Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

Marcel Tetel. *Marguerite de Navarre's "Heptameron": Themes, Language, and Structure*. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1973. Pp. 217. \$7.50

Like George Sand and Colette, the Queen of Navarre achieved more through her influence on others than by her own literary production. Her role in persuading her beloved brother, François I^{er}, to found the institution of the Lecteurs Royaux (later the Collège de France) is recognized as decisive. Her apparently unceasing philosophical and religious enquiry, more subjective than systematic, bears witness to a relatively uninhibited mind: in contemporary jargon she was "into" Neo-Platonism, moderate Protestantism, and mystical Christianity at various times, not as a dilettante but as a genuine eclectic whose dissatisfaction stemmed from the failure of any system to pursue its logic to a finality. The *Mouvement de la libération de la femme* would have certainly found in her a champion of its causes (*mutatis mutandis*), and it is perhaps as an activist that we should think of her today, though certainly not as a radical.

Her surviving literary *corpus* comprises a deal of poetry, some *comédies* (neither verse nor plays are read now by other than curiosity seekers), and a collection of seventy-two tales (presumably the original plan, cut short by death, called for one hundred) entitled the *Heptameron*. This is the work most closely linked with Marguerite's name — though it is probably not the monument she would have desired — and is available to the modern reader in no fewer than four editions currently in print, including a new critical edition (1967) and a Slatkine reprint (1969) of a late nineteenth-century edition.

The bawdiness and scatology of these tales, which are closely reminiscent of Boccaccio and *les Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles*, surprise the reader who does not quite expect a pious queen to compose stories of this sort. What differentiates them from their models is the seriousness of the discussion that follows each. The ten participants are no mere Florentine fashion-plates but people of a more serious turn of mind who use the (often) vulgar tales of the popular tradition as the basis of an enquiry into morals, taste, and human nature.

Professor Tetel's goal has wisely not been that of "placing Marguerite de Navarre among the foremost prose writers of French literature," since "such a classification would be both erroneous and pointless" (p. 205). His task, more limited and more valuable, has been to understand the functioning of the text on the levels indicated

by the three parts of his title. He concludes judiciously that the work, alternatively scabrous and *moraliste*, is emblematic of the fundamental dichotomy Marguerite observed and keenly felt between the aspiration for the ideal and the base nature of much of human life. That the *Heptameron* presents no solution to the problem is a sign that Marguerite herself could find none, not even in faith; indeed there may be some evidence that as the work progressed she grew more despondent over the impossibility of discovering a way out. The text seems to point finally to the view that the individual is responsible for finding his own road to salvation.

I shall not bother to indicate the few misprints or what I take to be trivial errors in interpretation (except to say that the burning candle in Tale 63 seems to me to be inescapably phallic). One could have wished that the bibliography showed signs of a wider range of readings in linguistics, thematics, and structuralism, but then I am perhaps assuming more than Professor Tetel wished to accomplish.

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Jean Delumeau *La peur en Occident (XIV^e – XVIII^e siècles). Une cité assiégée*. Paris: Fayard, 1978. Pp 485.

Inventaire des frayeurs collectives en même temps qu'évaluation précautionneuse des mentalités qu'elles ont suscitées à la fin du Moyen Age surtout, ce livre de synthèse sur "les peurs du plus grand nombre" et sur les réflexes conditionnés de la culture dirigeante de l'époque, représente une des meilleures réussites de l'historiographie des sentiments humains en Europe occidentale.

Chaque âge a ses peurs. Celles de la fin du Moyen Age en partilier, qui intéressent davantage l'Amérique du Nord, sont reliées à un rapport avoué de dépendance vis-à-vis du cosmos. Ces peurs sont en un sens matérielles, physiques, globales et brutales. Elles tiennent à l'instinct humain devant tout ce qui est mer, ténèbres, nuit, mort, au-delà, peste, inondation. A ces dernières frayeurs viendront s'affilier la peur des hérésies et du schisme, la peur des fins dernières surtout. Mais, pendant que le peuple s'effraie tout simplement, les savants de l'université font des liens entre le mal physique et le mal moral, les moralistes cherchent des responsables. Chacun accuse et s'accuse, comme il veut, comme il peut. Parmi les victimes les plus redoutées, il y a les juifs, les sorcières, le diable, voire les femmes.

La première de ce livre est consacrée aux peurs du plus grand nombre et la seconde, (pp. 197 sui.), traite des procédés et des hantises davantage idéologiques de la culture dirigeante ainsi que de son goût du dossier et du procès public.

Sûr de ses sources, qui viennent de tous les côtés à la fois, sources visuelles, sources orales et sources écrites, le professeur Delumeau entrevoit une histoire de "crimes et châtements" doublée de contre-offensives religieuses et politiques parfois très douteuses. Telle une ville assiégée mais assurée de ses victoires passées, l'Eglise