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Elizabeth Chesney Zegura, *Marguerite de Navarre's Shifting Gaze: Perspectives on gender, class, and politics in the Heptaméron*. London and New York: Routledge, 2017. viii + 276 pp. Bibliography and index. \$140.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 978-1-4724-8730-8.

Review by Leanna Bridge Rezvani, Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Elizabeth Chesney Zegura's insightful volume is the latest addition to Routledge's Women and Gender in the Early Modern World series which is known for its interdisciplinary approaches. Zegura's work is particularly fitting as she skillfully incorporates history, politics, religion, and gender studies into her literary analysis. The primary goal of the work is to offer "a better understanding of the ways in which the *Heptaméron's* shifting perspectives--as marked by narrative cues, intertextual resonances, and signifiers of direction and point of view--function textually, by mobilizing the reader's standpoint, supplementing canonical views with alternative modes of seeing, and contributing to the era's discourses of gender, class, and politics" (p. 14). While numerous scholars have remarked on the presence of a multiplicity of viewpoints in the Queen of Navarre's most-celebrated work, this study makes a valuable contribution to the scholarship in that it offers a thorough interdisciplinary analysis of the *Heptaméron's* multi-perspectival nature.

In a thoughtful introduction, Zegura situates Marguerite de Navarre and her "multiscopic" *Heptaméron* in the political, historical, theological, and literary currents of sixteenth-century France (p. 2). The author makes a convincing case for her methodological and theoretical approach. Zegura's exploration of Marguerite's unique social position in relation to the *Heptaméron's* ambiguities, veiled ethical and political reflections, and "perspectival explosion" is both informative and original (p. 3). This section's many theoretical, sociohistorical, and intertextual references are all pertinent; together they further our understanding of Marguerite's tales and the didactic nature of her novella collection. The author clearly states one of the volume's central arguments saying, "Marguerite's shifting gaze inverts and interrogates socially entrenched viewpoints by illuminating marginalized realities and viewing positions in her culture, including those of women and the underclasses" (p. 3). Through a brief examination of the prologue and selected novellas of the first day, Zegura illustrates the extent to which the *Heptaméron* is a multilayered text that invites the reader to question and decipher various competing discourses to uncover "hidden truths" (p. 17). Along with the introduction, the volume includes four additional chapters, a conclusion, a bibliography, and an index.

The second chapter, "Between life and literature: the many faces of Marguerite de Navarre," focuses on Marguerite's life to "contextualize the *Heptaméron* historically and biographically" (p. 32). Zegura offers a detailed explanation of pivotal events in Renaissance France along with a compelling analysis of the religious, political, and personal aspects of Marguerite and François I's relationship. Through an examination of Marguerite's personal and political experiences, this section highlights how she benefitted from her privileged position as sister to the king while she also confronted the disadvantages and injustices of being a woman in the highly patriarchal society of sixteenth-century France. Zegura convincingly argues that Marguerite's powerful rank and her status as a woman put her in "a privileged

position of otherness from which she observed the inner workings of her culture” (p. 39). The author successfully demonstrates how Marguerite’s gender and station enabled her to understand multiple perspectives and to confront the “darker realities” of Renaissance France, which she intentionally incorporated throughout her magnum opus (p. 31). Zegura’s use of theory, namely standpoint theory and various experiential theories of narratology, enhances her detailed study of Marguerite’s personal experiences and political engagement. Her thorough exploration of historical events, especially Marguerite’s multi-faceted involvement in the reform movement, also strengthens her argument. The author’s contention that Marguerite writes of feminine spaces and *faits divers* to “provide an effective foil for the serious reflections on Church and state, and the critique of both patriarchy and gender- and class-based oppression” that are integrated throughout her novella collection is both persuasive and eloquently presented (pp. 29-30).

Chapter three, “Gender and patriarchy: a multi-sided view,” is dedicated to a thorough analysis of the representation of gender in the *Heptaméron*, particularly how Marguerite both represents and also contests certain gender norms of Renaissance France. The author’s extensive knowledge of Boccaccio’s *Decameron* and her close readings of several of the *Heptaméron*’s tales lead to fresh insights into the extent to which Marguerite de Navarre’s collection of tales is distinct from her model, especially how “Marguerite expands his focus on female characters, gender-related themes, and the battle of the sexes” (p. 69). Zegura also situates Marguerite’s work in the context of the sixteenth-century French literary landscape by demonstrating how the *Heptaméron* responds to ongoing controversy in the myriad texts associated with the *querelle des femmes*. Her analysis of Marguerite’s representations of sexual assaults, spousal abuse, and male violence includes invaluable insights and thought-provoking assertions on the representation of gender in the *Heptaméron* as a whole. While countless works have explored gender in the *Heptaméron*, the author’s keen grasp of Italian literature, French Renaissance texts, and her use of relevant theoretical tools result in an informative and original assessment of this aspect of Marguerite’s work. Although this chapter is significantly longer than any of the other chapters in the volume, the extensive focus on the representation of gender issues is understandable in the sense that it mirrors Marguerite’s own privileging of the topic in the *Heptaméron*.

The fourth chapter, “Upstairs, downstairs: the dynamics of class and rank in the *Heptaméron*,” explores how Marguerite incorporated representations of social class throughout her work. The *Heptaméron*’s storytellers are all aristocrats, their tales are frequently recounted from the viewpoint of the upper echelons of society, and at times they make classist statements about the underprivileged, nonetheless Zegura persuasively argues that “Marguerite directs our gaze to the plight of the poor and disempowered repeatedly” (p. 168). This section demonstrates how Marguerite gives voice and value to the marginalized lower classes in Renaissance France in the same way that her text represents and valorizes women’s viewpoints. She highlights how the *Heptaméron* frequently underscores the spiritual perspectives of the underprivileged in society who are closer to “Christ’s own poverty and humility” (p. 161). Although Marguerite was from a privileged milieu, Zegura remarks that her evangelical spiritual beliefs influenced her perception of class. She states that Marguerite’s tales offer “a ‘raising up’ of the poor, the hungry, and the oppressed whom Christ champions so often in the New Testament” (p. 169). Through detailed socio-historical analyses and extensive close readings of various tales, this chapter illustrates how the *Heptaméron* represents servants and the lower classes as having “privileged standpoints as outsiders” (p. 15). Although some critical works have briefly discussed how the *devisants* are portrayed as indifferent to the death of their servants in the *Heptaméron*’s prologue, this chapter offers original assertions and invaluable insights into the treatment of class throughout Marguerite’s entire text. Zegura concludes that “Marguerite’s descending gaze, association of servants with truth, and focus on ‘les choses basses’ are consistent with a longstanding literary, folkloric, and philosophical tradition that links descent, and, to a lesser degree self-abnegation and socioeconomic marginality, with enlightenment and truth” (p. 172). Zegura convincingly argues that the *Heptaméron* subverts traditional Renaissance perceptions of class by representing the poor as sources of truth at the same time that it emphasizes the gross abuses of power of the most privileged and influential members of French society.

In chapter five, “Power, politics, and modes of governance in the *Heptaméron*,” Zegura explores Marguerite’s representation of political power, focusing on “the positive models of governance and community,” “portrayals of evil rulers,” and how she uses “political allegory and metonymy to reflect on the unstable balance of power between Church and State in sixteenth-century France” (p. 185). Through an analysis of specific tales’ connection to political events during the reign of François I, Zegura suggests that Marguerite subtly incorporates several lessons in effective governance into her *nouvelles*. Zegura’s exploration of the *Heptaméron*’s portrayals of moral and immoral rulers, representations of justice and clemency, and examples of abuses of authority emphasizes the politically-oriented discourse in Marguerite’s text. The political nature of the work is however intentionally veiled; Zegura states, “the queen of Navarre, does not maximize, but instead downplays, the political import of these stories” (p. 197). The chapter also offers original insights into Marguerite’s work as political allegory. Zegura effectively illustrates that “Marguerite’s outwardly ‘modest’ recreation of the world, disguised as *romans joviels*, dissimulates controversial insights about early modern France, its gender- and class-based injustices, and its political tensions and dysfunctional balance of power” (p. 250).

While the examination of such a variety of disciplines is highly ambitious and could easily result in a superficial or fragmented analysis, *Marguerite de Navarre’s Shifting Gaze* is meticulously researched, impeccably organized, and well-reflected. In the introduction, Zegura states that the volume will explore “the interface between the *Heptaméron* and its contexts, cultural and historical as well as biographical, with an eye toward elucidating both the text and the social and political conditions under which it was written” (p. 5); her work does indeed accomplish this objective. Zegura’s well-crafted arguments vis-à-vis the *Heptaméron*’s multiperspectivism shed new light on Marguerite’s literary motivations and heighten our understanding of her text. The volume is an important contribution to the scholarship as well as an indispensable resource for specialists of Marguerite de Navarre and scholars of sixteenth-century French literature. The work’s interdisciplinary nature also makes it a useful text for scholars interested in the intersections between politics, history, gender, and class in Renaissance France.

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