-and-his-habit" proverb's figurative meaning: namely, that seeming and being often differ radically, that respectable appearances may disguise prurient behaviour, and that rhetoric and truth are not necessarily coterminous. Nowhere in the *Heptaméron* is this duality or representational layering more richly developed than in *nouvelle* 31, the tale of a trusted family confessor who kidnaps a matron while her husband is absent, murders four servants, and plots to rape his victim once she is safely ensconced within his monastery. Clearly the tale is anticlerical; yet much as the confessor's respectable mantle camouflages his real desires, so arguably does this overtly conventional anticlerical *nouvelle* mask the underlying goals of Marguerite's veiled text. For in addition to criticizing the clergy, the queen embeds within her *nouvelle* a cautionary tale for the monarch, whose governance of his realm, or body politic, parallels that of the husband over his household; reflections on the "two kingdoms," or the proper versus improper balance of power between spiritual and temporal authority in Reform-era Europe; and an allegory of reading that urges all of us to "look beneath the monk's habit," rather than be blinded by surface appearances in social interactions, textual exegesis, and moral judgments.

That the queen of Navarre, sister of King François I of France, intended her stories to convey political or religious meaning is of course open to debate, in part because ours is an era that privileges textual operations over the so-called "intentional fallacy," in part because the text is so multi-perspectival that it contests its own provisional meanings, and in part because traditional patriarchal societies such as Marguerite's neither authorized nor expected women to

3. We find another example of this practice in *nouvelle* 23, which also features an abusive Cordelier, an inattentive husband, and body language.

traffic in political discourse, to assign or determine meanings, or even to write.<sup>4</sup> Given the spirituality and evangelical resonances of Marguerite's poetry, to be sure, and her conclusion of each *nouvelle* with a moral or lesson, scholars often take it for granted that she intended the *Heptaméron* to teach as well as please her readers. Human beings have a long history of "reading for intentions" and of connecting literary texts to the historical author's presumed objectives, after all;<sup>5</sup> and in Renaissance and early modern studies, we are perhaps more attentive to intended meanings than in other fields as a result of the archival and philological traditions that have shaped our discipline. Yet for Marguerite de Navarre, even more than other writers of the Age of Paradox, this is no easy task, in part because of the author's facility for dissimulation—and need to dissimulate, during an era fraught with danger—and in part because of the *Heptaméron's* ambiguities.<sup>6</sup> As a result of these ambiguities, the surface exemplarity and opening and closing morals of individual *nouvelles* break down when we examine them closely;<sup>7</sup> and beyond their stock consensus that appearances can be deceiving and that human foibles are legion, there is so little

4. See Shari L. Thurer, *The End of Gender: A Psychological Autopsy* (Oxford and New York: Routledge, 2013), 13: "Those in power get to assign meaning."

5. See David Herman, "Narrative Theory and the Intentional Stance," *Partial Answers* 6.2 (2008): 233–60: "[Humans have an] evolved predisposition to adopt as a basic and general heuristic strategy [...] what the philosopher Daniel Dennett has characterized as the 'intentional stance' (236). See also Daniel Dennett, "Intentional Systems," in *Brainstorms: Philosophical Essays on Mind and Psychology* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981), 3–22; *The Intentional Stance* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987); "The Intentional Stance," in *The MIT Encyclopedia of the Cognitive Sciences*, ed. Robert A. Wilson and Frank C. Keil (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 412–13.

6. For a discussion of Marguerite's artful use of language, often used to dissimulate her true intent in her correspondence, see Barbara Stephenson, *The Power and Patronage of Marguerite de Navarre* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), 44–77. In his *King's Sister: Queen of Dissent*, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 1:13, Jonathan A. Reid also notes de Navarre's fondness for using words ironically and for playing with their meanings, particularly by "turning the normal sense of religious terms on their head." He connects this linguistic craftiness to her religious and political activities, arguing that Marguerite and her fellow evangelicals wore a "protective cloak of dissimulation, which enabled them to survive and continue to act" (355).

7. For example, see John D. Lyons, *Exemplum: The Rhetoric of Example in Early Modern France and Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989); Pollie Bromilow, *Models of Women in Sixteenth-Century French Literature: Female Exemplarity in the Histoires Tragiques (1559) and the Heptameron (1559)* (New York: Mellen, 2007); and David LaGuardia, "Exemplarity as Misogyny: Variations on the Tale of the One-Eyed Cuckold," in *Narrative Worlds: Essays on the French Nouvelle in 15th and 16th Century*

agreement among Marguerite's *devisants*, or intratextual storytellers, that it is difficult to extract an overarching message or even an unambiguous intellectual content from the short-story collection as a whole.

Scholars are also divided in their assessment of the *Heptaméron*. Critics including Nicole Cazauran and Catharine Randall view the work as a vehicle for the queen's evangelical theology,<sup>8</sup> while Lucien Febvre and Jules Gelernt interpret de Navarre's prose masterwork as an inquest into love's wide-ranging permutations.<sup>9</sup> Patricia Cholakian and Kathleen Bradley contend that the short stories are veiled representations of Marguerite's own experiences, some of them traumas that she comes to terms with via her writing,<sup>10</sup> while Marcel Tetel suggests that the contradictory, ambivalent nature of her prose reflects the era's ethical and epistemological ferment.<sup>11</sup> Despite the queen of Navarre's myriad references to kings, dukes, tyrants, and benevolent monarchs in the *Heptaméron*, however, only in the last few decades have scholars such as Margaret Ferguson, Carla Freccero, and Ian Morrison begun to view her as a political writer.<sup>12</sup> It is upon their insights that I will build in this essay.

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France, ed. David LaGuardia and Gary Ferguson (Tempe, AZ: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 2005), 139–58.

8. See Nicole Cazauran, *L'Heptaméron de Marguerite de Navarre* (Paris: Société d'édition d'enseignement supérieur, 1976); and Catharine Randall, *Earthly Treasures: Material Culture and Metaphysics in the Heptaméron and Evangelical Narrative* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2007).

9. Lucien Febvre, *Amour sacré, amour divin: autour de l'Heptaméron* (Paris: Gallimard, 1944); and Jules Gelernt, *World of Many Loves* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1966).

10. See Patricia Cholakian, *Rape and Writing in the Heptaméron* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991); and Kathleen Bradley, *A Transgenerational, Cryptonomic, and Sociometric Analysis of Marguerite de Navarre's Heptaméron* (PhD dissertation, University of Arizona, 2007).

11. Marcel Tetel, *Marguerite de Navarre's Heptaméron: Themes, Language, and Structure* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1973).

12. See Margaret Ferguson, "Recreating the Rules of the Game: Marguerite de Navarre's *Heptaméron*," in *Creative Imitation: New Essays on Renaissance Literature in Honor of Thomas M. Greene* (Binghamton, NY: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1992), 153–87. Drawing upon Ottaviano's contention in Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier* (*Il Cortegiano*, ed. Giulio Preti [Torino: Einaudi, 1960]), 354–61; trans. George Bull [Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967], 284–89) that a courtier's ultimate function is to advise his prince wisely, Ferguson likens Marguerite to the courtier and proposes that the *Heptaméron* is a "social text" (159), which aims to win the monarch's favour and instruct him: "[Marguerite de Navarre] gives us the portrait of the author as courtier—someone who needs exquisite skills of persuasion as she attempts to play one of the most difficult of the roles Castiglione's male interlocutors discuss: the role of

Marguerite's prologue, where one might expect to find clues regarding her objectives,<sup>13</sup> serves not to announce her goals but rather to establish the stories' fictional pretext and their recreational purpose within this fiction: briefly stated, ten travellers seek refuge during a flood in the Abbey of Notre Dame de Serrance, where they decide to tell "true" stories to pass the time and alleviate their boredom. Instead of attributing any moral or instructional purpose to their tales, the *devisants* or storytellers emphasize the narratives' entertainment value, not unlike Chaucer in his prologue to the *Canterbury Tales*.<sup>14</sup> With the exception of Oisille, an elderly pilgrim who suggests that the stranded group of travellers read the Bible while workers construct a bridge over the swollen waters, Marguerite's storytellers ultimately appear to focus almost exclusively on the pleasure of their enterprise. To be sure, the telling of stories is an intermediary activity between the reading of the Bible proposed by Oisille and the act of making love proposed by Hircan; in this sense, the prologue stakes out a Neoplatonic hierarchy that ranges from the corporeal (Hircan) to the worldly and discursive (Parlemente) to the spiritual (Oisille), which suggests that a level of edification not visible to the naked eye, and not limited to the simple "pleasure of the text," has been

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the courtier not only as 'ornament,' but as 'educator of the prince'" (178). In her "Archives in the Fiction: Marguerite de Navarre's *Heptaméron*," in *Rhetoric and Law in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Victoria Kahn and Lorna Hutson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 73–94, Carla Freccero elaborates on and develops Ferguson's thesis as it pertains to *nouvelle* 42 and Marguerite's interactions with her brother in particular; and Ian Morrison, in his "La *nouvelle* 12 de Marguerite de Navarre," *Studia Neophilologica* 67.1 (1995): 61–66, disputes scholars' traditional reluctance to view the queen as a "penseur politique" (61) by analyzing the political resonances of *nouvelle* 12, an account of Lorenzino or Lorenzaccio de' Medici's assassination of his cousin, Duke Alessandro de' Medici of Florence. Outside the realm of literary studies, Stephenson discusses the political content of Marguerite's correspondence in her *The Power and Patronage*; and Jonathan A. Reid, in his *King's Sister: Queen of Dissent*, places Marguerite at the epicentre of religious dissidence in early modern France. See also Reid, "Marguerite de Navarre and Evangelical Reform," in *A Companion to Marguerite de Navarre*, ed. Gary Ferguson and Mary B. McKinley (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 29–58.

13. Freccero relates this dearth of information about the writer's objectives to the "liabilities of female authorship": "Thus the obliquity of the authorial assertions in the *Heptaméron*, produced in the ambiguity of the relation between fact and fiction, suggests the political social liabilities of female authorship" (76).

14. For example, the host in Chaucer's prologue says, "If you don't enjoy yourselves, cut off my head!" See also: "And the one of you whose stories please us most / [...] / Shall sup at our expense while we make merry." *The Portable Chaucer*, trans. and ed. Theodore Morrison (New York: Viking, 1949), 82–83.

incorporated into the storytelling.<sup>15</sup> Notwithstanding the implicit integration of an *altior sensus* into the book and the stories' formal similarity to instructional exempla, however, the *devisants* persist in referring to the activity as a "plaisant exercice" (7; "something to amuse us," 66) in which "chascun prendra plaisir" (9; "which [...] all of us will be able to enjoy," 68), drawing our attention away from the text's hidden meanings or instructional content to its entertaining surface.

In much the same vein, the queen's own daughter, Jeanne d'Albret, suggests in her correspondence that the short stories are merely "romans jovials," or frivolous trifles, designed to avoid the displeasure of Henri de Navarre and François I, who had tired of answering for Marguerite's tendency to "get new doctrines into her head" and incur the wrath of Sorbonne censors with her evangelical activities.<sup>16</sup> If Jeanne's account, written years after Marguerite began the *Heptaméron*, is accurate, it does not mean that the *nouvelles* themselves are innocuous bagatelles (although Jeanne may have believed this was the case), but it does imply that they were intended to be viewed as such, to shield the author from the Sorbonne's reprisals and her own brother's objections. True, the *Heptaméron* did not appear in print during Marguerite's lifetime, which might suggest that the Faculty of Theology's censors were not uppermost in the queen's mind when she penned her *nouvelles*. There is no indication that she intended her short stories to remain unpublished, however; and the fact that they did not appear in print during her lifetime is almost certainly due to her

15. For this insight and, indeed, for many others, I am indebted to an anonymous reader who reviewed this paper for publication in *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, providing numerous useful comments that I have attempted to incorporate into the present version of the manuscript.

16. Nancy Lyman Roelker quotes Marguerite's daughter in her *Queen of Navarre: Jeanne d'Albret* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968), 127: "The said Queen [was] warned by her late brother the King, François I of good and glorious memory, my much honored uncle, not to get new doctrines in her head [*mettre en cervelle dogmes nouveaux*] so that from then on she confined herself to amusing stories [*romans jovials*]. Besides, I well remember how long ago, the late King, my most honored father [...] surprised the said Queen when she was praying in her rooms with the ministers Roussel and Farel, and how with great annoyance he slapped her right cheek and forbade her sharply to meddle in matters of doctrine." Translated by Roelker from B.N., F fr 17,044, fol. 336, Jeanne d'Albret to the Vicomte de Gourdon, 22 August 1555. While Roelker does not explicitly link the "romans jovials" to which Jeanne refers with the *Heptaméron*, the connection appears self-evident, given Marguerite's turn to stories well after the Sorbonne's censorship of *Le miroir de l'âme pecheresse* in 1533 and accusations by conservative Catholics that she was a heretic in the early and mid-1530s. Freccero clearly makes the assumption that the "romans jovials" are Marguerite's *nouvelles* in her "Archives in the Fiction" (76).



death in 1549 prior to the collection's completion, rather than a token of her reluctance to make the stories public. Given the climate of religious and artistic repression in France, Marguerite's earlier brush with the Faculty of Theology's censors, and ongoing tensions surrounding the unorthodox theology of her publications, it seems likely that the queen took particular pains to avoid the Sorbonne's opprobrium while penning the *Heptaméron*.

Notwithstanding Jeanne d'Albret's trivialization of her mother's *nouvelles*, after all, what better "cover" could there be for the enigmatic "truths" that Marguerite promises in her prologue than a cloak of frivolity and courtly gossip?<sup>17</sup> And lest we assume that these truths, if they are indeed embedded in the *Heptaméron*, are purely religious rather than political, let us note Freccero's hypothesis that Marguerite, in writing a social text intended to

influence the conduct of the ruler and the affairs of state much as Castiglione may have hoped to do [in his *Book of the Courtier*], [...] ran the risk of usurping the prerogatives of a king, a husband, and a man in ways that Jeanne seems not to have perceived.<sup>18</sup>

Camouflage was indeed in order, contends Freccero, given the "political and social liabilities of female authorship" and Marguerite's apparent "ambition to intervene at the level of state policy and practice under the cover of fiction."<sup>19</sup>

Unlike *nouvelle* 48, in which Ennasuite specifically opines that the habit does not make the monk (317), *nouvelle* 31 does not directly mention the anticlerical aphorism about outer "covers" and camouflaged truths, perhaps to minimize the scrutiny of censors, to resist the interpretive closure that a reductive moral might generate, or to refrain from stating the obvious. If indeed the proverb informs this novella, which is clearly the case in Rutebeuf's "Frère Denise," its words remain veiled and no less "cloaked" than the monk they represent, within an allegorical text where Marguerite camouflages her own inspiration and intentions.<sup>20</sup> Notwithstanding the maxim's absence (except

17. Details on the proposed truthfulness ("nulle nouvelle qui ne soit veritable histoire," 17) of the stories, as originally conceived at the French court, will follow in our discussion of the prologue.

18. Freccero, 76.

19. Freccero, 76–77.

20. See François, 476n535: "Le thème de ce récit se retrouve identique dans le fabliau de Rutebeuf" In their critical edition of the *Heptaméron* (Marguerite de Navarre, *Œuvres complètes*, t. X, 3 vols. [Paris:

as a trace) within the tale, however, the literal and figurative message of this well-known adage, which dates from the medieval era, permeates *nouvelle* 31 from start to finish.<sup>21</sup> In addition to “uncovering” a man of the cloth who is profoundly unholy, a trope echoed in the kidnapped matron’s disguise as a “petit moine” or “little monk,” Marguerite draws readers’ attention to the blindness of the “gentleman” who trusts the friar, choosing surface appearances over empiric facts; and to the suppressed voices of abused servants and women, who witness the impious underside of monastic piety.<sup>22</sup> With a descending gaze that strips official truths of their respectable veneers, the author not only uncovers the unofficial realities of private experience, typically masked by social and gender hierarchies, but also encourages readers to do the same with her own text by extracting from it what Rabelais calls the “substantificque mouelle” or “substantial marrow.”<sup>23</sup> In his *Gargantua*, the Gallic physician defines this hidden, inner content as “horrific mysteries” pertaining to “nostre religion” (“our religion”) and “nostre vie politicque” (“our political life”); and without explaining her intent, Marguerite adopts a similar strategy in *nouvelle* 31, using a simple story of clerical malfeasance, silenced voices, and a husband’s blindness to generate a provocative allegory on the relationship between religion and politics in

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Champion, 2013]), 3: 952, Nicole Cazauron and Sylvie Lefèvre also note the similarities between *nouvelle* 31 and “Frère Denise,” but focus at greater length on the differences: “Mais si l’on y trouve quelques détails similaires, les situations n’ont rien à voir avec cette sombre histoire d’un cordelier qui assassine chambrières et valets.”

21. The exact origins of the proverb are unclear. Some scholars believe it is a variation on Plutarch’s Latin dictum that “barba non facit philosophum” (a beard does not a philosopher make), while others link it to the storming of a Monegasque fortress in 1297 by troops disguised as Franciscans, or, alternatively, to the requirement that laypersons be dressed as monks when tried by canon law. Moreover, Rutebeuf begins “Frère Denise,” which many scholars believe Marguerite had read, with the pronouncement that “l’habit ne fait pas l’ermite.” See James Woodrow Hassell, Jr., *Middle French Proverbs, Sentences, and Proverbial Phrases* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1982), 132; and Antoine le Roux de Lincy, *Le livre des proverbes français*, 2 vols. (1859; Paris: A. Delahays, 1968), 1:36.

22. See Bénédicte Boudou, “Aveuglement et dévoilement: Etude littéraire de la *nouvelle* 31,” in *Lire l’Heptaméron de Marguerite de Navarre*, ed. Dominique Bertrand (Clermont-Ferrand: Presses Universitaires Blaise Pascal, Maison de la Recherche, 2005), 137–53.

23. “Prologue de l’auteur,” *Gargantua*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Pierre Jourda, 2 vols. (Paris: Garnier, 1962), 1:7. The English translation is from *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, trans. J. M. Cohen (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1955), 38. Whether Rabelais’s work is actually allegorical remains a much-debated question in Renaissance studies, but the reference typifies the popularity of allegories in both art and exegetical practices of the era.

sixteenth-century France.<sup>24</sup> In an effort to elucidate both her allegorical insights and the narrative processes upon which they depend, this study will focus on the historical and literary context of Marguerite's linkage of silence and truth; on the contrasts between *nouvelle* 31 and Rutebeuf's anticlerical "Frère Denise"; on the relationship between silence, seeing, and body language in the queen's economy of revelation; and on the critique of—or, at least, warning to—both church and state that is implicit in her allegory.

Given the religious and intellectual censorship that emanated from the Sorbonne during the French Renaissance, it is not surprising that the suppression of speech and the theme of silence should figure prominently in the works of Marguerite de Navarre. One of her own volumes of poetry, *Miroir de l'âme pécheresse* (*Mirror of the Sinful Soul*), was banned for heresy by the Faculty of Theology in 1533, in apparent retaliation for her public support of the reformist theologian Gérard Roussel.<sup>25</sup> Despite Marguerite's personal brush with the censors and her active protection of dissidents, however, most scholars have traditionally viewed the theme of silence in her works as a religious rather than political phenomenon.<sup>26</sup> In her devotional poetry, after all, the muting of earthly rhetorical figures serves as a cornerstone of the contemplative life, laying the foundation for "divine silence" and communion with God.<sup>27</sup>

This critique of artful language, along with the quest for truth that subtends it, remains present in *The Heptaméron*, which was published posthumously in

24. In my references to "allegory," I am not referring to the four interpretive levels of biblical hermeneutics discussed by Dante, but instead to allegory in its etymological sense, meaning "figurative language," a "description of one thing under the image of another, and 'literally' a speaking about something else." See *Online Etymology Dictionary*, s.v. "Allegory," 1 April 2015, <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=allegory>. Brian Cummings rightly notes, of course, the aversion to allegory present in much Protestant discourse of the era, and particularly in Martin Luther's approach to Scripture. See Cummings, "Protestant Allegory," in *The Cambridge Companion to Allegory*, ed. Rita Copeland and Peter T. Struck (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 176–90. Marguerite de Navarre's use of allegory in her theatre and poetry is well documented, however. See, for example, Robert Cottrell, *The Grammar of Silence: A Reading of Marguerite de Navarre's Poetry* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1986), 19–33; and Lyons, 72–117. In her "Archives in the Fiction," Freccero also notes the "national allegory at work" (75) in *nouvelle* 42 of the *Heptaméron*.

25. François, vi.

26. An important exception to this tradition is Patricia Cholakian, who studies the relationship between writing and sexual oppression in her *Rape and Writing*.

27. See Cottrell, *The Grammar of Silence*.

1558 and 1559.<sup>28</sup> According to Parleme, the intratextual storyteller most closely identified with Marguerite herself, aristocrats at the French court first conceived the collection of short stories not as a work of fiction, but rather as an experiment in veracity hinging upon the suppression of both art and learned discourse.<sup>29</sup> While inspired by a fictional model, Boccaccio's *Decameron*, the volume that Marguerite, the dauphin, and other courtiers envisioned, at least according to Parleme, was a compilation of one hundred "true stor[ies]" unadulterated by the "art" and "beautiful rhetoric" of educated storytellers:

Les deux dames dessus nommées, avecq plusieurs autres de la court, [...] se delibererent d'en faire autant, sinon en une chose differente de Bocace: c'est de *n'escripre nulle nouvelle qui ne soit veritable histoire*. Et prosmirent [...] d'en faire chascun dix et d'assembler [...] dix personnes qu'ilz pensoient plus dignes de racompter quelque chose, *sauf ceulx qui avoient estudié et estoient gens de lettres*; car monseigneur le Daulphin *ne vouloit que leur art y fut meslé*, et aussy de paour que la beaulté de la rethorique fait tort en quelque partye à la vérité de l'histoire (9; my italics).

(The two ladies I've mentioned, along with other people at the court, [...] made up their minds to do the same as Boccaccio. There was to be one difference—that they should not write any story that was not truthful. Together with Monseigneur the Dauphin the ladies promised [...] to get together a party of ten people who were qualified to contribute something,

28. Ironically, and not surprisingly, the earliest published editions of Marguerite's collection of novellas suppressed portions of her anticlerical satire. See François, xvi.

29. Interestingly enough, Marguerite relegates the origins of this project not to the fictional present of Parleme and the other storytellers or *devisants*, but rather to the historical past and the extratextual reality of the French court. According to this scenario, the *Heptaméron's* exploration of *unofficial* or *unauthorized* discourse has paradoxically been authorized and legitimized by the king, his sister Marguerite, the dauphin, and other courtiers. It is they, and not the intratextual narrators, who are credited, fictionally at least, with the idea of compiling a "French *Decameron*," but Parleme tells us they have abandoned the project in the wake of political and family crises. Her own collection of short stories, which explores the underbelly of French society for hidden truths, is thus conceived as a gift for the lords and ladies of the court: "Si Dieu faict que notre labour soit trouvé digne des oeilz des seigneurs et dames dessus nommez, nous leur en ferons présent" (10). Marguerite's use of the word "oeilz" or "eyes," which occurs throughout her writings as a reference to both physical sight and insight, further suggests that the "lowly" stories will enlighten as well as entertain her noble audience.

excluding those who studied and were men of letters. Monseigneur the Dauphin didn't want their art brought in, and he was afraid that rhetorical ornament would in part falsify the truth of the account [68–69].)

In view of the author's own humanistic education, Parlemente's description *en abîme* of a "truth project" conceived by aristocrats, but devoid of learned discourse, seems on the one hand to smack paradoxically of the same empty rhetoric that the dauphin condemns. At the very least, Marguerite's use of fictional characters to complete or "realize" a truth project supposedly abandoned by their real-world counterparts at the French court, including the queen herself, adds both Pirandellian complexity and a ludic dimension to the *Heptaméron's* purported veracity. Yet on the other hand, Marguerite's delegation of the truth project to *devisants* less obviously learned than herself, her liberal use of dialogue in colloquia following the narratives, her relatively simple and repetitive vocabulary, and the wealth of geographical place names scattered throughout her masterwork lend some credence to Parlemente's claims.

Marguerite's stated intention of producing an artless, and therefore truthful, narrative is of course a commonplace of Renaissance literature that is not particularly remarkable in and of itself.<sup>30</sup> To dismiss the queen's rejection of learned rhetoric as unimportant, insincere, or apolitical, however, is to forget that Machiavelli begins *The Prince* with a similar claim, abjuring "artifice" and "superfluous ornamentation" in the interest of empiricism and factuality.<sup>31</sup> His own work, he tells us, is purposely devoid of

clausule ample, o di parole ampullose e magnifiche, o di qualunque altro lenocinio o ornamento estrinseco con li quali molti sogliono le loro cose

30. In his "Rhetorical Augustinianism in Marguerite de Navarre's *Heptaméron*" (*Allegorica* 23.1 [2002]: 55–58), Claude La Charité suggests that this eschewal of rhetoric and artful discourse is an emulation of the Bible's "low style," common among reformist writers of the era: "Rhetorical Augustinianism is based on two main ideas: the inversion of the Ciceronian stylistic system and the subordination of rhetoric to biblical hermeneutics. The inversion of the Ciceronian system was brought about by the desire to promote low style, instead of grand style, as the hierarchic recapitulative style. This inversion ensues from the transmutation of pagan values accomplished by Jesus Christ" (55).

31. Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince and Other Political Writings*, trans. Stephen J. Milnes (London: J. M. Dent, 1995), 37. All translations of Machiavelli are from this edition.

descrivere e ornare; perché io ho voluto, o che veruna cosa la onori, o che solamente la varietà della materia e la gravità del subietto la facci grata.<sup>32</sup>

In contradistinction to Machiavelli, who draws upon both “esperienza” and erudition (“una continua lezione delle antiche: le quali avendo io con gran diligenza lungamente escogitate et esaminate”<sup>33</sup>) in *The Prince*, Marguerite proposes even more radically to silence, albeit provisionally, the “gens de lettres” (“men and women of letters”) who dominate official discourse in Renaissance France, in order to uncover and provide a forum for the silent truths of private experience and popular discourse.<sup>34</sup> In effect, she is proposing an inverse censorship that is a particularly ingenious variation on the world-upside-down motif so common in sixteenth-century literature: by suppressing the learned artfulness and lies of official discourse, she hypothesizes an artless narrative that will ultimately foreground the unadorned veracity of abused women, beleaguered servants, and raw facts. Even as Marguerite allows the silenced voices and truths of her culture to be heard, moreover, she also focuses critically

32. Machiavelli, *Opere*, ed. Mario Bonfantini (Milan: Riccardo Ricciardi), 3: “...which work I have not embellished with swelling or magnificent words, nor stuffed with rounded periods, nor with any extrinsic allurements or adornments whatever, with which so many are accustomed to embellish their works; for I have wished either that no honour should be given it, or else that the truth of the matter and the weightiness of the theme shall make it acceptable,” 37.

33. *Opere*, 3 (“... a continuous lesson from the ancients, whom I, having with great diligence reflected on and examined at length,” 37).

34. The pretext of providing a forum for uneducated voices and unofficial discourse is necessarily provisional, for both Marguerite and her storytellers are literate (at the very least, the *devisants* have all read the Bible [8]) and thus qualify as “gens de lettres” in the most rudimentary sense of the term. On one level, of course, Marguerite’s exclusion of learned voices may simply serve to disparage, in Rabelaisian fashion, the Scholastic or clerical education that dominated French pedagogy in the Middle Ages. This interpretation of the passage is certainly consistent with her broad anticlerical satire, with the evangelic thrust of her religious thought, and with her own humanistic education. While Marguerite’s literate but unadorned narrative style certainly finds corollaries in Renaissance literature, however, it deviates markedly from the erudite, classicizing models of eloquence that one typically associates with Franco-Italian humanism; and her stories, told by ordinary (albeit gently bred) people instead of read, and followed by freewheeling discussions, private jokes, and off-colour innuendos rather than learned commentary, are more steeped in the orality of popular discourse than in the learned speech of Plato’s *Symposium* or even *The Book of the Courtier* by Castiglione. Further, her archaeology of silence throughout the *Heptaméron* depends heavily upon alternative, unofficial forms of communication and representation such as body language, eavesdropping or spying, rumours [*le bruit*], and the testimony of servants, victims, and women.

on the process of suppression itself, dissecting the various mechanisms that both legitimize lies and discredit embarrassing facts that threaten the status quo.

Unlike Rabelais, Marguerite de Navarre does not invoke the myth of Philomela, whose rapist cut out her tongue to prevent her from telling “her-story.”<sup>35</sup> Nonetheless, negative references to silenced voices occur almost obsessively in the *Heptaméron*: in the very first *nouvelle*, Saint-Aignan’s wife has young du Mesnil killed to ensure his silence about their adulterous affair; in the fourth *nouvelle* of the First Day, an elderly female companion persuades the protagonist, a Flemish widow often identified with Marguerite, not to report an attempted rape that she endured at the hands of a family friend to her powerful brother; and in the seventy-second *nouvelle*, the prior who impregnated a nun tries to prevent the young woman from confessing her sin. What Marguerite exposes, in these and other “true stories,” is not simply generic human depravity, as condemned in the learned discourse of medieval sermons, but rather the private vices of publicly virtuous people and the politics of silence that protects their appearance of respectability. The political resonances of Marguerite’s exploration of silence, which reveals the underside of power and propriety, are particularly evident in her thirty-first novella. This deceptively simple tale of clerical misconduct and silenced witnesses, which reverses the conventions of hagiography, not only criticizes the hypocrisy and oppressive tactics of a single Franciscan friar and his corrupt brethren, metonyms of the unreformed church and its claims to hegemony, but also maps out an alternative strategy of communication that depends upon body language and “seeing” rather than upon spoken discourse. In addition to foregrounding the abuse of servants and women and the silencing of their voices, *nouvelle* 31 may be read figuratively and contextually as a cautionary tale about the dangers of religious censorship, the persecution of dissidents and questioners, and—by virtue of a commonplace analogy between the body politic and the body of the family—the church’s infringement upon temporal powers rightfully belonging to the state.<sup>36</sup> While the

35. *Quart livre*, ch. 2, in *Oeuvres complètes*, 2:37; and Cohen, *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, 454.

36. Some might argue that church and state are consubstantial in early sixteenth-century France, given the monarchy’s actual and theoretical authority over the Gallican Church, particularly following the Pragmatic Sanction’s revocation and the ratification of the Concordat de Bologna. For this reason, many scholars contend that François I had no need to follow Henry VIII’s example and sever his ties with Rome, given the control he already exerted over the church in France. In this paper, however, I am suggesting that conservative Catholic activists in Parlement and the Faculty of Theology operated as

*nouvelle's* content and salacious plot work to camouflage its topical resonances, both humanistic practices and the queen's own discourse provide a blueprint for this figurative reading, which requires that readers look first beneath the surface and focus on "les choses basses" (N. 2, 21; "lowly things"), and then use this inverted viewpoint to judge surface truths and "les grands."<sup>37</sup>

The queen gives readers a template for this downward exegetical glance in *nouvelle* 1, where servants witness and reveal their masters' perfidy, and in *nouvelle* 2, the story of a humble mule driver's wife who resists her valet's sexual advances with all her might, sacrificing her life to protect her virtue. Later, in *nouvelle* 32, Marguerite will implicitly question the basic premise of this hagiographical account by having Ennasuite, one of the more frivolous *devisantes*, opine that nothing is worth dying for ("Il n'y a rien pourquoy je voulsisse morir," 246; "There is no reason why I should wish to die," 335); but in this earlier tale of wifely chastity (N. 2) both the matron's status as a paragon and the fundamental premise that death is preferable to dishonour go unchallenged. The relevance of this narrative here does not depend upon the *mule-tière's* wisdom or foolhardiness in resisting her rapist, however, but upon the means by which neighbours learn of her martyrdom and upon the secondary moral the narrator draws from the story. First, Marguerite directs the reader's gaze downward to a lowly serving girl hiding *under* the bed ("cachée *soubz* le lit," 20; my italics), who hears what has happened and calls for help once the valet has fled. Second, the pious *devisante* Oisille not only praises the virtuous

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de facto arms of the church throughout much of François's reign, attempting to quell his tolerance for reform, minimize the influence of his sister on royal policy, and increase their own control over the monarchy—rather than vice versa. That Reformers such as Martin Luther were themselves reflecting on the "two kingdoms," the one spiritual and the other temporal, during this era increases the likelihood that Marguerite, from both a royalist and evangelical position, is staging a confrontation between church and state in *nouvelle* 31.

37. In my as yet unpublished monograph, provisionally entitled "The Shifting Gaze of Marguerite de Navarre: Perspectives on Gender, Society, and Politics in the *Heptaméron*," I study the author's archaeological or subversive gaze at length, arguing that she systematically interrogates the dominant, patriarchal discourse by drawing the reader's attention to alternative perspectives and vantages. This shifting, downward gaze also informs her religious poetry and theatre from start to finish, beginning with the *Miroir de l'âme pécheresse*: "Il fault que mon orgueil rabaisse / Et qu'humblement en plorant je confesse / Que, quant à moy, je suis trop moins que riens" ["So it is that my pride must lessen / and I must humbly confess that, as for me / I am less than nothing"]. See Marguerite de Navarre, *Selected Writings*, trans. Rouben Cholokian and Mary Skemp (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 79–80.



matron in her closing moral, urging her female companions to protect their own chastity, but also encourages listeners to take notice of, and learn from, *lowly things* (“les choses basses,” 21), which God often “elects,” or infuses with value and goodness, to “confuse” the high and mighty (“pour confondre celles que le monde estime haultes et honorables,” 21). Lest readers miss the implicit analogy between God’s allegory and her own, moreover, Marguerite pointedly describes the former as the Book of Life, a term one might easily apply to her own masterwork; and its contents, as writing (“nous sommes escriptz au livre de Vie,” 21; “we are inscribed in the book of Life,” 82) whose obverse side conceals as much as it reveals, inviting readers to look beneath the surface.

Not coincidentally, a less theological version of Marguerite’s reversed perspective is formalized by Machiavelli in *The Prince*, where he argues that an artist must position himself in a plain to paint a mountain; and among the people to “conoscere,” or understand and portray, a prince.<sup>38</sup> While this narrative view from below is not surprising in Machiavelli, a middle-class humanist who looked “upward” to Medici patronage for his livelihood, and perhaps downward as he scorned them, reversals of perspective such as these seem at first glance improbable in a writer of Marguerite’s rank. Given her status as both a princess of France and queen of Navarre, one would not expect her to share either the class consciousness of her low-born contemporaries, or their view from the bottom up of household, ecclesiastical, and seigniorial practices.<sup>39</sup> That she *does*, at least up to a point, is startling and merits a short explanation.

In the *Heptaméron* as a whole, Marguerite’s repeated scrutiny of the downtrodden serves most often as a revelational device that illuminates the suffering, virtues, and insights of the underclasses, as well as the vices of their oppressors. True, the queen rarely fleshes out underlings with either physiological

38. *Opere*, 3–4.

39. In the prologue, Ennasuite’s thankfulness that God spared the upper classes and took the lives of their servants instead (“Eurent une joye inestimable, louans le Createur qui, en se contentant des serviteurs, avoit saulvé les maistres et maistresses,” 5) suggests a class bias on Marguerite’s part that would be consistent with her own background, and yet out of step with her later foregrounding of the servant’s perspective and body language. “Taken out of context,” says Marcel Tetel, “the statement [...] could indeed substantiate an anti-lower-class attitude, but the ambivalence arising from the two different uses of *serviteur* [in the *Heptaméron*] definitely weakens [this] feeling of class superiority [...]. If God satisfies himself with servants to let their masters live and thereby allows Parlamente to have her own servant, Symontaut, it should not be forgotten that Symontaut also serves both his lady and God. In the final analysis, the masters are the real *serviteurs*” (152).

attributes or the extensive psychological detail she accords to aristocrats such as Floride (N. 10), suggesting these flat characters remain profoundly “other” from her upper-class perspective. While Marguerite’s servants are generally faceless, however, their plot function is often pivotal and instructive, an observation that holds true in particular for *nouvelle* 31. As for exactly why this is true, especially in a non-theatrical work devoid of comic servants like Molière’s Dorine in *Tartuffe*, who speaks the truth with impunity, one must look to Marguerite’s classical education, her biography, and her evangelical faith. First, as a humanist the queen was well-versed in the allegorical practice of excavating “buried” meanings, which Rabelais expounds upon so memorably in his metaphor of the marrow bone and in his pretense that Jean Audeau found Gargantua’s illustrious genealogy *buried* in a meadow and written on elm bark. Like her bawdy contemporary, who subordinates his princely protagonist to the upstart Panurge in *Pantagruel*, and traffics in both learned and popular discourse, Marguerite extends this excavation of textual “layers” inspired by humanistic hermeneutics to the different strata of society itself, digging beneath the surface of her culture to unearth the suppressed perspectives of abused women and *serviteurs*. Second, because the queen herself was likely a victim of sexual violence, her empathy for the underclasses may reflect an experientially acquired aversion to abuses of power and oppression that bridges distinctions of class and gender, constituting not only a community of women, but a kinship across social hierarchies with *serviteurs* as well.<sup>40</sup> Third, Marguerite’s recurring focus on the oppressed finds a theological model in the New Testament, where in Matthew 20:16 (NIV) Christ not only succours the poor but also reverses the earthly hierarchy by promising that in the afterlife, the “last will be first and the first will be last.” Despite her class origins, Marguerite was an evangelical thinker clearly mindful of the inverse relationship between wealth and virtue, poverty and vice, in Christological teachings; and she internalizes these precepts by constructing

40. For more on the sexual assault that Marguerite de Navarre herself may have suffered, see Cholakian, *Rape and Writing*, 9–10; and Brantôme, who in his memoirs identifies the Flemish widow in *nouvelle* 4 who is raped by a friend of her brother as Marguerite herself: “Et si voulez sçavoir de qui la nouvelle s’entend, c’estoit de la Reyne mesme de Navarre, et de l’Admiral de Bonivet, ainsi que je tiens de ma feu grand mere” (Pierre de Bourdeille Brantôme, *Recueil des dames, poésies et tombeaux*, ed. Etienne Vaucheret [Paris: Gallimard, 1991], 554).

herself, and several of her poetic and dramatic personae, as aspiring servants of God in her religious poetry and theatre.<sup>41</sup>

While servants do not literally “speak” the truth in *nouvelle* 31, instead falling victim to the antagonist and communicating post-mortem through their body language, their function within the plot and their contribution to the meaning of the story are crucial. Set safely outside France in the territory of Maximilian I of Austria, and narrated by Geburon, this first *nouvelle* of the Fourth Day chronicles the abduction of a married woman by her husband’s confessor, a Franciscan or Cordelier, who during the nobleman’s absence takes control of the household at knifepoint, kills the servants by cutting their throats, and forces the young matron to disguise herself as a monk. On their way to the monastery, however, where the Cordelier plans to rape and incarcerate her, the young woman and her abductor come upon the nobleman, who is returning home early in the company of his servant. Apparently unaware that “l’habit ne fait pas le moine,” the husband initially fails to recognize his wife, who is forcibly prevented from speaking or “mak[ing] any sign” (327; “si vous faites un seul signe, j’auray plus tost mon poignart en vostre gorge,” 239). Ironically, it is the servant who, upon looking more closely, discovers the identity of the “small monk” and alerts his master to her presence. Although the Cordelier murders this servant, like all his predecessors, the “fort et puissant” (240; “well-built and powerful” 328) nobleman finally rescues his wife; and after trying and convicting the friar, civil magistrates condemn him to be burned along with all his colleagues for having abducted, raped, and imprisoned in the monastery not just one but numerous (“un bon nombre,” 240) young women.

41. Marguerite’s poetry and theatre abound with variations on the words “servir” and “servant,” most often within the context of serving God, or, conversely, of failing in that duty. In her *Miroir de l’âme pécheresse* (*Mirror of the Sinful Soul*), for example, the poet laments that in her pride she has forgotten to serve her lord (“si peu de servir j’ai pensé,” line 42), or “mal servy” (line 74) her master, who endowed her with a body and a soul whose primary duty is to serve him (“tous deux n’[ont] aultre exercice / Que de penser à vous faire service,” lines 211–12) from her lowly position (“je suis trop moins que riens,” line 45). See Cholakian and Skemp, *Selected Writings*, 78–81, 86. Similarly, La Sage or the Wise Woman in *La comédie de Saint-Marsan* contends that one must “suyvre son commandement, [...] le servant de cueur et d’œuvre” (lines 371–72, 326). On a sociopolitical level, moreover, the queen of Navarre also constructs herself as a “subject” and “servant” in her correspondence with Kings François I and Henri II, respectively. See, for example, *Lettres de Marguerite d’Angoulême, sœur de François Ier, Reine de Navarre*, ed. F. Génin (Paris: Jules Renouard, 1841), 334, 389.

At first glance, this abridged plot may seem to be nothing more than an unremarkable piece of anticlerical satire, similar in content to Rutebeuf's "Frère Denise," and having little to do with censorship, servants, sixteenth-century politics, or muted voices.<sup>42</sup> On a literal level, after all, the Franciscan silences the young matron not for her beliefs or dogma, but rather for logistical reasons: to prevent her husband from "seeing" the abduction of his wife and the depravity of his confessor. Comparing Marguerite's rendition of the story to Rutebeuf's more conventional anticlerical narrative causes the outline of an alternative reading to emerge, however. Here, I am not suggesting that "Frère Denise" is a source or model that Marguerite has borrowed or systematically rewritten. To be sure, we cannot discount the possibility that she had read or heard either Rutebeuf's tale or a variation of it prior to composing the thirty-first *nouvelle*; in fact, of all the extant anticlerical pieces that circulated in medieval and early modern France, arguably "Frère Denise" is the most similar to *nouvelle* 31, a fact that makes it a useful springboard for examining parallels and differences between Marguerite's tale and the anticlerical tradition in popular French literature. More than the similarities, which tempt us to dismiss de Navarre's text as a derivative anticlerical piece, it is these differences that alert us to the theological and political resonances of *nouvelle* 31.

"Frère Denise" or "Brother Denise," which dates from the thirteenth century, is the first known version of a legend that circulated widely in the Middle Ages.<sup>43</sup> In Rutebeuf's fairly typical account of clerical misconduct, a gullible and pious young woman named Denise, who scorns earthly love ("a fet de son pucelage / Veu a Dieu," 284, lines 26–27) and the marriage proposals of more than twenty suitors ("Granz gentiz hommes plus de vint / L'avoient a fame requeis," 283, lines 22–23; "more than twenty important noblemen had asked to marry her"), implores a monk who has "bewitched" ("qui la damoisele enchanta," 284, line 36) her to speak with her mother on her behalf, and to convince the older woman to let her enter a convent: "La pucele li fist proiere / Que il sa mere requeist / Qu'en religion la meist" (284, lines 38–40; "The young girl begged him to ask her mother to send her to the convent"). Far from respecting the girl's wishes and consulting her mother, however, the opportunistic

42. See Rutebeuf, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Edmond Faral and Julia Bastin, 2 vols. (Paris: Picard, 1977), 2: 281–91. All quotations of "Frère Denise" in French are from this edition (hereafter cited in the text). The English translations are my own.

43. Rutebeuf, 283–91.

friar deflects her decorous request and uses his persuasive skills on the young woman herself, who fails to realize that “tout n'est pas or c'on voit luire” (283, line 15) or “all that glitters is not gold.” The lascivious monk preys upon the girl's religious fervour, her faith in his own sanctity, and her conflation of divine will with clerical praxis, convincing her that the best way to serve God is to follow him.

Aptly called Simon, a name connoting both proselytism and corruption,<sup>44</sup> Rutebeuf's perverted monk recalls Boccaccio's *Decameron* 3.10, one of the Italian humanist's earthier narratives.<sup>45</sup> In this comic tale of clerical frailty and cunning, a lascivious hermit who is adept at casuistry persuades an ignorant pagan girl named Alibech that “resurrecting” his own flesh and “putting the devil back in hell,” or having sex with him, are the best ways to serve God.<sup>46</sup> Unlike Boccaccio's hermit, however, who finds Alibech on his doorstep seeking instruction in Christianity, both Rutebeuf's monk and Marguerite's Cordelier carefully stage the abduction of their victims to minimize their own risk of apprehension and maximize the duration and ease of their trysts. Parlemente herself explains the monk's reasoning as follows:

- Je m'esbahys, dist Simontault, comment il eut la patience, [...] qu'il ne la print par force. - Il n'estoit friant, dist Saffredent, mais il estoit gourmand, car, pour l'envye qu'il avoit de s'en souller tous les jours, il ne se vouloit point amuser d'en taster. - Ce n'est point cela, dist Parlemente, mais entendez que tout homme furieux est tousjours paoureux, et la craincte qu'il avoit d'estre surprins et qu'on lui ostast sa proye, lui faisoit emporter son aigneau, comme ung loup sa brebis, pour la menger à son ayse. (241)

44. These connotations of proselytism and corruption, respectively, stem from Simon Peter's role as a fisher of men (Matt 4:18–19) and from Simon Magus's effort to buy mystical powers from Christ's apostles (Acts 8:18–24), which gave rise to the term “simony” denoting the sale or purchase of ecclesiastical offices and services.

45. In a different way, the matron disguised as a monk in Marguerite's *nouvelle* 31 recalls Boccaccio's 2.3, where the king of England's daughter disguises herself as an abbot to avoid an arranged marriage.

46. See *Decameron*, ed. Umberto Bosco and Domenico Consoli (Basiano: Bietti/Lito Galleani-Chignoli, 1972), 200: “[Rustico] le mostrò quanto il diavolo fosse nemico di Domeneddio, e appresso le diede ad intendere che quello servizio che più si poteva far grato a Dio era rimettere il diavolo in inferno” (“he showed her how powerful an enemy the devil was to the Lord God, and followed this up by impressing upon her that of all the ways of serving God, the one that He most appreciated consisted in putting the devil back in Hell”). Trans. G. H. McWilliam, *The Decameron* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), 316.

(“I am amazed,” said Simontault, “that he had the restraint not to take her by force [...]” - “He wasn’t interested in tidbits,” said Saffredent.” He was a glutton! He wanted to have his fill of her every single day, not just amuse himself with one little nibble!” - “That’s not the point,” said Parlamente. “In fact a violent man is always a scared man. He was afraid of being discovered and that someone would take away his prey, so he had to carry off his little lamb like a wolf, in order to devour her at his leisure,” 330.)

With similar “malice” and cunning, in Rutebeuf’s fabliau Brother Simon specifically directs Denise to leave her family without telling them of her intentions (“Desus s’ame li desfendi / Que riens son conseil ne deist,” 285, lines 72–73; “Upon her soul he forbade her to tell anyone of his plan”), ostensibly to forestall their objections and remove earthly impediments to her spiritual vocation, but in reality to shield himself from blame and prevent others from thwarting his crime. Much like Marguerite’s Cordelier, who threatens his victim with death if she utters a sound to her husband when they meet, Simon also reiterates his instructions for Denise to remain silent, telling her to prepare for her journey “que ja ne le seüst li mondes” (285, line 76; “in such a way that no one knew about it”) and cloaking his own lies with the persuasive rhetoric of truth: “Sachiez en fine verité,” he assures her, “qu’èn nostre Ordre bien vous metroie” (284, lines 64–65; “Know in pure truth that within our Order I would place you well”).<sup>47</sup> To complete this elaborate subterfuge, Simon instructs Denise to “si celement [...] coper ses beles treces blondes” (“secretly cut her beautiful blond tresses”) and disguise herself in men’s clothing (“Feïst rere estauceüre / Et preïst tele vesteüre / Comme a tel homme covendroit,” 285, lines 77–79) like Marguerite’s matron, whose hair the Cordelier “hack[s] [...] off” (327), and whom he forces to don a monk’s habit before kidnapping her. Without a discerning servant or powerful husband to rescue her en route to the monastery, moreover, Rutebeuf’s Denise duly enters the friar’s order where he secretly uses her for his own sexual pleasure:

47. See the following variant, based upon Ms. C, fol. 60 ro, and taken from the *Recueil général et complet des Fabliaux des XIIIe et XIVe siècles*, ed. Anatole de Montaiglon and Gaston Raynaud, 3 vols. (Paris: Librairie des Bibliophiles, 1878), 3:265: “Sachiez de fine veritei / Qu’èn nostre bienfait vos metroie” (lines 93–94; “This is pure truth,” he assures her; “I would have you lead our virtuous life.”). The Faral and Bastin edition follows Ms. A, fol. 329 vo.

En l'Ordre la fist recevoir,  
 Bien sot ses freres decevoir :  
 La robe de l'Ordre li done (287, lines 145–47)

Frere Symons fist vers li tant  
 Qu'il fist de li touz ses aviaux  
 Et li aprist ces jeux noviaux  
 Si que nuns ne s'en aparsut. (287, lines 162–65)

(He had her received into the Order:  
 He had no difficulty fooling his brothers.  
 He gave her the habit of his Order

Friar Simon arranged things so well  
 That he used her for his own pleasure  
 And taught her new games  
 Without anyone noticing what he had done.)

Justice, when it finally does prevail, comes at the hands of a perceptive noblewoman, who, upon realizing that young “Frère Denis” is actually a girl, demands to hear her real story or “confession.”<sup>48</sup> Lifting the vow of silence that Simon imposed on Denise, the woman urges her to “tell the truth” (“Se vous la verité me dites [...] bien vous poez fier en moi,” 289, lines 225, 227); and when the girl prevaricates, her hostess pointedly silences her lies. Indeed, Rutebeuf systematically—and symmetrically—peels back both the visual and auditory layers of Simon’s subterfuge at the end of his fabliau, deconstructing the ersatz truths he originally told Denise to reveal the facts of his crime, and removing

48. While the echoes in *nouvelle* 31 of Marguerite’s ruminations on confessional practices merit more attention than I have given them in this article, clearly they are present in Rutebeuf’s intertext, in the Cordelier’s function as confessor and spiritual advisor in the *gentil homme*’s household, in the dark corners similar to a confessional in which he stabs his victims, and in the confessional quality of Marguerite’s stories. See Mary B. McKinley, “Telling Secrets: Sacramental Confession and Narrative Authority the *Heptaméron*,” in *Critical Tales*, 146–72; Margaret Ferguson, “Recreating the Rules,” 159; Marc-André Weismann, “Rolandine’s lict de reseul: An Arachnological Reading of a Tale by Marguerite de Navarre,” *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 31.2 (2000): 433–52, and particularly 447; and John Bossy, *The Social History of Confession in the Age of Reformation*, Transactions of the Royal Historical Society, 5th Series, 25 (1975): 21–38.

Denise's disguise so that nothing remains hidden ("si que riens ne li a celé," 289, line 239).

Quite differently from Marguerite, who concludes with a conflagration worthy of Don Juan that represents both earthly and celestial retribution, Rutebeuf opts for a light-hearted conclusion reminiscent of Boccaccio, whose hermit, exhausted from his austere diet and strenuous sexual exertion, sends Alibech back home to a life of wedded bliss. Instead of being publicly tried and burned alongside his peers like the Cordelier in *nouvelle* 31, Brother Simon in Rutebeuf's fabliau must merely furnish Denise a dowry, as the noblewoman arranges an honourable marriage for the girl; and the religious young woman's "initiation," much like that of Boccaccio's Alibech, ends in marriage to an eligible *parti* who will never realize that she has slept with another man ("de nule creature / Ne sera son secré seü, / Ne qu'ele ait a home geü, / Ainçois sera bien mariee," 290, lines 292–95).

Despite obvious parallels between the two stories, including anticlerical satire, kidnappings by clergymen, cross-gendered disguises, and a thematic focus on truth and silence, Marguerite's novella differs in numerous ways from "Frère Denise." Marguerite includes four variations that politicize the narrative and connect it to religious repression and the balance of temporal and spiritual power in sixteenth-century France. First, while the young woman in Rutebeuf's story is not married, her counterpart in the *Heptaméron* has a husband, who is no less gullible than Denise in the fabliau.<sup>49</sup> His portrayal as a strong but inattentive head of household, who entrusts his secular power to a perfidious friar, has decidedly political resonances, particularly in view of tensions between the monarchy and conservative arms of the church during the reign of François I, and evangelical and reformist concerns about Catholic incursions

49. In his "Heptaméron 71 and Its Intertextuality: The Fabliau Art of Narrative Distance" (*French Forum*, 19.1 [1994]: 5–16), Jerry C. Nash notes Marguerite's tendency to make men rather than women the targets of her satire when appropriating tales from the fabliau tradition. Specifically, Nash studies Marguerite's transformation of "De celle qui se fist foutre sur la fosse de son mari" in her own *nouvelle* 71, where she replaces the female target of the earlier intertext's satire with a man: "Given Marguerite's feminist narrative preference for portraying men, rather than women, as butts of sexual intrigue and comic infidelity," says Nash "it is not at all surprising that she would adapt and reverse the particulars of the age-old story" (5). In *nouvelle* 31, which Nash does not discuss, one butt of the earlier author's satire (the Cordelier) is unchanged, but Marguerite reverses Rutebeuf's secondary target by substituting a gullible head of household for a naïve young girl, in an adaptation that facilitates her political message about governance and leadership.



into temporal governance. Second, Rutebeuf's Cordelier preys on the gullibility of Denise, seducing her with his spiritual rhetoric which is a weapon in itself; but he does not take her by force, and he never resorts to murder. By way of contrast, the monk in Marguerite's thirty-first novella violently eliminates all the servants that dare to question him by slitting their throats, the symbolic locus of speech, with his dagger. This addition to the plot, when read within the dual context of church-state relations, as well as reformist discourse on the "two kingdoms," strengthens the importance of the matron's silence, by raising the entire theme of silenced voices from a logistical to a political level.

Third, Rutebeuf's Cordelier, like his counterpart in the *Heptaméron*, instructs the young woman in "Frère Denise" to remain silent, but he never threatens her with death if she speaks. As a result, the girl finally escapes her captor's clutches when she confesses her story to a curious and sympathetic noblewoman, who sees that the young "confessor" she invited to dinner is actually a girl. In the *Heptaméron*, however, the monk specifically tells his victim that he will kill her if she utters a single word to passersby during their journey to the monastery. Even before the Cordelier's threat, however, the young matron consciously chooses a strategy of prudent silence and feigned submission upon seeing the corpses of her servants. It is only by finding an alternative language, that of the eyes, and by taking the monk's phallic dagger literally into her own hands, that Marguerite's "wise" ("saige," 237) protagonist restores order to her household and authority to her husband.<sup>50</sup> Fourth, the grid of body language informing Marguerite's text not only suggests an alternative mode of communication that transcends silence, but also contributes to the political and religious resonances of her *nouvelle*.

In the first of these four innovations, the text suggests that the nobleman, by virtue of his literal and figurative absence from the household, is partly responsible for the abduction of his wife and his own loss of power. While the friar's strange behaviour and dark expression trouble the cautious and discerning matron, who wastes no time in instructing her servants to inquire about his business in her home, his pious words and works ("biensfaits, jeunes et

50. That the matron herself retrieves the weapon when it falls from the cleric's hand, and then hands it to her husband, is richly symbolic. For if the matron represents France within Marguerite's allegory, which is plausible given the monarch's identification as the *maritus republicae*, or husband of the realm (see note 56), her own agency in restoring power to the gentleman reflects her consent to be governed and a reminder that he is her lawful protector.

disciplines,” 237) blind and seduce the *gentil homme*—who, very much like Molière's Orgon in *Tartuffe*, is guilty of bringing the Cordelier into their home as a confessor. From a theological standpoint, Marguerite has structured both the *nouvelle* and her characterization of the monk around two key issues of evangelic and reformist thought: first, the issue of faith versus works, the latter of which is a cornerstone of traditional Catholic dogma; and, second, the sacrament of confession, which was coming under scrutiny by reformist theologians such as Luther, whose influence on Marguerite is well known.<sup>51</sup> By associating both the concept of works and the institution of confession with a miscreant such as the Cordelier, who uses both practices to further his own depravity and conceal his lack of inner faith, the author positions herself alongside reformist thinkers in opposition to the church and the Sorbonne.

Equally important for the purposes of this study is the nobleman's characterization as a figure of secular power who has yielded his rightful authority to the church. Both at the beginning of the novella and near the end, Marguerite reminds us of the husband's “puissance,” which, once he finally sees the true character of the monk, allows him to disarm and subdue the Cordelier with little difficulty. As head of the body of the family, moreover, the nobleman arguably wields an authority analogous to that of the king in the body politic.<sup>52</sup> While Marguerite never specifically invokes this traditional analogy, as do more overtly political writers such as Budé, the comparison is relatively commonplace in the sixteenth century and finds support not only in the striking parallels between the nobleman's shared governance of his household with the clergy and the French monarchy's uneasy alliance with the Sorbonne and church, but also in numerous references to the body in *nouvelle* 31: scattered throughout the text are allusions to the body (240), face (238, 239), throat (238), foot (238), head (239, 240), hair (239), hands (238, 239), eyes (238), side (240), wrist (240), and heart (240).

With the exception of the throat, Marguerite's mentions of body parts appear at first glance to be casual descriptors rather than carefully chosen signifiers. Yet if one considers their fragmentation metaphorically, within the

51. For a discussion of Marguerite de Navarre's religious beliefs and practices, see Gary Ferguson, *Mirroring Belief: Marguerite de Navarre's Devotional Poetry* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992), and Febvre, *Amour sacré, amour profane*.

52. See Paul Archambault, “The Analogy of the ‘Body’ in Renaissance Political Literature,” *Bibliothèque d'humanisme et Renaissance* 29.1 (1967): 21–53.

rhetorical tradition of the body politic, an analogy emerges between the linguistic dismemberment and scattering of body parts in *nouvelle* 31, punctuated by Marguerite's textual or lexical separation of head from feet or of upper from lower bodily strata, and the dysfunctional nature of the household and state that they arguably figure. As Paul Archambault points out in his analysis of Erasmus's corporal metaphors, "the head does not serve the same purpose as the feet"; and while the former is superior to and responsible for governing the latter, at least according to hierarchical governmental models of the pre-Revolutionary era, the loss or malfunction of either component is detrimental to the whole.<sup>53</sup> For the well-being of the entire body politic, all parts must operate in tandem, with the head ruling but attentive to the other extremities, in such a way that "all institutions of the monarchy [...] function together." In marked contrast to this ideal, the linguistically fragmented organs and extremities in Geburon's narrative, along with the mutilated corpses strewn across the matron's courtyard and the head of household's absence, offer us the fractured mosaic of a broken, crippled body.

To be sure, the absence of clear-cut indicators defining the meaning of Marguerite's corporeal signifiers cloaks the text in ambiguity, protecting the writer from reprisals and affording readers a good deal of interpretive latitude. For if, on a political level, the broken (the servants) and purloined (the matron) bodies in *nouvelle* 31 conjure up images of the body of sixteenth-century France, torn asunder by internecine quarrels, they have religious resonances as well, invoking the battered corporeal image of the crucified Christ, and the broken body of his church in France, largely coterminous with the country's body politic. On one level, the Cordelier figures as a metonym of the church; and in a different type of story, if Marguerite had portrayed him from a conservative Catholic perspective, and as a hero rather than a villain, the clergyman might have functioned allegorically as the true bridegroom and true head of Christ's body, come to restore spiritual order to his flock with the sword of the church.<sup>54</sup> Instead, he joins other medieval and early modern Cordeliers in

53. Archambault, 49–50.

54. See Eva Amanda McVitty, "False Knights and True Blood: Reading the Traitor's Body in Medieval England" (master's thesis, Massey University, Manawatu, New Zealand, 2011), 102: "Execution rituals incorporating [...] dismemberment and display of body parts have thus been seen as acts that symbolically reintegrated the body politic and restored it to order through the expulsion of its most divisive and deviant members." In the theology of both Martin Luther and the Catholic Church, the spiritual

his personification of ecclesiastical abuses.<sup>55</sup> Unlike many other gluttonous and lascivious buffoons of the anti-monastic and anticlerical tradition, however, the Franciscan in *nouvelle* 31 is a villain of tragedy rather than a target of satire: in contradistinction to the bumbling but congenial monks in *nouvelle* 34, he is a traitor and usurper whose love is carnal, greedy, and illicit rather than divine, whose weapon is a stunted dagger rather than the true sword of Christ, whose quest for power is temporal rather than spiritual, and whose oversight of the faithful is abusive rather than pastoral. Instead of figuring as a true bridegroom and head of Christ's body, then, his characterization casts the friar instead as a "false bridegroom" who has appropriated and ravaged the body of Christ on earth, or the church, for his own ends, while attempting to usurp secular power from the head of household—or, allegorically, the head of state.

In this richly layered narrative, which stages a crisis of authority in the family, the church, and the state, the husband's identification with the king, or at least a king, is arguably coded by his "power to command," by the analogy between heads of household and heads of state in corporeal symbolism of the era, and by the king of France's construction, based upon Christ's role as the bridegroom of the church, as the *maritus republicae* or the husband of the realm.<sup>56</sup> This reading is moreover supported by the husband and Cordelier's

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sword of the church might be used for equivalent purposes against evildoers; but the Cordelier's dagger (a perversion of the sword) instead kills loyal "servants" (of God and their earthly master) and brings disorder to the bodies of both the church and state.

55. At one level of the allegory, one might even view him as a "false bridegroom" who has appropriated and ravaged the body of Christ on earth, or the church, for his own ends; but this interpretation would force readers to posit the husband as the "true bridegroom," or Christ—an association that seems unlikely given the *gentil homme's* many flaws.

56. See Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (1957; Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 221–22: "Charles de Grassaille, writing under Francis I, [...] styled the king the *maritus republicae* and talked about the *matrimonium morale et politicum* which the king contracted after the model of the prelate who wedded his church [...] On the accession of Henry II of France, in 1547, we find, for the first time in a French Coronation Order, the almost juristic rubric before the Bestowal of the Ring, saying that by this ring 'the king solemnly married his realm' (*le roy espousa solennellement le royaume*). The rubrics of the Order of 1594 were more explicit. They said that the king, on the day of his consecration, married his kingdom in order to be inseparably bound to his subjects that they may love each other mutually like husband and wife." From Charles de Grassaille, *Regalium Franciae libri duo, jura omnia et dignitates christianissimorum*, I ius xx (Paris: Poncet Le Preux, 1545), 217; and Théodore Godefroy, *Le Cérémonial de France* (Paris: A. Pacard, 1619), 348, 661.

symmetrical “houses,” the one (“la maison du gentil homme,” 237) temporal and the other (“un couvent de Cordeliers,” 237; “le dit monastere,” 240) ostensibly spiritual; by the two men’s “twinned,” and seemingly synergistic, authority (“[the Franciscan] avoit telle puissance de commander [...] comme luy-mesmes,” 237), skewed by their claims to the same domain; and by inexact, but nevertheless significant, historical parallels between François I’s post-1534 relationship to the church and that of the *gentil homme* to his confessor.

Clearly, the French king’s position was far more complicated than Marguerite’s staged confrontation between church and secular authority may suggest. For one thing, François was not simply a temporal leader as the nobleman in *nouvelle* 31 is: instead, by tradition and convention he was the “roi très chrétien,” who, in addition to ruling by “divine right” as God’s earthly representative, was also the nominal head of both the Gallican Church and the conservative religious factions in his own government that often opposed him. Second, instead of abdicating his temporal (or spiritual) authority to the church, or being the trusting “dupe” of corrupt religious leaders, as the *gentil homme* is, the historical François was prone to manipulate and use them as much as they did him, and to make concessions only when he believed they would enhance or preserve his own power. A case in point is his advocacy of the Concordat de Bologna (1516), which reversed the Pragmatic Sanction of Bourges (1438) and reduced the Gallican Church’s administrative autonomy, while increasing the papacy’s and his own authority over French benefices and their revenues. Vehemently opposed by Parlement and the University of Paris, including the latter’s Faculty of Theology, this move on François’s part abrogated the Pragmatic Sanction’s conciliar assertions and its curtailment of the payment of annates to Rome, in return for the Holy See’s support for—or, at least, lack of opposition to—his own territorial expansion in Italy. While the Concordat did restore some of the papacy’s authority over the Gallican Church, however, it did even more to enhance the king’s own power, in a scenario that differs significantly from the complete transfer of governance from a temporal to a spiritual leader in *nouvelle* 31.

Broad schematic parallels between the *nouvelle* and François’s dealings with the church and conservative Catholics become progressively more evident following the “Affaire des placards” (“The Affair of the Placards,” 1534), however. Prior to the this date, François I was inconsistent but often tolerant toward and even protective of evangelical scholars, theologians, and writers of a humanist

bent, in part because of his own commitment to the “new learning,” in part out of respect for Marguerite’s evangelical leanings, and in part because the “Lutheran” dissension had not yet threatened his own rule. As early as 1521, Knecht tells us, “the Faculty [of Theology] [...] took the initiative in convincing both the king and the Parlement of the need to suppress Lutheranism,”<sup>57</sup> suggesting that François, like Marguerite’s *gentil homme*, was inclined to respect the counsel of his theological advisors; unlike his literary counterpart, however, the king did not ratify the Faculty’s directives unquestioningly, at least during the 1520s, but wavered on, and contested, a number of their positions on heterodoxy. Bound by his coronation oath to root out heresy in his kingdom, he nevertheless used his monarchical authority to halt certain anti-heretical measures, including the denunciation of Jacques Lefèvre d’Etaples and the arrest of Louis de Berquin in 1523, that he believed went too far. When placards protesting the mass appeared on the *chambre du roi*, however, the king viewed this gesture of religious protest as an attack on his sovereignty; thereafter, he aligned himself increasingly with the Faculty of Theology and conservative factions of the church against reformers and humanists.<sup>58</sup> To be sure, the king continued to vacillate as late as the 1540s, staying the execution of the Vaudois or Waldenses of Provence, whom the *parlement* in Aix sentenced to death by burning, on two occasions, first at the behest of Guillaume du Bellay and later to appease the German Protestants; but under pressure from the pope, the king reinstated their death sentence in 1545, effectively approving the massacre of 2,700 men, women, and children.

Whether Marguerite intended these broad parallels between the literary *gentil homme* and François, who heeded the counsel of conservative Catholics too closely for her liking, is uncertain. While scholars have begun to suggest more ideological rifts between the French king and his sister than those

57. Robert J. Knecht, *Renaissance Warrior and Patron: The Reign of Francis I* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 159.

58. Despite his increasing severity toward dissidents and gradual shift toward the church’s position on unorthodoxy, François I occasionally showed clemency to protesters and reformers even in the 1540s, probably at the behest of his sister. In January, 1543 he pardoned rebels protesting the *gabelle* or salt tax in La Rochelle, in a gesture of conciliation that did not find favour in all quarters. At around the same time, the reactionary bishop of Condom would accuse the king, as well as his evangelical sister, of aiding and abetting heretics in the south; and during her long illness in late 1542 and early 1543, which was likely caused by a molar pregnancy, Marguerite even feared that the bishop was poisoning her. See Génin, *Lettres*, 75–76, 372–73; and Patricia F. Cholakian and Rouben C. Cholakian, *Marguerite de Navarre: Mother of the Renaissance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 236.

previously acknowledged, her fulsome praise for his wise governance in her *Chansons spirituelles*, addressed to God and written shortly after François's death, holds no overt criticism of her brother's missteps and shortcomings:

C'est celuy que vous avez oinct  
 A Roy sur nous par vostre grace,  
 C'est celuy qui ha son Coeur joint  
 A vous, quoy qu'il die ou qu'il face,  
 Qui vostre Foy en toute place  
 Soustient [...].  
 Vous vivez en luy tant qu'il vit,  
 Car de vous ha vraye science;  
 Vous réglez en sa conscience (lines 41–46, 51).<sup>59</sup>

(He is the one you anointed  
 King over us by your grace,  
 He is the one whose heart is joined  
 With you, whatever he may say or do,  
 Who your Faith in all places  
 Upholds [...]  
 You live in him as long as he lives.  
 For of you he has true knowledge;  
 You reign in his conscience.)<sup>60</sup>

Yet even in this elegiac paean to François, whose heart and will she conflates with those of his maker,<sup>61</sup> Marguerite introduces a subtle distinction between earthly and heavenly rule when she notes that the true king is God (“Vous estes son Roy et son Dieu,” 5, line 54; “You are his King and his God”), whose will is made known to François, his temporal surrogate, not through papal decrees or the counsel of Sorbonne doctors, but through the unmediated operations of his own “conscience,” often associated with the “inner eye” of faith. Rather than

59. *Chansons Spirituelles*, ed. Georges Dottin (Geneva: Droz, 1971), 4–5.

60. My translation.

61. Given Marguerite's contention in this passage that François's heart is conjoined with God, and that God lives in her brother's conscience, one might argue that she is constructing the king as the body of God on earth, a role traditionally reserved for the church.

describe her deceased brother as he was, moreover, Marguerite reconstructs him rhetorically as a paragon of Christian and reformist kingship and virtue, in a eulogy-turned-prayer that privileges inward and faith-based faculties including his “conscience,” his “true knowledge” of God, and his “heart” over his outward words and works (“quoy qu’il die ou qu’il face”). Arguably, lexical ambiguities in the passage allow us to interpret “quoy qu’il face” not only as a summative modifier of “[his] heart is joined with you” (e.g., his acts mirror his heart and are, therefore, always godly), but, alternatively, as a contrasting subordinate clause implying that his heart remains godly—no matter what he may have said or done.

Despite François’s own contention that Marguerite’s thoughts mirrored his own, clearly this was not always the case.<sup>62</sup> His remonstrance for her to stop meddling in matters of doctrine, reported by Jeanne d’Albret, draws our attention to their confessional differences, for example, which were necessarily politicized; and while it would have been impolitic for de Navarre to criticize or reprimand her brother directly, there is nothing in either her biography or the historical record to suggest that she would have refrained from making religious or political suggestions to him, particularly if those unpalatable “truths” were dissimulated by flowery rhetoric, allegory, or frivolity. These considerations add plausibility to political readings of key *nouvelles*, including the thirty-first, as do Marguerite’s own participation in politics as an advisor to the regent (her mother, Louise de Savoie) and a negotiator for her brother’s release in 1525; her role as the *duchesse régnante* of Alençon following her first husband’s death; and her activities as both a client of her brother, and a patron of her subjects, in Navarre. Contrary to accounts that paint Marguerite as an evangelical thinker with mystic, and even Quietist, tendencies, which would in fact have sharply curtailed her involvement in politics, Jonathan A. Reid constructs the writer not as a supernumerary, but as a leader, of France’s reformist movement, suggesting that she was not only engaged but extremely active in French Protestantism, a fact he believes she dissimulated to avoid reprisals and protect fellow Reformers. In this sense, one may argue that the “grammar of divine silence” toward which she strives, apolitically, in her religious poetry is reformulated in the *Heptaméron* as a strategic muting of impolitic truths, too

62. “She will never believe anything that I do not believe,” the monarch reputedly proclaimed, “and will never belong to any religion that would be prejudicial to my Estate.” Translated by Cholakian and Cholakian, 210, from Brantôme, *Recueil des dames*, 178.



dangerous to articulate, which are made visible by the body language of the text.

Whether it specifically targets François I or not, *nouvelle* 31 joins other short stories in Marguerite's collection in offering insights into temporal decision-making that are relevant to the monarchy and to the "education of the Christian prince." One such example is *nouvelle* 42, the tale of a prince—typically identified as François d'Angoulême—who hopes to bed a young bourgeoisie named Françoise. The youth's evolution from a selfish aristocrat who assumes the girl will acquiesce, to a mature young man capable of understanding and respecting his love's wishes, offers François I a template for government as well as love. By way of contrast, Marguerite's story of the duke of Urbino (N. 51), who has a young serving girl killed for carrying love letters back and forth between his son and a respectable young woman from a poor family, provides the monarch with an anti-model of governance—as does the tale of Alessandro de' Medici (N. 12), whose cruelty and tyranny lead to his assassination.<sup>63</sup> To drive home the lesson and its applicability to all rulers, rather than Italian despots alone, the storyteller Dagoucin urges princes in general to beware of displeasing their subjects ("Et doibvent bien craindre les princes ceulx qui sont en auctorité, de faire desplaisir à moindres que eulx," 94–95), lest they too be deposed or assassinated. And while Marguerite refrains from mentioning François I in either *nouvelle*, concern for his well-being and that of his subjects resonates in Dagoucin's forward-looking critique of monarchical injustice. As Carla Freccero points out, Marguerite de Navarre cannily attempts to influence monarchical behaviour and affairs of state in her *Heptaméron*, much like Castiglione does in his *Book of the Courtier*;<sup>64</sup> but instead of simply

63. At least, this is true in Marguerite's version of the story. In his "Commentaire de la XIIe nouvelle de l'*Heptaméron*" (*Revue du Seizième siècle* 11 [1924]: 208–21), Alexandre Rally argues that Marguerite simply transcribes the assassin's (Lorenzino de' Medici, later immortalized as "Lorenzaccio" or "bad Lorenzo") own self-serving account of the coup, which she would have heard when he sought refuge in France. Indeed, her narrative is relatively consistent with Lorenzino's published chronicle of the assassination. Yet today scholars recognize that few if any of Marguerite's *nouvelles* are mere transcriptions of historical events. Instead, the author manipulates and molds the historical "seed" or template of her tales, when there is one, for artistic and ideological purposes that critics are still attempting to unravel. See Lorenzino de' Medici, *Apologia e Lettere*, ed. Francesco Erspamer (Rome: Salerno, 1991); Joyce G. Bromfield, *De Lorenzino de Médicis à Lorenzaccio: Etude d'un thème historique* (Paris: Librairie Marcel Didier, 1972).

64. Freccero, 76.

expressing her political insights discursively or even dialogically, de Navarre also communicates them indirectly through princely models and anti-models, as well as through household dramas and allegories such as *nouvelle* 31.

Like many of de Navarre's tales, to be sure, as well as those of her predecessors and contemporaries, the thirty-first novella illustrates a truism that is not inherently political: namely, that we must beware of false appearances and look beneath the "monk's habit." In addition to its vocabulary of power, the analogy it invokes between the body of the family and the body politic, and its metaphors of silence and seeing, however, what sets this *nouvelle* apart from others that differentiate between the proverbial book and its cover is the social and political, rather than personal, contextualization of the axiom: for much as an individual's wickedness increases dramatically in scope "when [it is] combined with power" (N. 51, 431; "quant elle est jointe à la puissance," 331), so also does *nouvelle* 31 reveal the adverse effects that personal gullibility or a single lapse of vigilance and discernment in the exercise of power by a ruler or family patriarch can have upon the entire realm or household. Nowhere is this more evident than in the broken bodies of the *gentil homme's* servants in *nouvelle* 31, whose deaths, directly perpetrated by the Cordelier, stem indirectly from the head of household's blind trust in his confessor, to whom he delegates his own "power to command" without considering the possible disconnect between the friar's outward appearance and inner character, or the potential repercussions of his literal and figurative abdication of authority upon those in his care. While this fictionalized plot element may be correlated figuratively with the increasing political power of conservative arms of the church in the 1530s and 1540s, it is not the delegation of authority per se that Marguerite is targeting, given the division of labour and shared responsibilities required by any large administrative entity, but rather the *gentil homme's* allocation of authority to a Cordelier or religious hypocrite, a misstep that points back to the husband's own lack of insight.

By righting this error in judgment at the story's end, and ensuring that the nobleman "sees" the Cordelier's perfidy, Marguerite emphasizes the importance of clear-sightedness in authority figures and reaffirms a key component of the *Heptaméron's* instructional goals: for if the work indeed functions as a "social text" designed to educate the prince or king, as Margaret Ferguson and Freccero have suggested, a large proportion of its lessons are ocular or perspectival and address limitations in an authority figure's vision. In *nouvelle* 42,

for example, the young prince's self-absorption prevents him from realizing that his honour differs from that of Françoise, and that the sexual liaison he hopes to persuade her to engage in will affect her future more adversely than his own. In this story, the instructional focus is on learning to see through the eyes of otherness (Françoise's perspective), and to anticipate the repercussions that one's own decisions may have on other individuals and the community as a whole (Françoise's dishonour and that of her family if she sleeps with him). This is a lesson that the *gentil homme* in *nouvelle* 31 would also do well to heed; but his own perspectival shortcomings, and the moral accompanying them, are figured differently. While the inattentive husband fails to anticipate the devastation that his lapse of judgment will bring to his household, much as the prince in *nouvelle* 42 fails to "see" Françoise's perspective, Marguerite emphasizes the lack of depth and insight, rather than the lack of breadth and foresight, in the *gentil homme's* undiscerning gaze.

Related as it is to the "inner eye" of faith, which allows believers to see truths that outward appearances obscure, this insight brings reformist resonances to de Navarre's "education of a Christian prince": for without condemning the rituals of unreformed Catholicism outright, she identifies the deceptive outward trappings of faith not only with the corrupt monk's habit, but also with the "good works," "fasts," "disciplines," and confessional rigour that the *gentil homme* embraces so obsessively. In this interrogation of key symbols of Catholic piety, the author refrains from portraying the mass itself or the cult of relics in a negative light, as many sixteenth-century French reformers did—although one may argue that she does this obliquely in *nouvelle* 32, the tale of a penitent adulteress required to drink from her dead lover's skull and venerate his skeleton. In contrast, the evangelical overtones of *nouvelle* 31 reside in the revelation that "good works," unaccompanied by faith and insight, are hollow.

The story also suggests that the late medieval and early modern Catholic confession, criticized by Reformers for its formalistic and obligatory nature, its monetization and links to indulgences, and its attribution of Christ-like (*in persona Christi*) intercessory power to priests, poses moral, spiritual, and even physical danger to the penitent. In this regard, the matron's abduction by the lascivious Cordelier for prurient purposes, together with the revelation that his monastic community is sequestering numerous other female sex slaves, echoes tales of both conventual abuses and confessional misconduct on the part of priests that circulated widely during the era. "The seduction of female penitents

by their confessors, euphemistically known as *solicitatio ad turpia* or 'solicitation,' writes Henry Charles Lea, "ha[d] been a perennial source of trouble to the church since the introduction of confession, more especially after the Lateran Council of 1216 rendered yearly confession to the parish priest obligatory."<sup>65</sup> On an iconographic level, the Cordelier's abduction and attempted rape of the matron stand out from the text and emblemize his transgressions with graphic impact, which is intensified by the incident's literal, real-life corollaries.

No less importantly, the confessor's scorn for and acts of violence toward the servants or *menu peuple* in *nouvelle* 31 not only give physical form to the "tyranny of confession"<sup>66</sup> so often decried for its brutality by Reformers, who contended clerics "desire[d] to enslave the penitent" to themselves,<sup>67</sup> but also recall the disempowerment of women and the lower classes in church practice and canon law. In general, Protestantism promised adherents of all backgrounds a greater voice in church governance and theological discourse than was had in the unreformed Roman or Gallican tradition, as well as an egalitarian role in the corporate or collective confession favoured by reformist communities, and in their priesthood of all believers. Instead of embracing this class- and gender-based inclusiveness, however, the Cordelier in *nouvelle* 31 perverts Christian teachings, including scriptural exhortations to exalt the poor and his clerical responsibility to "hear" and respond to their pronouncements and questions. In his self-aggrandizement and abasement of those he has sworn to assist, the friar embodies the abuses that French evangelicals and other reformist groups decried in mendicant orders, the institution of confession, and the church hierarchy as a whole. By diverting our gaze momentarily away from the clergyman or "monk's habit," however, and to the servants he has silenced rather than answered, and killed rather than succoured, *nouvelle* 31 directs the reader's attention to the true body of the church, consubstantial with the body politic, whose needs the sacrament of confession theoretically

65. Henry Charles Lea, *A History of the Inquisition of Spain*, 4 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1922), 4:95–96.

66. See Steven E. Ozment, *The Reformation in the Cities: The Appeal of Protestantism to Sixteenth-Century Germany and Switzerland* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1980), 51. Ozment attributes this comparison of confession to tyranny to Martin Luther and to the church historian Johannes Oecolampadius, quoting from the latter's *Quod non sit onerosa Christianis confessio, paradoxon* (Augsburg: Sigismund Grimm, 1521), or *A Paradox: Christian Confession Is Not Onerous*.

67. Ozment, 51, paraphrasing the Eisenach preacher and pamphleteer Jacob Strauss.

serves. At the tale's end, the entire monastery's destruction by civil authorities symbolically reverses the Cordelier's devastation of the *res publica*, as figured by the *gentil homme's* brutalized household, and echoes the widespread dissolution of monastic communities in Protestant countries during the sixteenth century, including those disbanded by England's Henry VIII between 1536 and 1541. Arguably, this gesture of secular power and justice in the face of ecclesiastical abuse, authorized by the court of Emperor Maximilian I in Flanders, is an important component of the lessons "for a Christian prince" embedded within the *Heptaméron*.<sup>68</sup>

In fact, one might venture that *nouvelle* 31 is doubly instructional: for on a metatextual level, Marguerite appropriates the Cordelier's own role as the *gentil homme's* counsellor to subvert and correct his advice to the head of household, countering his "spiritual" lessons, which brainwash the husband into relinquishing temporal power to the clergy, with her own evangelical and monarchist admonitions about the dangers of clerical intrusions into secular governance. In *nouvelle* 31, these dangers are linked at the level of the household to the sacrament of confession, through which, contends the Eisenach preacher Jacob Strauss, the clergy "seek to elevate the power of the pope and to reign themselves over the consciences of men, knowing, ordering, and arranging all things according to their good pleasure."<sup>69</sup> Aside from the reference to the pope, this is precisely what happens in *nouvelle* 31, where the *gentil homme's* consignment of his "power to command" to the Cordelier reflects, and is concomitant with, his abdication of control over his own judgment and his under-reliance on the insights of his conscience, a cornerstone of reformist morality. That the *gentil homme's* loss of authority figures that of the head of state moreover finds support in the testimony of Strauss and other Reformers, who "complained [...] about the power that mendicant confessors wielded over the judgments of kings."<sup>70</sup>

Among the evangelical or reformist resonances of *nouvelle* 31, the implication that church incursions into temporal governance transgress the proper balance of the "two kingdoms," the one secular and the other spiritual, is

68. While some might argue that Maximilian, as Holy Roman Emperor, exercises spiritual as well as temporal power, by convention the Empire represents the "secular sword"—and the church, its spiritual corollary—in traditional representations of the "two kingdoms."

69. Quoted by Ozment, 52.

70. Ozment, 53.

central. In contrast to Pope Boniface VIII, who, in his “Unam Sanctam” (1302) affirmed the church’s superiority to secular authorities and its right to intervene in affairs of state, Martin Luther proposed instead that “authority in temporal affairs belongs exclusively to the jurisdiction of the state.”<sup>71</sup> This view had already taken root in France, writes Henry Heller, where “royal legists admit[ed] the spiritual primacy of the Pope, [but][...] insist[ed] on the full independence of the monarchy in temporal matters, [suggesting] that as protector of the faith the king had the duty to regulate ecclesiastical affairs when required by urgent circumstances.”<sup>72</sup> In fact, Jean Thenaud, a royal panegyrist, goes so far as to contend, in his *Le triomphe des vertus* (ca. 1518–19), that God has endowed the French king with “as much power on earth as He has in heaven.”<sup>73</sup> While there is little in *nouvelle* 31 to support this hyperbolic view of the monarch’s power, reading the text as a political allegory, in which the head of household figures the head of state, yields a view of temporal governance and of church-state relations that echoes those of Luther and François I’s royal legists. More importantly, the lesson in governance offered by *nouvelle* 31, through the mistakes and evolution of the *gentil homme*, offers a practicum in judgment for kings, princes, and laypersons. Progressing from absolute trust in the confessor’s counsel, which suppresses his own moral faculties, to a realization that “monk’s habit” is deceptive, the husband learns from his valet and wife to train his eyes and ears on their reality, reassert his own authority, and bring the Cordelier and his cohort to justice.

Within this allegorical framework, the monk’s elimination of the nobleman’s servants by slitting their throats takes on new meaning. The weapon used by the Cordelier, first of all, is not the cross of his religion but rather a “poignart” or dagger. Typically associated with traitors and usurpers, or with illegitimate rather than legitimate power, the knife is at once a phallic symbol reflecting the monk’s unlawful claim to patriarchal power; a stunted, dishonourable version of the traditional knightly blade, which the emasculated gentleman appears to

71. Luther Hess Waring, *The Political Theories of Martin Luther* (1910; New York: Putnam, 1968), 234.

72. Henry Heller, “Reform and High Politics in France 1517–1525,” *Canadian Catholic Historical Association Study Sessions* 36 (1969): 57–77; this quotation, 68. From Pierre Imbart de la Tour, *Les Origines de la réforme*, 2 vols. (1914; Paris: Hachette, 1978) 2:75–77; and Victor Martin, *Les Origines du Gallicanisme*, 2 vols. (Paris: Bloud and Gay, 1939), 1:309–10, 318, 320–21.

73. Quoted by Heller, 68, from Pt. II, BN MS. Fr. 144, cxvii v: “[...] autant de puissance en terre qu’il en ha pour luy [au] ciel.”

have lost; and, arguably, a perversion of the sword that Luther believed secular authorities alone, rather than the church, were entitled to use against evildoers—but not against faithful Christians such as the Cordelier’s victims. Indeed, the friar’s violence against these *menus gens*, ostensibly in support of his own “Christian” power, directly contravenes the teachings of Christ, who warns that whatever is done to “the least of these” is done to him (Matt 25:40, 45 [NIV]). Further, the murders of the chambermaids take place in “coing[s]” (326–27; “corner[s],” 238) reminiscent of the secluded corners where private confessions were often heard;<sup>74</sup> and the narrator characterizes two of the victims specifically as “serviteurs,” a highly charged term in Marguerite’s writings used to designate a noblewoman’s admirer, a subordinate employee, and a servant of God. The Cordelier stabs each of these servants, finally, in the throat rather than in the back, chest, or stomach: as a result, the servants are deprived not just of life but, more pointedly, of the faculty of speech which enabled them to interrogate the friar. In fact, a servant’s question precipitates the entire string of murders: “La chamberiere s’en vat à la court,” Marguerite tells us, “demandant [au Cordelier] s’il vouloit riens [...] et, la tirant en ung coing, print ung poignart qu’il avoit en sa manche, et luy mist dans la gorge” (238; “The chambermaid went out into the courtyard to ask if he required anything [...] and dragging her into a corner, he took a dagger from his sleeve with which he proceeded to slit her throat,” 326).

Despite being threatened, of course, Marguerite’s young matron avoids the fate of her servants, in part because the monk claims to love her, and in

74. There is no scholarly consensus on exactly when the confessional or confessional box originated. Ozment repeatedly refers to structures he calls “confessionals” in early sixteenth-century Germany, while Lea proposes that they were invented in the middle of the century, based on an allusion to the confessional booth “in a memorial from Siliceo of Toledo to Charles V, in 1547” (96). In France, Jean Baptiste Etienne Pascal contends the confessional box and the French term (*F. confessionnal*) designating it do not appear until the late sixteenth century; but he notes that private confessions of women prior to this date were often held in chapel corners (“dans l’angle d’une chapelle) appointed with a stool or chair for the priest and a raised, partitioned space where the female parishioner would kneel and confess through a small opening or grill, with male confessions taking place in the sacristy. Concerns about the propriety of hearing the confessions of women in dark corners, out of public view, and the documented abuses of this practice were voiced in numerous medieval and early modern church councils, including those of Béziers (1246), Cologne (1280), and Aix (1585), the latter of which required “confessionnaux” or confessionals. See Pascal, *Origines et raison de la liturgie catholique en forme de dictionnaire* (Paris: J. P. Migne, 1859), 985–86. See also Lea, 95–96: “The intercourse between priest and penitent was especially dangerous because there had not yet been invented the device of the confessional.”

part because of her own astute use of silence in the face of censorship—which, in a sense, is what the queen is doing in her allegory. Instead of defying the Cordelier, the wife “delibera de faindre luy vouloir obeyr” (238–39; “decided to pretend to obey him,” 327). As a result, the young woman does not protest, but rather remains silent, when the monk cuts her hair and disguises her as a “petit Cordelier” (239). Similarly, she neither calls to her husband nor answers the questions of his servant (“ne luy respondit mot,” 239) when they cross paths on the road to the monastery. In lieu of spoken language, however, the resourceful woman does manage to signal to the servant with her eyes (“luy feit signe de l’oeil,” 239), using an alternative form of communication, or a form of body language, that figures repeatedly in the *Heptaméron*.

Ultimately, the imperative to “see”—and see differently—emerges both from the matron’s silence and from the coded text of Marguerite de Navarre. Because she “sees” what the monk has done (“elle veid ses deux chamberieres et son varlet mortz,” 238), the young woman develops a strategy of silence (“elle demeura comme une statue sans sonner mot,” 238) that both saves her life and communicates her insight to others. Not coincidentally, this tactic is parallel to the queen’s own compositional strategy, which involves muting her true message, burying it within the body of her text, and showing, instead of telling, us where to look for it. Previously blinded by the monk’s words and works, moreover, the nobleman in his own turn finally “sees” his dead servant and his silent wife; and this long overdue insight into the depravity of his confessor spurs him to act and reassert his authority. Rather than stab the Cordelier with his own dagger, the husband arranges for the monk to be tried in the court of the Holy Roman Emperor, thereby reaffirming the authority of secular rulers and civil law over the temporal claims of the church.<sup>75</sup> That the gentleman reasserts his authority in this way, punishing the “false bridegroom” and re-establishing order and justice to his household, moreover transforms this cautionary tale into a template for positive change: in addition to showing the French leaders the error of their ways, Marguerite suggests a plan for the future intended to restore order to, and heal, the body politic. When he is brought before the tribunal, the Cordelier “confesses” his crime in an ironic reprise of his vocation as a confessor; and his death by burning at once foreshadows the hell fires he may one day

75. See note 67.



encounter, and echoes the fiery punishment meted out to a range of accused criminals in sixteenth-century France—but especially to suspected heretics.<sup>76</sup>

Upon closer inspection, then, Marguerite's pursuit of obedient "silence," like that of the wise matron, proves to be less a gesture of submission or escapism than an act of *engagement*. Against a backdrop of censorship, clerical hypocrisy, and violence, Marguerite warns readers about the abuse of religious power, calls for strong temporal leadership, and invites readers to look beyond the habit of the monk. As she delves beneath the Cordelier's veneer of piety and propriety, into a reversed underworld of censored realities and silenced voices, Marguerite constructs her own authorship, paradoxically, on the unauthorized perspective of servants, women, and victims. By looking downward at the mutilated bodies of her servants, the matron sees beyond the "habit of the monk" and judges him on what he has done. Similarly, the discerning gaze of the fourth servant, from the underside of power and privilege, saves the matron by deciphering her silent message of suffering and oppression; and in turn, it is by seeing through the servant's eyes, and focusing on his brutalized body rather than the "habit" of official discourse, that the slow-learning nobleman finally grasps the "true story."

Within the fiction this progression from sight to insight hinges upon illuminating the blind spots of official discourse, both through the alternative perspective of the disempowered, and through body language rather than elegant rhetoric. Even as she decries the intratextual monk's deception, or his concealment of lasciviousness under a veneer of piety, moreover, Marguerite cloaks her own message in a veil of allegory which, like the matron's appeal for help, is silent and yet visible. Ultimately, then, the thirty-first novella functions as an allegory of reading not that different from Rabelais's marrow bone: Marguerite is urging her public not to read life uncritically, in the manner of the complacent nobleman, but rather to excavate beneath the surface of the text and uncover its censored truths.

76. François Guizot and Henriette Guizot de Witt report that "from 1524 to 1547, 81 death-sentences for heresy were executed," and that in a single period of six months, most likely from November 1534 to May 1535, "102 sentences of death by fire for heresy were pronounced." See their *France*, trans. Robert Black, 8 vols. (New York: P. F. Collier, 1900), 3:166; and *Journal d'un bourgeois de Paris sous le règne de François Premier (1515–1537)*, ed. Ludovic Lalanne (Paris: Jules Renouard, 1854), 441–51.