
SOME BEAUTIFUL AND TRUE STORIES OF WOMEN IN THE MIDDLE AGES AND THE RENAISSANCE**Dominique de Courcelles**

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Résumé

Au Moyen Age et à la Renaissance, les femmes acquièrent le désir et la capacité d'écrire elles-mêmes des histoires édifiantes, belles et véritables, et elles posent à leur mesure la question difficile, à la fois philosophique, théologique et juridique, du rapport entre la beauté, la vérité et l'écriture. Cette étude considère successivement la *Vie* de sainte Douceline de Digne écrite à la fin du XIIIe siècle par Philippine de Porcellet qui lui a succédé à la tête des béguines de Provence, *La Cité des Dames* de 1404 de Christine de Pisan, *L'Heptaméron* de Marguerite de Navarre composé à partir des années 1520, dans la mesure où ces textes correspondent à trois étapes significatives de l'histoire de la littérature française du Moyen Age et de la Renaissance, et de l'élaboration des rapports entre la beauté et la vérité dans la littérature. Ces trois exemples d'«histoires belles et véritables» des femmes montrent bien comment les femmes, en nouant les rapports entre la beauté et la vérité, imposent leur présence dans la littérature. Découvrant le pouvoir des «histoires belles et véritables», elles en tirent non seulement une reconnaissance religieuse, culturelle, sociale, mais aussi une meilleure connaissance d'elles-mêmes et du monde qui les entoure, une aptitude à affirmer et légitimer efficacement leur intelligence et leur liberté.

Mots clés: beauté, Cantilène de sainte Eulalie, Christine de Pisan, Cité des Dames, Douceline de Digne, femmes, Heptaméron, histoire, littérature française, Marguerite de Navarre, moyen âge, renaissance, vérité.

Abstract

In the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, women acquired the desire and the ability to write their own inspiring, beautiful, and true stories, and raised the difficult question of the relationship between beauty, truth, and writing, which was at once philosophical, theological, and juridical in nature. This study considers successively the Life of St. Douceline de Digne, written in the late thirteenth century by Philippine de Porcellet—who succeeded her as head of the beguines of Provence—The City of Ladies authored by Christine de Pizan in 1404, and Marguerite de Navarre's Heptameron, composed after the 1520s. These texts represent three significant milestones in the history of the French literature of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, and in the development of the relationship between beauty and truth in literature. These three examples of “beautiful and true stories” illustrate how women, by establishing the relationship between beauty and truth, imposed their presence in literature. Discovering the power of “beautiful and true stories”, they used them to obtain not only religious, cultural, and social recognition, but also a better knowledge of themselves and the world around them, and an ability to effectively assert and legitimize their intelligence and freedom.

Key Words: beauty, Canticle of Saint Eulalia, Christine de Pizan, The City of Ladies, Douceline de Digne, women, The Heptameron, history, French literature, Marguerite de Navarre, Middle Ages, Renaissance, truth.

French literature is rooted in the Middle Ages, at a time when French, like other Romance languages, was born of spoken Latin. From the beginning, writing aimed to enable a form of communication that escaped time, created memory, said the truth, and had a solemn and legal value. But the sentiment of beauty soon disrupted that effort towards simple communication. Aesthetic pleasure is reflected in the text, which becomes the object of a literary desire; the game of themes and motifs—and their combination of words and images—closely linked form and meaning. In fact, beauty implies an act of knowledge, that is to say, an effort to understand and to express the objective aesthetic properties inherent in the structure of reality and the world. The contribution of metaphysics and ancient rhetoric profoundly marked the designation of beauty. Given that beauty involves an act of knowledge, it raises the question of truth and stands at the centre of legal, philosophical, and theological thinking. This is how the beauty and truth of words combine.¹

The oldest known literary text is the *Séquence* or *Cantilène de sainte Eulalie*, composed around 881-882.² In the manuscript of Valenciennes in which it appears, this short 29-line piece is placed between a poem in Latin in honour of Saint Eulalia and a German poem, the *Ludwigslied*, in honour of King Louis III (d. 882). While the Latin poem is a rhetorical praise of Saint Eulalia, the French poem introduces the saint and gives a brief account of her martyrdom. It is inserted into the Divine Office as a vernacular variant of the Latin poem, at a time when the Church was forced to make an effort to preach and teach in the vernacular language. The poems begins as follows: “Buona pulcella fut Eulalia./ Bel auret corps bellezour anima.”³

In this first story, the drama is an abridged version of the characteristic lives of saints, but includes a particular nuance: the evocation of female beauty. At the end of the account, as a result of the ordeal underwent by the saint, this beauty is transformed and spiritualized into a white dove.

Ad une spede li roueret tolir lo chief.
La domnizelle celle kose n(on) contredist.
VOLT lo seule lazsier si rouet Krist.
In figure de colomb volat a ciel.⁴

Several points need to be noted here. First, the clerics who wrote the Christian legend did not hesitate to transfer it from Latin to the Romance language: the monks of Saint-Amand-les-Eaux, near Valenciennes, for whom the *Cantilène* is intended, lived in a Picard-speaking area. Second, this account, written in imitation of a Latin poem written by Prudentius in the fourth century in honor of Saint Eulalia of Mérida, also changed the rhythmic structure, abandoning syllable

¹ As MICHEL 1994 notes; DE BRUYNE 1998 [1946] expounds on the various doctrines of beauty in medieval times to better understand the literary and artistic creations of this era, in which the world itself was seen as a song in praise of the “good Lord.”

² Bibliothèque de Valenciennes, MS 150, f. 141 v.

³ Eulalia was a good maiden, / Fair was her body, and fairer was her soul.

⁴ The king ordered to cut her head with a sword. / The girl did not dispute it. / She wants to leave the world, if Christ so commands. / In the shape of a dove she flies towards heaven.

weight in favour of rhyme and rhythm. Finally, and quite remarkably, the name Eulalia itself binds together beautiful words and femininity, for it derives from the Greek “she who speaks well,” “she who speaks beautifully.” French literature was therefore born between the Latin of the scriptures, the Fathers of the Church, and the representatives of power and the vernacular of the people who needed to be taught the Christian truth and who were sensitive to the beautiful and truthful words of a beautiful, martyred, and saintly woman. The short poem of Saint Eulalia is recognized as the first monument of French literature (WALTER 1993).

At the end of the ninth century, therefore, Sainte Eulalia arouses the literary desire, but she also encourages seeking the meaning of a kind of beauty of which she is but an image. Ultimately, this is the beauty of God and of the Divine Words; a kind of beauty that is the truth in itself and expresses a certain idea of perfection. However, at the same time, the woman, as such, causes fear. For a long time, the Church managed to defend the masculine and clerical privileges of writing and beautiful and true stories.⁵

In the mid-twelfth century, the so-called ancient *romans*—because their authors present them as translations of prestigious Latin texts—introduced women into French literature in *langue d’oil* and *langue d’oc* by means of long descriptions of their beauty, and drawing attention to their lamentations of love, which gave rise to the development of an art of love (for instance, in the *Roman de Troie*). In his *romans*, Chrétien de Troyes seems to be interested in the strong determination of women (for example in *Erec et Enide*, composed in 1165). Around 1180, Marie de France, in her *Lais* recounts the dramatic stories of women married to men they do not love, and the tensions between society and the individual, between men and women. She frequently insists on the veracity of her narration, because despite the fact that the beauty of her poems was recognized she was criticized on the truthfulness of her stories. The twelfth century is also the time of an admirable revival of techniques, Romanesque art reached its peak, the Gothic style flourished. John of Salisbury (who was bishop of Chartres) in his *Metalogicon* presented three allegories: “philologia,” the love for speech and rational thought; “philosophia,” the love of wisdom, and also “philocalia,” the love of beauty, which had been already discussed by Saint Augustine in *De Trinitate*, and which could not be separated from the other two loves. In the thirteenth century, with the development of cities and universities, with the establishment of free communities of women, called beguinages, French—both the *langue d’oil* and the *langue d’oc*—found a literary form that dealt with spiritual matters in the writings, in prose or in verse, of some women who were Beguines or nuns close to them. Gradually, women acquired the desire and the ability to write edifying, beautiful, and true stories, and tackling through them the difficult questions of the relationship between beauty, truth, and writing.

⁵ JOHNSON 2003 points out that to understand the complexity of cultures, we must study the status of women and the conception of the beauty of women, and of the beauty of the world created by God. Beauty identifies divine perfection, and thus, at the same time, it asserts world harmony, wealth, power, and a high social position.

This study will focus successively on the *Life* of Saint Douceline de Digne, written in the late thirteenth century, on *The City of Ladies* written by the Venetian Christine de Pizan in 1404, and on Marguerite de Navarre's *Heptaméron*, composed after the 1520s, for these texts represent three significant milestones in the history of the French literature of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, and in the development of the relationship between beauty and truth in literature.

I. The *Life* of a saintly woman written by a woman around 1297

In the early thirteenth century, historiography, with figures such as Nicolas de Senlis and others, was written in prose. The alleged truthfulness and faithfulness the prologues of these accounts maintain betray a desire to create a new form of edifying story based on authenticity and to support the claims of a particular social group.

In 1215, the 4th Lateran Council aimed to strengthen the spiritual and moral life of the laity and stressed the importance of knowing and imitating the saints. In 1260, the *Golden Legend* by the Italian Dominican Jacobus de Voragine in Latin was a practical compilation of short biographies of saints that were used by preachers (FLEITH, MORENZONI 2001). Jacobus de Voragine, whose sources were old and often apocryphal, never raised the question of the truth of his stories, turned into canon by the Latin language, the language of the scriptures. Very quickly, the *Golden Legend* was adapted to the French *langue d'oc* and *langue d'oïl* by clerics concerned with the edification of the faithful. The French lives of saints are structurally related to the first "ancient" French *romans*, appeared in 1150, and like them, they are literally a work of vulgarization.⁶ However, creative writing had to fit in the narrow space of the translations or adaptations from Latin texts, while the lives of saints referred to liturgical texts: the respect for the models attests to a truth that exceeds them.

In the same thirteenth century, women got used to recount their own spiritual experience, their "visions," by submitting to the authority of men who owned the models of religious life and its writing. Thus, they were led to impose their presence through speech, while benefiting from the authority of those who read and appraised their work.⁷

In this context, the *Life* of Saint Douceline de Digne (d. 1274), a Provençal Beguine, written around 1297 by a woman, Philippine de Porcellet (d. 1316), who belonged to an important Provençal family, is quite characteristic of the writers' awareness of the power and importance conferred on them by the literary text. This work is one of the first biographical accounts written by a woman (BNF, fds français, MS 13503).⁸ Philippine was herself a Beguine who became acquainted with Douceline

⁶ In the *Roman de Philosophie* written by Simon de Freine in the twelfth century, an adaptation of Boethius's *Consolatio Philosophiae*, we read: *Solaz dune e tout ire/ Icest romanz ki l'ot lire: Ce roman console et rassèrene/ Celui qui en entend la lecture*; in the *Vie de saint Georges* by the same author: *N'i ad rens en cest romanz/ Dunt le profit ne seit granz: Il n'y a rien dans ce roman/ Dont le profit ne soit grand*. On the relation between the first French *romans* and hagiographic literature, see JODOGNE 1964, GUMBRECHT 1979.

⁷ Several studies expound on this problem in the miscellany DUBY, PERROT 1992.

⁸ *La Vie de sainte Douceline*, fifteenth-century Provençal text preserved in MS Fr. 13503 of the BnF; it was edited, translated and annotated in GOUT 1927.

de Digne from a young age, and after the death of Douceline, she became major prioress of the beguinages of Hyères and Marseille, founded by Douceline by the middle of the thirteenth century. She had therefore every reason to safeguard the original memory of the foundress and the continuity of her work. With this double purpose, the *Life* was written in the *langue d'oc*, in a beautiful prose that turns it into a valuable monument to Provençal literature and the religious history of Provençal Beguines. We should not forget that until the thirteenth century, from northern France to Italy, the *langue d'oc* was the language of culture and refinement.

Who could better speak and write about the foundress of Provençal Beguines if not a woman? Actually, Douceline de Digne “non solamens non sufria parlar amb els homes, mais parlar d’els esquivava molt fort” [not only could not stand talking to men, but also avoided talking about them as much as possible] (chap. 6, f. 20 r). Women were therefore able to speak for themselves and, preferably, Douceline adds, to speak of saints in order to conform to their model.

Philippine begins her account as follows: “En nom de Nostre Senhor acomensa li vida de la Benaurada Sancta Doucelina mayre de las donnas de Robaut;”⁹ next she immediately turns to Douceline’s family history, as do all medieval writers when introducing the heroes of the early *chansons de geste*. The true story of the blessed woman is necessarily between God and the human lineage. Philippine insists:

E car, segon la garentia de Crist qu’es testimoni de vertat, de bona razis ieis bons albres, e tuh li fruc son bon, car li pairon eran verai, li enfant foron bon e drechurier e sant... resplendor de tota sanctitat (chap. 1, f. 1 v).¹⁰

The firstborn was the Franciscan Hugues de Digne, “mot ardens predicaires de la vertat de Crist,”¹¹ and the second child was Douceline, “li segona lumniera, non mens luzens per sanctitat de vida” (chap. 1, f. 1 v).¹² Thus, immediately, truth and beauty, here signified by light, appear related to each other, but also the masculine and the feminine. The role of the brother of Douceline, “a very ardent preacher of the truth of Christ,” and the role of the foundress are fundamental to the story. Also important is the role of the Count and Countess of Provence.

Recounting the events, that is to say, the successive miracles and ecstasies of the life of Douceline, Philippine continues to show the interweaving of truth and beauty in the life of the saint. Beauty evidences the truth of the spiritual experience of the holy woman, and both men and women can attest to it:

⁹ [In the name of our Lord begins the life of the Blessed Saint Douceline, mother of the ladies of Roubaut].

¹⁰ [And, as the testimony of Christ who is the guarantor of truth, just as good roots sprout a good tree, whose fruits are good, these truthful parents had good children, righteous, and saints ... the splendour of all holiness].

¹¹ [Very ardent preacher of the truth of Christ].

¹² [The second light, no less brilliant for the sanctity of her life].

Mot sovent era li sieu ver raubiment, e per motas personas foron proatz, qu'en porteron verai testimoni de la gran gloria que dels huols li ihissia adoncs e de la sieva cara que semblava uns angels, e de la vertat que n'avian conneguda, e de las maravillas que d'ella avian vist... (chap. 9, f. 48 v).¹³

And again: “E en sa cara laisset singular maravilla, que sembla uns angels” (chap.13, f. 75 r).¹⁴ The beauty of Douceline seems to concentrate the theories of light and the contemplation of the intelligible world, which are the theories of Neoplatonism that exalts the primacy of vision.

Her beautiful holy body, after her death, was the object of desire of the people, who wanted to seize and dismember it, but the Franciscans and “li mellor home”¹⁵ of the city managed to protect and bury her before such thing happened. “E comenset li sancta resplandir per miracles” (chap. 14, f. 79 r),¹⁶ wrote Philippine, who had continuously recounted the miracles Douceline performed during her life. The first miracle after her death consisted in her apparition donning a Beguine’s habit in the convent which was then beset with doubt about the truth of a praise formula included in the first life of the saint: should they use such formula or not? “E era tota de meravilloza beutat, que per maravilla esgardava son tall, tant era ben formada” (chap.14, f. 82).¹⁷ Beguines then had an immediate answer about their foundress; they heard “en son cor”¹⁸ the Latin hymn of the liturgical office attesting to the truth of the sanctity of a woman:

Dulcelina haec de Digna
Sede polorum est digna,
Inter sacras virgines.

The Latin language of the liturgy of the Church introduced into the narrative in *langue d’oc* proves that the writer is familiar with the cultural codes of her time. So the truth is ultimately guaranteed the sanctity of Douceline.

While men, from the thirteenth century onwards, wrote true stories in prose, because “no rhymed tale is true,” Philippine claims her ignorance of the art of writing while showing a good command of prose in *langue d’oc*. In the same way as women from Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179) on devoted themselves to the art of writing about spiritual matters while humbly protesting their theological ignorance and their divine inspiration, Philippine states her lack of wisdom and understanding and voluntarily distances herself from Douceline’s story by always speaking of herself in the third person:

So que bel i es fach, non pot hom dar a savieza de persona, ni az entendement... Mais le Maistres de vertatz, que sap totas las cauzas,... aquell Sennher n’es agutz principals fazeires e maistres (chap. 15, f. 98 v^o).¹⁹

¹³ [Very frequent were her raptures and many people experienced them giving true testimony of the great glory that came out of her eyes and the resemble of her face to that of an angel, and the truth of her ecstasies and the wonders they had seen]

¹⁴ [A singular beauty remained on her face that made one think of an angel]

¹⁵ [The best men]

¹⁶ [And she began to shine through her miracles]

¹⁷ [She had a marvelous beauty, with a waistline that was delicious to see, for it was so well done]

¹⁸ [In their heart of hearts]

¹⁹ [What beauty there is cannot be attributed to the wisdom or the intelligence of the person who wrote it ... The real

When Douceline's life was read by Beguines for the first time, one of them recovered speech to celebrate the true wonders of the saint. Thus, Philippine Porcellet turned the link between beauty and truth in this story about a woman written in *langue d'oc* the foundation of both an autonomous language and a holy lineage of women. Writing about a woman, with whom she claims to maintain ties of filiation, she is implicitly writing her own story and her own truth as Beguine nun and as prioress responsible for the daughters of the saint. Since Douceline's story is beautifully and truthfully written, it must be her only story. Philippine could not write other hagiographic narrations. The link she described turns Douceline into a singular and authentic subject of spiritual experience and foundation. She concludes:

Bezenetz sia Dieus per tostemps, car aqui sta vida es venguda a compliment... totas las cauzas hi son pauzadas am vertat... ni li miracle que hi son pauzat non son doptos en ren... E a tolre tota duptansa, aguem per sagrament per que ren non hi dupti que so que n'es escrich es dich per veritat (chap. 15, f. 98 r^o-v^o).²⁰

Thus, the truth of Douceline's beautiful story lies in the confrontation between the account and the proven and documented reality of her life. Within this truth, Philippine Porcellet, the author pours the truth of her own story and that of the Beguines of Hyères and Marseille, and then turns to the future. The little epilogue to the *Life* is particularly clear in this regard:

Ar aian gauch las filhas de tan honrada maire, sobredigna de tot ressemblament. E alegron si fort en Nostre Seïnhor, car las ha apelladas al sieu sant estament, seguir las sieus pezadas e sa perfeccion (épilogue, f. 99 r^o).²¹

Douceline's *Life* contains no other truth than her guidance and authority over her daughters; Douceline's beauty embodies her perfection. The author described her subjectivity through her literary activity; she finds her truth and that of the Beguines she serves as prioress in a constant struggle towards perfection.

It is remarkable that this link between truth and beauty is not the dramatic device of the lives of holy men and women contained in the countless books written by clerics. The latter, however learned and skilled in the art of writing, have indeed specific pastoral concerns; through holy lives, they dispense the teachings of the Church to the faithful, in an effort to control their thoughts and actions. They do not need to prove the truth of their stories; their dignity as clerics is the guarantor of their works. This is why the lives of saints contained in collections are not born with a reflexive attitude in respect of language; they are not evidence of the meeting of the narrative and the subjective. In contrast, women, who are led by and for men to justify in writing their spiritual experience, are

author and master of this life, it is the Lord, master of truth, who knows all things]

²⁰ [Blessed be God forever, for the completion of this life ... Everything is in accordance with the truth ... There was no miracle reported that is not well proven ... And to remove all doubt, we swear that what is written and said here is the truth]

²¹ [Rejoice, now, daughters of a mother worthy of being imitated in everything. And rejoice strongly in the Lord who has called them into His holy institution to follow in His footsteps and perfection.]

brought before men knowing that the narrative prose of the past highlights and defends the present of its author. If the beauty of the past story of a woman is her truth of perfection and holiness, it is also the truth of the present story of other women and the legitimation of their religious experience; hence the need for women to write about women. However, very few stories have survived.

II. Christine de Pizan, author of *The City of Ladies* in 1404

Christine de Pizan was born in Venice in 1364. Around 1368, King Charles V called her father—an astrologer and physician—to France and Christine never left France again. In 1380 and 1390 she lost her father and her husband, respectively, both of them fondly admired and loved, and refusing to remarry, she took upon herself the heavy burden of sustaining her family. She then discovered the voluptuous asceticism of study and knowledge, but she also witnessed the injustice of the men who hoarded knowledge and writing leading all men and women to believe that “les femmes ne sont bonnes qu’à cajoler les hommes et à mettre au monde et à élever les enfants” [women are only good at cajoling men and to bear and raise children] (*Cité*, I, XXXVIII).²² She was sad, lonely, and poor. She then became a poet, historian, moralist, and made a living as a writer, addressing the princes and princesses who held both social and political power in France. She was one of the first French professional female writers, an *écrivaine*, as she calls herself.

The beginning of the fifteenth century was a tumultuous period when the madness of King Charles VI, the fierce hatred between princes, the threat of foreign invasion, the Schism of the Church, riots and uprisings, epidemics and wars converged. For Christine, evil is identified with this unrest, while the light of truth embodies the brightness of the serene order that must govern society. She relentlessly presents the ideal of a rational order whose divine or natural foundations must be sought out, and she is a passionate advocate of peace and of the dignity of women: “Ce ne sont point elles qui commettent les atrocités et les exactions qui bouleversent continuellement le monde!” [They are not the ones to commit the atrocities and abuses that continually sweep the world!] (*Cité*, II, LIII).

Writing *The City of Ladies* between 1403 and 1404, she certainly intended to refute the Mathéolus’s *Lamentations* in which women were accused of having made the evil of the world, but she also wanted to denounce what she saw as the rudeness and misogyny of Jean de Meung, the continuator of the *Roman de la Rose* around 1277. She especially aims to denounce the abusive powers of the written word when it becomes an allegorical labyrinth, and the dangerous privilege of the art of interpretation when it turns into an ironical multiplicity of voices; as exercised by Jean de Meung and those who followed him against what she considered to be the only justice and truth.

²² The text of the *Cité des Dames* is given from editing and translation de MOREAU, HICKS 2005.

At the same time, Christine was under no illusions about the literary, and formal dimension of love born of the Court of Love—founded in 1401 at the court of the Duke of Burgundy—and of the Order of the Rose she herself founded in 1401 as a rival of the Court of Love and affiliated with the Duke of Orleans. The proliferation of these literary orders where loving was not as important as discussing love, was accompanied by the multiplication of parodies, such as the one by Eustache Deschamps entitled *D'un beau dit de ceux qui controuvent nouvelles bourdes et mensonges*, in 1401, which recounts the creation of a parliament in Epernay for the feasts of May holidays and “Pour compte de ses bourdes rendre” [to render account of their blunders]. Thus, beautiful words can hide the deception. Christine de Pisan wants to revive beauty and truth through her writing.

In the *City of Ladies* and following the example of the poet Horace, Christine wanted to raise a monument more lasting than bronze, and this monument, like Saint Augustine’s *City of God*—which had been recently translated into French for King Charles V—had to be a fortress, a combative work written against error and falsehood. Christine claimed that, according to Saint Augustine, the scriptures, which surpassed the literatures of all nations, sanctioned the *City of God*; God founded it for eternity, and it is intertwined with the earthly city of present time, for the men who live the truth are mixed up with those who are in error. Thus, through transference, is the *City of Ladies* a literature that exceeds all literature? Is it a city above all cities, the intermediary between the divine and the earthly city? For Reason, Righteousness, and Justice—“all three of them the daughters of God and of divine origin”—are absent from the human city dominated by the envious and slandering enemies of women, who will preside over the construction of the new city built up by Christine, “la Cité des Dames... qui sera d’une beauté sans pareille et demeurera éternellement en ce monde” [the *City of Ladies* ... to be of unparalleled beauty and will eternally remain in this world] (*Cité*, IV).

The purpose of this beautiful and unique city, of this beautiful writing and this beautiful construction, is indeed to “chase error away from the world”; a world where Christine had “fallen into” the writings of Mathéolus and “de bien d’autres encore, en particulier du *Roman de la Rose*” [of many others, especially the *Roman de la Rose*] (*Cité*, I, II), that lead to believe—“il faut bien que cela soit vrai, hélas mon Dieu” [it must be that this is true, alas, my God], lamented Christine, so sensitive to the accumulation of writings in this line—that God “a fait une chose bien abjecte en créant la femme... un vase recelant en ses profondeurs tous les maux et les vices” [made a very despicable thing by creating the woman ... a vase concealing all the ills and vices in its depths] (*Cité*, I, I). Christine thinks of all the women she has known, both princesses and great ladies and womrn of lesser condition, who were willing to entrust their secret thoughts and sufferings. It is based on all women.

The three ladies who helped Christine to build the city with the beautiful and true stories of the great ladies of yesteryear then proposed her an art of interpretation capable of challenging slander, of defining the limits of everything, of telling the truth and of escaping and hating falsehood (*Cité*, I, VI).

Against the information given by Jean de Meung and all those who, like him, defamed women; against the multiplicity of knowledge he offers, which is a condemnation of the truth; and against his hurtful words, Christine decided to build a city with beautiful and true stories, criticizing “the opinions based on the accumulation of the prejudices of others” through an art of interpretation exercised by reason, righteousness, and justice. She aimed to provide words that were liberating and caused joy. She surpassed the duality of wisdom and love, the former having the exclusivity of reflection and knowledge, and the latter that of existence and feeling. Thus, in her own words, she turned to philosophical work, that is to say, the work of “wise judgment” and the construction of the *City of Ladies*: she became “sage Christine”.

Focusing on great female figures in order to show the truth of their divine creation, Christine drew primarily on Boccaccio’s (1313-1375) *De Mulieribus Claris*—written around 1365 and translated into French in 1401²³—which is a compilation of the lives of the most illustrious women of mythology and Antiquity; thus, she contributed to the dissemination of Boccaccio’s work in France. In order to establish the truth, Christine contrasted Boccaccio with other writers, for instance: “Contrairement à ce que dit le philosophe Théophraste... Voici ce qu’en dit Boccace...” [Contrary to what the philosopher Theophrastus claims... Here is what Boccaccio says...] (*Cité*, II, XIV). This truth she found in Boccaccio, was it not her own Italian truth?

Christine thus created a genealogy of prophetesses, sibyls, illustrious citizens, politicians, historical figures and devout women, both famous and unknown, heroines of Antiquity and female saints from the *Golden Legend*. Through the stories of these women that constitute “les grandes et belles pierres de la Cité des Dames” [the large and beautiful stones of the *City of Ladies*] (*Cité*, I, XIV), “ces femmes dont la vie est très édifiante et très belle à entendre” [these women whose lives are very edifying and beautiful to hear] (*Cité*, II, XLIX), she recounted her own birth and her approach to books, her encounters and readings.

The first stone, directly borrowed from Boccaccio’s book, is a mythical figure, Queen Semiramis, who rebuilt Babylon, the greatest city in the world. Was it not in her image that Christine courageously undertook to build the *City of Ladies*? However, Semiramis, the widowed queen, decided to marry her son, because she thought he would be the best of kings. Despite her transgression of the prohibition of incest, she is the foundation of the *City of Ladies*, the first strong stone that supports the whole building, but because she is also the figure heralding another mother who reigned with his son, Semiramis is a sign of the origin of a world defined as truthful (*Cité* I, XV).

Universal knowledge is present in the *City of Ladies* as the truth of the intelligence of women and the truth of the discernment they bring to the world, as Dame Reason tells Christine (*Cité*, I, XXXIII):

²³ The authorship of this translation cannot be attributed to Laurent de Premierfait, as was traditionally done. The date is provided by the colophon of the manuscript entitled *Des femmes nobles et renommées*, BnF, MS Fr. 12420.

Il est évident que l'intelligence et l'habileté féminines ont découvert un nombre considérable de sciences et techniques importantes, tant dans les sciences pures, comme en témoignent leurs écrits, que dans le domaine des techniques, comme en font preuve les travaux manuels et les métiers... [It is obvious that female intelligence and skill discovered a considerable number of major sciences and techniques, both in the field of pure sciences, as evidenced by their writings, and in the field of techniques, as shown by different crafts and trades]

Furthermore, Dame Reason describes the Roman Sempronia in these words:

Sempronie la romaine était une femme éblouissante. Mais si elle l'emportait sur toutes les femmes de son époque par la beauté de son corps et de son visage, elle se distingua encore plus par les capacités de son esprit. Car elle était si intelligente qu'elle retenait sans la moindre erreur tout ce qu'elle avait entendu ou lu... De plus sa façon de parler, son expression, son style étaient si beaux, si agréables et si justes que par son éloquence elle pouvait gagner toute personne à sa volonté (*Cité*, I, XLII). [The Roman Sempronia was a dazzling woman; but if she surpassed all the women of her time with the beauty of her body and her face, she was still more distinguished by the capabilities of her mind. Because she was so clever she memorized without any error all she heard or read ... And her way of speaking, her expression, her style was so beautiful, so nice and so just that her eloquence could win anyone to her will]

Christine intervenes, placing among the stories a different narrative, which frames the whole text and through which the beautiful, and especially, truthful city comes out:

Et je, Christine, je repris: Ma Dame, je vois bien qu'il est vrai que Dieu -qu'il en soit loué!- a donné à l'esprit féminin assez de pénétration pour comprendre, connaître et retenir tous les domaines du savoir... C'est pourquoi je vous saurais gré de bien vouloir me dire si l'esprit féminin est capable de jugement et de discernement... [And I, Christine, follows up: My lady, I see it is true that God—may He be praised!— gave the female mind sufficient insight to understand, know and remember all fields of knowledge ... That's why I would be grateful if you kindly told me if the female mind is capable of judgement and discernment] (*Cité*, II, XLIII).

Dame Reason responds affirmatively. This “I, Christine,” adapts the book to the person, shortens the distance between the narrator and the reader, enables the blend of the time of construction of the city and the present; through it, Christine can become the writer of the change to which she aspires, and be the counselor of the men and women of her time. Many images depict her wearing a blue gown, which is not the colour of a queen, nor that of a bridesmaid or a nun, but the passionate colour of fidelity and loyalty, a writer's gown.

If the stories of illustrious women of the past constitute “preuves pour réfuter les dires de tous ces hommes” [evidence to refute the statements of all these men] that Christine mentioned (*Cité*, II, LXI), present princesses and great ladies of the kingdom of France may be included in the *City of Ladies*. Christine was indeed aware that the stories she wrote, that the stones she assembled apply to all women, past, present, and future: “Vous qui êtes mortes, vous qui vivez encore et vous qui viendrez à l'avenir, réjouissez-vous toutes et soyez heureuses de notre nouvelle Cité...” [You who

are dead, you who live on and you who will come in the future, rejoice all and be pleased with our new city...] (*Cité*, II, XLIX).

Her narration of the past highlights and defends her present and that of other women, but also their future and that of all women to come. She considers the beauty and truth of women's stories as the legitimization of their cultural, social, and political role.

“Ma chère enfant, en vérité, je vois que tu as fort bien travaillé” [My dear child, in truth, I see you have worked very well], Dame Justice tells her, before leading her to the City, in counterpoint to the first base stone, “la noble Reine, bienheureuse entre toutes les femmes, avec sa noble suite” [the noble Queen, blessed among all women with her noble entourage] (*Cité*, III, I). The Queen is obviously the Virgin, traditional protector of towns and mother of a divine Son, himself a builder of God's City. And those who accompany her are the women who “n'ont délaissé ni mort ni vif le Fils de Dieu” [have not abandoned the Son of God neither dead nor alive] (*Cité* III, II). The beauty and truth of the stories written by Christine in the *City of Ladies* find their completion and perfection in the Marian figure linked to the incarnation of the deity. Given that her purpose is to prove a cultural, social, and political legitimacy, these stories contribute to make visible what is invisible, that is to say to give pain a form, but also to walk through life without submitting to it. The writing of the *Cité des Dames* by Christine de Pizan, sad and lonely, in the early fifteenth century when men failed—a mad king, a despised *dauphin*, enemy and perjuring princes, people in turmoil—could be the embodiment of wisdom against that sadness and loneliness, as well as social legitimization.

III. Marguerite de Navarre: the *Heptameron*

Marguerite de Navarre, born in 1492, a princess in France and a queen in Navarre, and the sister of a king, wrote the *Heptameron* after 1542. According to Brantôme “elle s'adonna fort aux lettres en son jeune âge” [she devoted herself to letters at a young age] (LALANNE 1864-1882, 8: 115). Her life was extremely hectic. She lived among the splendor of the court, knew exile and sought refuge, for example, in Nérac, where Calvin, Marot, and Lefèvre d'Étaples stayed for a while. At that time, feasts and stakes followed each other in France. Pious, and a poetess of God, Marguerite designed this profane book, which many found licentious, at the end of her life. She knew Petrarch, *Amadis of Gaul*, chivalric romances, Guillaume de Machaut, Alain Chartier, Christine de Pizan, whose work she loved, Plato's *Symposium*, and Castiglione.

Marguerite belonged to her time. She was sensitive to the type of spirituality disseminated through the printing press; she corresponded with Guillaume Briçonnet, bishop of Meaux, but after the Affair of the Placards, in 1534, she was exiled from the court of France. She participated in the bitter political negotiations with Charles V and Margaret of Austria trying to get back all

of her kingdom of Navarre. She married her daughter, Jeanne d'Albret—not without hesitation and regrets—to the Duke of Clèves, one of the princes of the league against Charles V. At the end of 1542, she returned to her estate, and probably compiled the first elements of what would be the *Heptameron*. Overcome with sadness at the death of her brother in 1547, she retired for four months to the abbey of Tusson, and later remained in the Pyrenees. She could not prevent Jeanne d'Albret, whose marriage had been annulled, from marrying Antoine de Bourbon in 1548. Marguerite died in 1549 near Tarbes.

Brantôme, who knew Marguerite quite well through his mother and grandmother, recounts:

Elle fit un livre qui s'intitule Les Nouvelles de la reyne de Navarre... elle composa toutes ses nouvelles, la plupart dans sa litière en allant par pays... Je l'ai ouy ainsi conter à ma grand-mère qui allait toujours avec elle dans sa litière, comme sa dame d'honneur, et lui tenait l'escritoire dont elle écrivait (LALANNE 1864-1882, 8: 125-126). [She made a book called The News of the queen of Navarre ... she composed all her accounts, most of them in her litter while travelling the country ... I heard it from my grandmother, who always accompanied her in her litter as her maid of honour, and held her escritoire where she wrote]

Although the project of writing a French *Décameron*²⁴ is explicitly stated in the prologue, no manuscript contains the hundred foreseen short stories, and the most extensive copies gather seventy-two stories. The idea of putting in writing a series of short stories was not new in France. After 1467, at the court of Burgundy, the collection *Cent nouvelles nouvelles* enjoyed considerable success. The title of the *Heptameron* cannot be attributed to Marguerite.²⁵

The *Heptameron*²⁶ begins after a terrible storm that led people to seek refuge. The ten storytellers or “devisants” [interlocutors], five men and five women, were sheltered in an abbey in the Pyrenees because of the flood of the Gave de Pau. Having escaped death, they decide to use “stories” as “pastimes” between devotional practices and masses, before the lesson of the Gospel that begins each of their days. All are waiting to cross the stream again and return to their everyday world. Their names barely conceal the identity of the relatives of the Queen of Navarre.

Each storyteller affirms their intention to “n'écrire nulle nouvelle qui ne soit véritable histoire” [not write a story that is not true], unlike Boccaccio, in whose work we explicitly admire the beauty of the story but not its truth. The story starts then by rejecting the content and form of fiction. Listeners

²⁴ The *Decameron* by Giovanni Boccaccio, written around 1348-1349, was translated into French by Antoine Le Maçon at the behest of the Queen of Navarre in 1545, and was dedicated to the “très haute et très illustre princesse Marguerite de France, sœur unique du roi, reine de Navarre, duchesse d'Alençon et de Berry” [very high and very illustrious Princess Marguerite of France, only sister of the king, Queen of Navarre, Duchess of Alençon and Berry]. It had a great success and many editions in 1548, 1551 and 1553.

²⁵ It is currently impossible to know if the work remained unfinished or if the missing stories were lost. The printer, Claude Gruget, invented the title of *Heptameron* in 1559.

²⁶ We quote here *L'Heptameron*, a text compiled from manuscripts with an introduction, notes, and a name index by FRANÇOIS 1991.

found pleasure in deciphering the hidden names. The story aims to represent the real-life world, the real issues of society, in contrast with the “vieux roman”, which is the narrative prose of fictional chivalric romances. The short story goes after the truth, without need for artifice; it reports new events or those not yet transcribed, and the whole work is built on an interlocking pattern.

Two other rules are added to the novelty of the stories: the truth of the story and that the truthfulness of the narrator—who must have witnessed the event themselves or gotten their account from a credible eyewitness: “Puisque vous m’avez élu à partie, dit Geburon, je vous dirai une histoire que je sais, pour en avoir fait inquisition véritable sur le lieu” [Since you chose me to participate, Geburon said, I’ll tell you a story I know, for I carried out a true inquisition at the place] (p.34).

The story must be exemplary, deserve to be told and remain in the memory. However, this exemplary is ambiguous because the story is sometimes edifying, and sometimes only humorous: “Je suis bien d’opinion, dit Ennasuite, que nous ayons quelque plaisant exercice pour passer le temps; autrement, nous serions mortes le lendemain” [I am of the opinion, said Ennasuite, of engaging in some pleasant exercise to pass the time; otherwise, we will be dead by tomorrow] (p.7). Marguerite respects the alternation of female and male speech, and she also alternates happy and sad, short and long stories.

The *Heptameron* is a long discussion on love, the complexity of relationships between men and women, and death. Women are suspected of hypocrisy and pretence; men are accused of brutality and selfishness. The human comedy is staged in her touching dramas and her antics, sublime or ridiculous, sublime and ridiculous; the body is neither despised nor sublimated. There are thirty-nine stories about noblemen and monarchs, sixteen stories about Church people, about Cordeliers, fifteen stories about citizens, and two stories about ordinary people. The stories include hints of irony towards the sublime aspirations of Dagoucin and Parlamente: “Encore ay-je une opinion, dit Parlamente après la 19^e nouvelle, que jamais homme n’aimera parfaitement Dieu qu’il n’ait parfaitement aimé quelque créature en ce monde” [Again I have an opinion, said Parlamente after the 19th story, that man will never fully love God, for he has not loved absolutely any creature in this world] (p.151). Longarine has no illusions: “Le cœur de l’homme qui n’a nul sentiment d’amour aux choses visibles ne viendra jamais à l’amour de Dieu par la semence de sa parole, car la terre de son coeur est stérile, froide et damnée” [The heart of the man who has no sentiment of love towards the visible things will never come to the love of God through the seed of his word, for the land of his heart is barren, cold, and damned» (p.152).

The examples multiply: a lady imposing an overnight test of patience on a chaste servant is more amazed than happy of his propriety when he wakes up in the morning without having touched her (18th story, p.189); a husband bringing a handsome young man in bed with his wife and telling her, “M’amie, je vous donne en garde ce prisonnier, traitez-le comme moi-même” [My love, I

give you this prisoner so that you guard him, treat him as you would myself” (26th story, p.216); a naive or perverse mother asking a friar to punish her daughter in bed, when the raped girl calls the mother to her rescue, she merely asks the Cordelier to punish her again (46th story, p.310).

The narrative that gives entertainment even if it is tragic opposes the commentary following it, which includes a passionate debate between the “interlocutors”, between those nostalgic for the old regime of order, and the supporters of the new disorder of love and language.

Si la mort est étrange, dit Nomerfide contre Parlamente après avoir entendu l’histoire de la sœur du comte Josselin meurtrier de son beau-frère, le plaisir aussi est nouveau et d’autant plus grand qu’il a pour son contraire l’opinion de tous les sages hommes et pour son aide le contentement d’un cœur plein d’amour. [If death is strange, said Nomerfide against Parlamente after hearing the story of the sister of Count Josselin who murdered his brother-in-law, pleasure is also new and much larger, for the opinion of all wise men are against it and the contentment of a heart full of love in its favour] (p.278).

Parlamente said:

Je prie Dieu, mesdames, que cet exemple vous soit si profitable que nulle de vous ait envie de se marier pour son plaisir sans le consentement de ceux à qui on doit porter obéissance. [I pray to God, my ladies, that this example may be so profitable that you have no desire to marry for pleasure without the consent of those to whom we owe obedience] (p.277).

Here we witness the dawn of the questioning of opinions, the challenge of beliefs, and the birth of suspicion. Morals and the precautions of the narrator are in fact most often torn into pieces by the commentaries. No one is responsible for concluding, no one tries to summarize, and no opinion of the “interlocutors” is amended by the discussions. The voices are discordant and no authority controls them. Another story and another commentary follow suit; they are the hallmark of the attention a micro-society grants to itself, the trace of the tender and sly glance of the writer Marguerite:

Nomerfide dit tout haut: « Ha, par ma foi, vous en direz ce que vous voudrez, mais j’eusse mieux aimé être jetée en la rivière que de coucher avec un cordelier. Oisille lui dit en riant: Vous savez donc bien nouer? » Ce que Nomerfide trouva bien mauvais, pensant qu’Oisille n’eût telle estime d’elle qu’elle désirait. Parquoi lui dit en colère: « Il y en a qui ont refusé des personnes plus agréables qu’un cordelier et n’en ont point fait sonner la trompette ». Oisille se prenant à rire de la voir courroucée, lui dit: Encore moins ont-elles fait sonner le tabourin de ce qu’elles ont fait et accordé. [Nomerfide said out loud: “Oh! by my faith, you say what you like, but I would have preferred to be thrown into the river to sleeping with a friar. “So you can swim well?” said Oisille, laughing. Nomerfide took this question badly, for she thought that Oisille esteemed her less highly than she desired. Accordingly she answered in anger: “There are some who have refused more agreeable men than a Cordelier without blowing a trumpet about it. Oisille laughed to see her so wrathful, and said to her: “Still less beat a drum about what they have done and granted] (p. 37-38).

The opening of the dialogues and their direction suggest that the consistency of the discourse is perhaps nothing more than a myth. No one tries to restore a disturbed agreement. The narrator gives her voice to each of the ten. In the tumult of the debates she establishes the conflict between law and desire, between the burdens of the law and the tricks of desire. This is why the amorous exchange and the circulation of desire are the main themes of the stories: vice hides under virtue. How can we discern the words of Marguerite in these debates open to a multiplicity of viewpoints, and to both conventional codes of honour confused with continence and chastity, and the naturalistic realism of Jean de Meung, recognizing the desire and pleasure of woman and man?

The topos of truth and veracity involve an apparent disdain for beauty and art. Truth must be preferred to beauty, “de peur que la beauté de la rhétorique fit tort en quelque partie à la vérité de l’histoire” [lest the beauty of rhetoric did wrongs the truth of the story in some parts” (p.9). The conflict between truth and beauty already appears in the prologue of the *Heptameron*. Ethics must triumph over the aesthetic. The small assembly declares that beauty and truth are incompatible, but this opposition is itself rhetoric. Marguerite’s collection is so carefully constructed that it is clear that art is present in it, and so is beauty, because with its tales of love and death, the *Heptaméron*, developed near the frightening figure of the Gave de Pau on the verge of its Autumn floods, wants to seduce and entice listeners and readers into the time of the narrative, which is the time of the flood and calming of the waters and the construction of the bridge.

Marguerite de Navarre’s short stories indeed implement a seduction strategy, just like Douceline de Digne’s *Life*, and Christine de Pizan’s *City of Ladies*. The “interlocutors” repeat:

Mon histoire est si belle et si véritable qu’il me tarde que vous la sachiez comme moi (p.54); Ne craignez point de parler longuement, car il y a encore assez de temps pour dire de bonnes et belles choses (p.54). [My story is so beautiful and true that I long to have you know it as well as I do myself; Fear not to speak at length, because there is still enough time to say good and beautiful things]

The tragic story of the chatelaine of Vergy particularly captivates the “interlocutors;” its truth and beauty arouse bitter conflict:

C’est assez que deux soient morts d’amour, sans que l’amour en fasse battre deux autres, car voilà le dernier son de vêpres qui nous départira, que vous le vouliez ou non. [It is enough that two have died of love, without two others fighting for the same cause. And there is the last bell sounding for vespers, which will have us gone whether you be willing or not] (p.420).

For the storytellers of the *Heptameron*, beauty and truth merge:

Vraiment, Saffredent, ce dit Oisille, vous nous avez raconté une histoire autant belle qu’il en soit point; et qui aurait connu le personnage comme moi, la trouverait encore meilleure. [Truly, Saffredent, said Oisille, anything finer than the story you have just narrated one could not wish to hear; and if the rest of the company knew the persons as I do, they would think it still finer] (p.220).

Because, indeed, a nice story is first a true story: “J’en sais une si véritable, dit Dagoucin, que vous prendrez plaisir à l’ouïr” [I know one so true, said Dagoucin, that you will enjoy hearing it] (p. 311). The truth is always beautiful, even when it describes ugliness, filth, villainy, for the unveiling of an activity is a source of emotion and amazement. About beauty we read: “Ce serait belle chose, dit Parlamente, que notre coeur fût si rempli, par la foi, de Celui qui est toute vertu et toute joie, que nous le puissions librement montrer à chacun” [It would be a beautiful thing, said Parlamente, that our heart was so filled with faith in Him who is all virtue and all joy that we can freely show it to everyone] (p.250).

Beauty is realized in the work of Marguerite by exploiting the forms of empirical reality and becoming the principle of its inexhaustible fecundity. Love from corruption, intrigues, adventures, wends maybe a path that leads to God’s love. The world, taken as it stands, nonetheless is: Marguerite is against the lies of construction; the man is multiple; a story about two ends badly. Truth and beauty lead the “interlocutors” to forget that time is going by, as strongly as the furious Gave carries its waters: “Et là, avaient si bien écouté les beaux contes, qu’ils n’avaient point ouï sonner la cloche de leur monastère” [And there, they were so intent on listening to the fine stories that they had not heard the bell of their abbey] (p. 156). The charm of the story lies in the fact that it awakens desire and carries the storytellers away. Thus,

Le matin venu (de la huitième journée), s’enquirent si leur pont s’avançait fort et trouvèrent que dedans deux ou trois jours il pourrait être achevé, ce qui déplût à quelques-uns de la compagnie, car ils auraient bien désiré que l’ouvrage eût duré plus longuement, pour faire durer le contentement qu’ils avaient de leur heureuse vie...[The morning being come (of the eighth day), they inquired how their bridge was getting on, and found that it might be completed in two or three days. This was not welcome news for some of the company, who would have been glad if the work had lasted longer, in order to protract the pleasure they enjoyed from so agreeable a mode of life] (p.421).

With the bridge, another path is offered.

The truth and beauty interwoven by Marguerite contribute to the pleasure of listening to the men and women, to the pleasure of obliquely saying about themselves in the commentary, about their multiplicity, about their desires and fantasies they have recognized in the tale. The stories of the *Heptaméron* are “beautiful and true” because they describe conflict and the tension between the prestige of virtue and the seductions of desire, between culture and nature, and the false unity the man with an explosive candor.

Conclusion

The three stages outlined through the examination of these “beautiful and true stories of women” written by women constitute as many variations that devise and offer a way of reading and interpreting the literary texts written by the men and women of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance.

In the thirteenth century, the truth of the beautiful story of a saintly woman allowed a social group, that of the Beguines of Hyères and Marseille, to affirm the perfection and holiness of their foundress. Literary activity granted the recognition of the spiritual and institutional identity of the writer and the present and future Beguine community that she felt responsible for. The explicit link between beauty and truth of the history of the saint provided social legitimation. Christine de Pizan, in the early fifteenth century, sad and lonely in a society ravaged by deadly conflicts, chose to use her quill sustain herself and her family. Composing the *City of Ladies*, she wants to denounce the abusive powers of writing in texts such as the *Roman de la Rose* by Jean de Meung. She aspires to the recognition of the beautiful and true stories of women who are the guarantors of their recognition in the present and her own recognition, “I, Christine.” She showed the princes and princesses, to whom her work is dedicated, a utopia of political and social beauty and truth, based on an interpretive art able to trace the limits of truth and lies. This is how she intended to legitimize the cultural, social, and political role of women and counter her loneliness and sadness. In the first half of the sixteenth century, Marguerite de Navarre, a Queen overwhelmed with spiritual and political concerns but never devoid of a tender and wry irony, demonstrated in her *Heptameron* how the beauty and truth of the stories are present in an everlasting conflict, in the multiplicity of male and female voices, in the extinction of the ideal views in favor of a bold reality. “Beautiful and true stories” recount the life of the world as it, is full of sound and fury, murder and gallantry, and desires and nights, without lies, construction, or judgement.

These examples of “beautiful and true stories” of women in French literature from the Middle Ages and the Renaissance show how women, by establishing the relationship between beauty and truth, imposed their presence in literature. Discovering the power of the “beautiful and true stories,” they not only obtained religious, cultural, and social recognition, but also a better knowledge of themselves and the world around them, and the ability to effectively assert and legitimize their intelligence and freedom. If Beguines found the legitimation of their spiritual experience and institutional life, Christine de Pizan found the legitimation of her life as a woman who was alone and the head of a family, a woman eager to know and who loved books. Marguerite of Navarre, despite the constraints of her rank and religion, found the legitimation of her spiritual concerns and her belief in the narrow distinction between the world and God and in human multiplicity, against the false religious morality of monks. All three, on their own level—the level allowed by their social environment and time—developed for any writer the possibilities of independent and free thinking. Thus, the efficacy of these beautiful texts of literature is once again confirmed, and their further interpretation and study is more necessary now than ever.

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