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Marguerite de Navarre, *Selected Writings: A Bilingual Edition*, ed. and trans. Rouben Cholakian and Mary Skemp. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008. xxviii + 412 pp. Series Editors' Introduction, Volume Editor's Introduction, Illustrations, Notes, bibliography, and index. \$27.50 (pb). ISBN 13. 978-0-226-14272-2.

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Sister to King Francis I, a queen in her own right, prolific writer of verse letters, mystical poems, cautionary tales, morality plays and multi-faceted novellas, Marguerite de Navarre (1492-1549) is a key figure in the Renaissance. Including her *Selected Writings* is thus an important and logical addition to the University of Chicago's *The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe* series. Geared primarily for an academic audience that can include teachers, undergraduate, and graduate students, the series is ambitious in range and scope. Since 1996 it has filled an important gap in early modern Western European studies. In the Series Editors' introduction (pp. ix-xxvii) which up to now has been reproduced at the beginning of every volume, co-editors Margaret King and Albert Rabil, Jr. state their mission clearly: to redress the imbalance created by the predominance of first voice texts (i.e., written by men) that have come to be considered the sine qua non of Western culture.

How do they propose to do this? Simply stated, by recovering and disseminating to a wide public texts emanating from that "other voice" to which the series title refers: that of women, from 1300-1700. These texts have been chosen in part to show how actively women participated in their society, be it in a literary, social, political or theological context. These texts also aim to demonstrate that the feminist ideas we associate with the 1970s have deep roots, the provenance of which can be appreciated only by unearthing female-authored texts that have been buried for far too long, and whose resurfacing, thanks to the efforts of scholars who have already contributed to the series, demonstrate without a doubt that out of the patriarchal misogyny that marked those years arose strong and intellectually prescient female voices that found their way into print, and that continue to be relevant today. The series aims to produce approximately 155 texts, the overwhelming majority written by women. Each volume is critically edited and translated by a scholar in that particular field. What is especially attractive and important is that up to now, foreign texts in the series have been offered as bilingual editions. As of August, 2009, out of the seventy-five volumes published, nineteen have been French texts, with two more in production and another slated to be published by the University of Chicago Press. *The Other Voice* series will then continue publishing approximately eighty more volumes through the Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies (CRRS) at the University of Toronto. While none of these has been published yet, nineteen French titles are scheduled to appear. The Toronto series books will also be available as e-books on the University of Toronto's Iter Website.

H. P. Clive's 1983 *Marguerite de Navarre. An Annotated Bibliography* contains valuable information concerning early editions of her work as well as references to her that date back to the sixteenth century. Clive notes that his work reflects everything published on Marguerite de Navarre up to 1979 (p. 11). To be sure, the last twenty-five years have witnessed a remarkable resurgence of interest in the life and works of Marguerite de Navarre. This phenomenon was fueled by the 1992 500th anniversary of her death which gave rise to a host of conferences and subsequent publications. Because Clive's is the

first bibliography devoted to her, it is also indispensable when we want to track the tremendous growth that Marguerite de Navarre studies have experienced.

As a case in point, we can take the *Heptameron*, arguably her most well known work. Clive lists a total of 194 records (pp. 95-122 and pp. 149-152). If we search the online *MLA International Bibliography* for publications related to the *Heptameron* from 1992 to 2009, we come up with 248 hits for a time span of less than twenty years. That figure includes not only articles but books and critical editions. If the quantity of works published in such a relatively short time span is impressive, we can be assured that the numbers are bound to grow. Currently the publishing house Honoré Champion is engaged in a project under the direction of Nicole Cazauban, with the goal is to provide updated French critical editions of all of Marguerite's work, in its *Textes de la Renaissance* series. With volumes IV and IX in the series, published respectively in 2002 and 2001, we find some of the texts for which Cholakian and Skemp offer translations in their *Other Voice* volume. Scheduled to appear in the future is a new English translation of all of the *Heptameron* (the most current English translation was published by P. A. Chilton in 1984 and republished in 2004). The new translation, which due to its length will unfortunately not be bilingual, is currently being prepared by Rouben Cholakian, with annotations by Mary B. McKinley. It targets an American audience and will also be part of *The Other Voice* series.

If the contextual information above has made clear that Marguerite de Navarre has already become a recognized and widely studied "other voice," what makes the current contribution by Rouben Cholakian and Mary Skemp so significant? As the introduction indicates (p. 38), Skemp has provided the translation and introduction to two of the seven works in the volume--*The Coach* and *The Comedy of Mont-de Marsan*--with Cholakian responsible for the rest of the volume. There are many reasons. For one, the organization of the volume is excellent, something that is evident from the beginning. The volume editor's introduction gives readers a coherent overview of the works and their historical context, in an accessible and lively writing style. Secondly, selection of texts and quality of translations are exceptional. This is the first anthology to include in one volume such a rich sampling of texts that illustrate Marguerite's adeptness in a large variety of literary forms. Many of these texts are seeing the light of day for the first time in a form accessible to both French and English readers. Thirdly, it is the only edition offering such a variety of Marguerite's work in a bilingual arrangement (I will return later to the importance of this), with the French page facing its English translation. Lastly is what the appearance of this volume makes possible for the future.

Given that *The Other Voice* series is designed to include an audience significantly larger than specialists in Marguerite de Navarre studies, Cholakian's thirty-eight page introduction serves as a solid entry point for its readership. As can be expected, it gives us a strong sense of Marguerite's life, since Cholakian co-authored with the late Patricia Cholakian the most recent biography of Marguerite de Navarre, which appeared in 2006. Focusing on the historical moment during which Marguerite wrote, the introduction provides the information needed for readers to understand key aspects of the religious and political tensions surrounding her, as well as the place of humanism, Neo-Platonism, and notions of courtly love that inform her work. For those wanting more information, footnotes provide references to more detailed works on the subject in each subdivision of the introduction. Even though each of the translated texts will contain its own introduction, this opening general introduction provides an initial glimpse into each of the seven works (pp. 25-37).

To make the written portraits of the historical figures discussed more vivid, the introduction also provides reproductions of real portraits, including those of Marguerite and her family: mother Louise de Savoie, brother King Francis I, husband Henri d'Albret, and daughter Jeanne (the future mother of Henri IV). Cholakian's writing style may at times surprise those used to academic writing. All the while supplying important background information, he will not hesitate to offer editorial comments replete with linguistic flourishes hard to forget. As an example, when talking about Marguerite's theatrical corpus, Cholakian notes that even though *Le mallade* (a play not included in the anthology)

may have its funny moments, it nevertheless “fizzles out in a preachy and predictable denouement” (p. 19). Regarding the question of Marguerite’s religious stance, Cholakian makes his view clear: “As a reformist she denied the validity of empty-headed ceremony, but she was not about to give up the Catholic Mass with its glorious liturgy” (p. 33). As for the *Heptameron* (selections of which are included in the anthology), he offers his view that Marguerite’s mastery of dialogue makes the fictional work’s characters “palpitatingly real” (p. 36); in reference to novella 11, he remarks that “the queen of Navarre is no prissy prude, self-importantly beyond scatological humor” (p. 373). Cholakian’s writing style demonstrates how strongly engaged he is with the subject matter; Marguerite’s life and literary creations are clearly very alive for him, something he transmits in the way he writes about them.

The strong organizational thread that we see in the volume editor’s introduction continues in the rest of the volume, as we move smoothly through the seven sections, each devoted to a representative work from Marguerite’s oeuvre. The works presented are selections from the *Épîtres* (I), the theologically driven poem *Le miroir de l’ame pécheresse* (II); the secular dialogic narrative poem on love, *La Coche* (III), the cautionary tale on human sexuality, *La Fable du faux cuyder* (IV), the lyrical *Chansons spirituelles* (V), the allegorical play *La Comédie de Mont-de-Marsan* (VI) and selections from Marguerite’s most widely published work, her seventy-two novella frame narrative, *The Heptameron* (VII). Each section offers an introduction between one and three pages in length, supplemented by footnotes; the selected texts are also annotated. The volume editors are to be commended for providing such readable translations of complex works. The translations are faithful to the texts, without being slavishly and stiflingly so. Because poetic form is such an essential quality in Marguerite’s literary creations (only *The Heptameron* is in prose), the volume editors manage to create a smoothly flowing meter, even though the introduction claims that only prose translations are offered. Visually, the translation offers a form that looks like verse lines. Often the translations capture the nuances of Marguerite’s deft use of language. A particularly successful rendering into English is *The Comedy of Mont-de-Marsan*. Understandably, the editors did not aim to go through the convolutions that replicating rhyming verses would have entailed, but because of the facing French text, readers can easily move from one language to the other. Those of us who teach and discuss works in their original language and who have worked with bilingual editions (for example, Donald Frame’s *Montaigne: Selected Writings*) know that more classroom time can be devoted to rhetorical and linguistic-related aspects of the French text. Students’ appreciation of the text in its original language is enhanced when questions related to comprehension are answered as students prepare the reading at home with a solid English translation immediately at hand.

As for *The Heptameron* selections, the editors rightfully choose to include the prologue in which the frame narrative is introduced, along with the ten storytellers. The prologue also establishes the tension between the profane and sacred which will overshadow virtually all the novellas, either in the narrative itself or in the ensuing discussion of the tale by the storytellers that have heard it.^[1] The short stories chosen show how Marguerite could be both serious (novellas 4 and 72) as well as scatologically funny (novella 11) and bawdy (novella 69). While I personally like the choice of novellas here (anthologies of French Renaissance texts often tend to choose selections of *Heptameron* novellas that focus primarily on the tragic tales), the teacher in me wonders if there is another linking thread here, not openly articulated by the editors, that may give those unfamiliar with *The Heptameron* the idea that rape stories prevail in the work, for in each of these novellas rape actually takes place (novella 72), or is attempted and thwarted (novellas 4 and 69), or is thought to be in progress (novella 11). Patricia Cholakian’s 1991 *Rape and Writing in the Renaissance* makes us aware that one third of the novellas deal with attempted or actual rape; she hypothesizes that the traumatic attempted rape experienced by Marguerite de Navarre (which novella 4 is purported to retell) is the generative force behind the novella collection, and offers a perspective through which to understand the work. One could argue that whether this attempted rape actually took place or not is not the issue. The larger question some of us may have is whether such an autobiographical vantage point in choice of novellas skews things too

much. More specifically, could choosing a novella or two from the remaining two thirds better serve the purposes of an anthology that aims to show the multi-faceted dimensions of Marguerite's work?

In that light, the editors' introductions and notes often point readers to links between the literary work's narrative and the people and places in Marguerite's life. For instance, the editor's introduction tells us that Louise de Savoie is the addressee of the first verse letter and that it refers to her voyage to the south of France to see the two grandchildren who had been held hostage in Spain by Charles V for nearly four years. The footnote (n. 3, p. 43) details Marguerite's role in negotiating for the release of her brother after his capture in the 1525 Battle of Pavia, the ransom demanded by Charles V (i.e., the turning over of Francis I's two sons) to guarantee that Francis abide by the Treaty of Madrid, and the ensuing rift between Francis and the surviving son Henry who became king in 1547. Such information is invaluable, particularly in a Renaissance history class that wants to incorporate literary artifacts as witnesses to its time.

But how would this work in a comparative literature course, or in a women's studies course? Given the wide range of disciplines to which *The Other Voice* series is addressed, I appreciated introductions such as the one to *La Coche* (pp. 151-153). While giving a good sense of the personal travails that weighed upon Marguerite in 1541 (they involve the political machinations and behind-the-scenes negotiations surrounding who daughter Jeanne would marry), the editor provides much greater coverage to how this poem about female friendship is structured along the lines of the traditional debate poem. In detailing the literary history of the genre, the editor shows how Marguerite mentions one of her sources in the poem itself (Alain Chartier's *Belle dame sans merci* and his *Livre des quatre dames*). The introduction then discusses the medieval antecedents of the debate poem frame. It concludes with a long paragraph demonstrating the originality of Marguerite's *La Coche*, highlighting how the patriarchally vectored notion of *amitié d'alliance* is rewritten by Marguerite, so that it now involves the creation of a community among women instead of men, a community which counteracts female alienation and powerlessness in both literary and social contexts.

American universities are not the only ones experiencing a radical shift in what they can and cannot expect from students confronted with early modern French texts. The French themselves are engaged in a vigorous "translation" project as they realize that sixteenth century texts need to be modified for modern day French students. Not surprisingly, we are seeing updated editions that modernize spelling, simplify syntactical constructions, offer glossaries, and provide notes to clarify what have become opacities in the original text. Among the most recent we find Claude Pinganaud's translation of Brantôme's *Vies des Dames Galantes*.^[2] How he puts it can readily be applied to other texts and authors of the period: "la phrase de Brantôme... reste souvent incompréhensible aux lecteurs de ce début du XXI^e siècle" (p. 15). Even though modernized editions of works such as *The Heptameron* already exist (see for example, the 1982 Simone de Reyff edition used in many universities, Marguerite de Navarre, *Heptameron*), there is a growing realization that even annotated French school editions can pose difficulties for American students. In fact, at least one publishing house produces editions in French that are annotated and specifically geared for this audience. One of its titles includes an edition of the prologue and first ten novellas of *The Heptameron*.^[3]

If American publishers are becoming realistic, this realism also indicates that representative selections, instead of complete works, have a place in an academic market affected by the changing economic climate and the shifting priorities of university administrations in their allocation of scarce resources. In terms of marketability, I would place my bet on series such as *The Other Voice* because the market for what it offers is much greater. The series tacitly acknowledges that important foreign texts by women have a chance of surviving only if they become accessible to a far wider pool than foreign language literature majors or Ph. D. candidates in that discipline. How clearer can the writing on the wall be for those of us who have witnessed the diminishing numbers of students who choose to major in French, yet alone specialize in early modern French studies? No matter how committed we are to teaching in

French and having our students read important works in their original language, numbers are what matter in most of today's American universities, and those numbers are dwindling. The Modern Language Association recently issued the results of its latest study on *Enrollments in Languages Other than English in Institutions of Higher Education*. French has experienced the lowest increase in enrollment: 2.2 percent.

But any increase in foreign language enrollment in any foreign language leads to unfounded optimism once we look further and see what a subdivision of the statistical analysis make glaringly obvious: that students are five times more likely to be in an entry level course than in an advanced level course. The kind of proficiency in French that a year or two of French can offer is hardly sufficient to tackle Renaissance texts in their original.[4] And so we realize not only the value of, but the dire necessity of accessible translations. Scholars must look beyond the dwindling numbers of specialists in their respective fields, and aim to market their valuable discoveries of early modern texts to students in classes of comparative literature, of history and culture, of printing and the history of the book, of women's studies, to name only a few. If there is any hope for these texts to survive in the college curriculum, it is to accept that translation increases manyfold that possibility. I strongly believe that the bilingual option is far superior to only an English translation, and thus *The Other Voice* series is unique in its endeavor to keep the reader simultaneously in touch with the early modern text and its translation.

No anthology will meet everybody's wish list. I would have liked to see the French version of the *Heptameron* prologue and novellas that have been included here; in a volume that contains the original of all other selections, it is hard to understand why the French is missing, particularly when this is Marguerite's most widely read work in English. As for pedagogical strategies for teaching these texts, Cholakian and Skemp's introductions and extensive footnotes direct readers to valuable secondary works and data bases where readers can find other works that deal with a variety of approaches to Marguerite de Navarre's work. A 2007 publication that would be of interest to those who teach the *Heptameron* is the most recent addition to the MLA series on Approaches to Teaching World Literature. Edited by Colette Winn, the *Approaches to Teaching Marguerite de Navarre's Heptameron* offers critical classroom tools and pedagogical strategies that will enhance whatever approach one chooses.

In conclusion, the addition of Marguerite de Navarre's *Selected Writings* to the series is important and is bound to increase the critical attention that this multi-faceted author and political figure merits. To have Marguerite de Navarre's writing available in a dual language edition opens up many possibilities for students and scholars in multiple disciplines. Up to now, publications dealing with the *Heptameron* have outstripped significantly those dealing with her other works. That imbalance can now be righted. Perhaps the model presented by Cholakian and Skemp's work will also encourage others to undertake a project to make more of Marguerite's work, such as her vast and important correspondence, available to an English readership.

NOTES

[1] For a discussion of the tension between these two realms, see Dora E. Polachek, "Narrating the 'Truth': the Problematics of Verisimilitude in the Heptaméron Prologue," *Romance Languages Annual I* (1989): 301-305.

[2] Pierre de Bourdeille, Seigneur de Brantôme, *Vies des dames galantes*, trans. and ed. Claude Pinganaud (Paris: Arléa, 2007).

[3] Marguerite de Navarre, *L'Heptaméron*, ed. Carrie F. Klaus (Newark, Del: Molière & Co., 2008).

[4] For a fuller analysis of this dire situation and its implications for the survival of French Renaissance texts, see Dora E. Polachek, "Preserved in Translation: The Inevitable Road in French Renaissance Studies in America?" *Sixteenth Century Journal*, Vol. XI, No. 1, Spring 2009, 204-206; the entire issue is devoted to speculations by sixteenth century scholars in various disciplines on what the future holds in store. .

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