

6 See McNamer, p.285.

7 See H.S. Bennett, *The Pastons and Their England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922; repr.1995), p.43.

8 Bennett, p.31.

9 John M. Ganim, *Chaucerian Theatricality* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), pp.66-7.

10 James Loyd and Virginia León de Vivero, "The Artful Rejection of Love from Andreas to Chartier," *Modern Language Studies* 9 (1979):46-52; p.50.

11 Lordynges, this question, thanne, wol I aske now,
Which was the mooste fre, as thynketh yow?
Now telleth me, er that ye ferther wende. (ll.1621-3)

12 Ethel Seaton, *Sir Richard Roos c.1410-1482: Lancastrian Poet* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1961), p.82.

13 Arthur Piaget, "La Belle Dame sans Merci et ses imitations," *Romania* 30 (1901):22-48; p.27.

14 Piaget, p.27.

15 *La Response des Dames faicte a maistre Allain*, in Piaget, pp.31-5, l.12. Line references are hereafter given in the text.

16 See Arthur Piaget, "La Belle Dame sans Merci et ses imitations: V," *Romania* 33 (1904): 189-208; p.200.

17 Space prevents me from exploring the differences between Christine's original and Hoccleve's version here.

MARGUERITE DE NAVARRE'S PORTRAIT OF MARGUERITE PORETE: A RENAISSANCE QUEEN CONSTRUCTS A MEDIEVAL WOMAN MYSTIC

It is rare to find a well-documented example of a medieval or early modern woman's reactions to a female-authored medieval text. Just such an example is that of Marguerite d'Angoulême (Marguerite de Navarre), who read the manuscript of Marguerite Porete's *Mirouer des simples ames* (*Mirror of Simple Souls*) now housed in Chantilly, Musée Condé manuscript F xiv 26. In 1547 the queen expressed her appreciation for this book in her last long poem, the *Prisons*, which devotes over a hundred lines to praising the *Mirouer* and its author (III.1315-1422).¹

This paper examines the queen's responses to the *Mirouer* and, in particular, her representations of Marguerite Porete. It addresses the following questions: First, how did the queen construe the *Mirouer* and its author as orthodox and

exemplary, even though book and writer were condemned and publicly burned by the Inquisition in 1310? Second, how did the queen of Navarre construct a verbal “portrait” of Porete, in the absence of detailed biographical information about her? Third, how did the queen use this portrait in feminist ways, and how do they differ from the feminist strategies of the *Mirouer* itself?

Marguerite de Navarre’s view of the text as orthodox, and of its author as exemplary, was shaped by the manuscript she read. This codex, which contains only the *Mirouer*, is literally marked by its history of female monastic ownership. Its three *ex libris* inscriptions all indicate it belonged to women. One identifies the volume as belonging to the convent of La Madeleine located in Orléans. Marguerite de Navarre’s means of access to the *Mirouer* was likely her contact with this convent—she financially supported the nuns there and maintained friendly relations with them (Glasson 49; Guarnieri, “Movimento” 490). A second inscription states that the volume belonged to Jehanne (Bontemps), and in the third, Jehanne Bontemps wills the manuscript to her daughter Claudine Bontemps, who was a nun at La Madeleine (folio 1r^o, reprinted in Guarnieri, “Movimento” plate 1). Paul Verdeyen has noted that the convent was a center of intense religious activity, particularly in the years before and during Queen Marguerite’s youth (“Introduction” viii). It is probably not a coincidence that the manuscript was copied on paper produced near Orléans between 1450 and 1530 (Guarnieri, “Movimento” 503). The sisters of La Madeleine may have requested or made the copy, and may be responsible for its marginal notes. These notes, in several hands, were added soon after the manuscript was copied, so they were probably part of the text Queen Marguerite read.

The notes may well be both a partial cause and consequence of medieval readers’ treatment of the French manuscript as orthodox, unlike, for example, some of its Italian counterparts. These notes present the book as an admirable devotional work that requires only a few recommendations to aid the reader in interpreting theologically risky passages. For a number of reasons it was possible to present the manuscript as orthodox when it was copied and annotated. First, despite the book’s repeated ecclesiastical condemnation in 1305–1310 and 1437, its alleged heresies are subtle enough that many readers have overlooked or at least debated them. Second, after the fourteenth century, Porete was remembered separately from her book, if at all. Third, the text generally circulated anonymously or was misattributed to other mystics. Consequently Marguerite de Navarre and the nuns of La Madeleine did not know the *Mirouer* had been banned under threat of excommunication of anyone who owned a copy.

At the same time, the queen’s comments about the *Mirouer* also imply a certain caution that is understandable given the turbulent state of ecclesiastical politics in her time. She was intimately aware of contemporary theological and

ecclesiopolitical controversies, being active in the French Reformation and having undergone a trial for heresy in 1533. Although unaware of its early history, Marguerite de Navarre surely would have noticed the *Mirouer's* daring and doctrinally questionable metaphors. It is significant, then, that she gives a purely positive assessment of the book and makes no mention of its risky passages. Absent are the cautionary statements, explanations, and justifications that mitigate almost all other recorded medieval and early modern reactions to the text. Also absent are bibliographic details. These silences probably function in defense of the queen and of the *Mirouer*. She never mentions the book's title, but she certainly knew it, since the manuscript states it in the text as well as at the head of the table of contents. Nor does she mention the author's name. Romana Guarnieri hypothesizes that La Madeleine's manuscript was not anonymous at the time; Guarnieri believes it originally had a title page that probably stated the author's name ("Movimento" 502). If it existed, that page has since been removed. The codex now begins with the first page of its table of contents, into whose margins the *ex libris* statements are squeezed. Some scholars, such as Gary Ferguson, have assumed that the queen did not mention the author's name because in the absence of such a title page she was unaware of it (Ferguson 219).

Or was she? Deep in the text is hidden a clue about the *Mirouer's* authorship: in this passage, the personified Soul is called a "precious pearl," that is, "precieuse marguerite" (52:152). The Soul, as protagonist of the story and arguably a narrator of sorts, has frequently (though not necessarily convincingly) been associated with the author. The queen may stand among the many readers who have construed the allegorical character Soul as a more or less transparent figure for Porete herself. Certainly the queen of Navarre was an attentive reader, herself named Marguerite and accustomed to wordplays on her name.² She was especially well prepared to notice and interpret this syntagm as an authorial "signature" as well as a reference to Matthew 13:46, the parable of a wise merchant who sells everything he owns in order to invest in a "precious pearl." Even if the queen did not know Porete's full name, or it meant little to her, the reference to "precieuse marguerite" may have alerted her to the text's female authorship.

Probably the queen knew only Porete's gender and name, but no biographical information about her beyond the few clues provided by the *Mirouer*. One sign of her lack of historical facts is her statement that the text was written a hundred years before: she dates the book as "Depuys cent ans escript" (III.1316). Her juxtaposition of this phrase with a reference to the author implies that she means the date of composition rather than the copying of the manuscript. However, when Marguerite de Navarre wrote the *Prisons* (1547), the *Mirouer* was about 250 years old.

Despite this lack of biographical information about Porete, the queen devotes considerable attention to portraying the medieval author. The first and perhaps most emphatic statement the queen makes about the *Mirouer* is that it was written by a woman (III.1315). Her use of nouns, pronouns and adjectives repeatedly draws attention to the earlier writer's sex—the queen calls her “ceste femme” (III.1324), “celle” (III.1375 and 1419), “une vierge” (III.1379), “ceste cy” (III.1385), “ceste là” (III.1391), “sçavante, et gentille” (III.1402). Marguerite de Navarre always refers to Porete in grammatically feminine terms even though some of the French nouns that she might otherwise have chosen are grammatically masculine, such as “author” (“acteur”). She uses distinctly gendered language as she favorably compares the *Mirouer's* author with the male scholars whose intellectual hegemony both women opposed. The queen characterizes male “docteurs” by the long years of scholarly effort they spend acquiring their book-learning (III.1415). In contrast, she portrays Marguerite Porete as “such a lowly virgin . . . filled with divine grace . . . filled with ignorance, who did not even know how to read,/ And who had not attended any school” (III.1379-1386).³ In keeping with the notion that the author was untaught and illiterate, Marguerite de Navarre consistently refers to the *Mirouer* as an orally composed text: for example, “son parler” (III.1319), “elle parloit” (III.1326), “parla” (III.1376), “l'escoutant parler” (III.1389). Insisting on the text's oral production, the queen implies that Porete dictated her book to a scribe, even though the *Mirouer* bears every sign of being the work of a literate author who wrote rather than dictated. As Marie Bertho has hypothesized, Porete may even have been a professional scribe who had the skills and financial means to copy her own manuscripts (32–33).⁴

By downplaying Porete's literacy and learning, the queen of Navarre could more easily claim that the *Mirouer* and its author were divinely inspired. She says that God's “divine power is more visible/ Where women's knowledge shines the least” (III.1397–98).⁵ The queen emphasizes the medieval writer's divine transformation, through love, from ignorance to wisdom and nobility (III.1401–02).⁶ Marguerite de Navarre portrays the earlier author as a simple, humble woman, even though humility is far from constant in the *Mirouer*. She also makes an assumption about Porete's virginity, perhaps guessing the theologian was a religious celibate, but such information was probably as speculative in the sixteenth century as it is now. It is unlikely that the queen had access to any historical information about Porete that would substantiate her claims. Instead, as with much of the *Prisons*, her portrayal of Porete can be read on a figurative level rather than, or in addition to, a literal one.

Queen Marguerite's portrait of Marguerite Porete establishes binary oppositions between two sets of gendered attributes. On one hand the queen describes Porete, an exemplary woman, as (at least symbolically) weak, uneducated,

humble, and able to approach God through affective piety. On the other hand the queen depicts male scholars as educated and powerful but spiritually uninspired (III.1415–1422). Marguerite de Navarre’s own experience spanned both these sets of qualities—she was one of the most powerful and highly educated Europeans of her time, and also explored the forms of mysticism that she here associates with women. In a surprising but carefully calculated act of intellectual acrobatics, at the end of the *Prisons* she rejects Reason and book-learning in favor of a highly affective epistemology, even though the poem’s 3200 lines self-consciously demonstrate her own erudition. She likewise praises Porete’s alleged intellectual innocence even though she doubtless noticed the *Mirouer’s* many references to Biblical and patristic texts and its use of poetic and rhetorical techniques that the queen knew well and used herself. This rejection of scholarly learning amounts to a profound criticism of the male-dominated clerical intellectual tradition against which (or away from which) Porete, too, was writing. Both authors use gender as a central category in their critiques, seeking access to the Divine in ways that are explicitly associated with women. However, each Marguerite does so differently.

Porete’s text construes gender as a versatile, flexible construct, as Barbara Newman has noted (145, 153, 164). For instance, the *Mirouer* equates God (masculine) and Love (feminine), so Lady Love may be and speak for God Himself. Consequently, when the personified human Soul (feminine) is portrayed as a courtly lover or knight (masculine) engaged in a love-quest for her (or his) beloved, then Love (feminine) or God (masculine) is placed in the position that the lady usually holds in a courtly love relationship. Such genderbending allows Porete to transfer the ideal masculine and feminine lovers’ characteristics onto the personified Soul. This character represents the human soul in general and instructs the audience by example. Her/his/its gender flexibility mirrors the spiritual flexibility the audience is to cultivate, an ability to conceive of the self in an almost protean manner that transcends human categorizations.

Where Porete sets up a flexibly gendered epistemology, Marguerite de Navarre establishes a feminine-gendered one. The *Prisons* value “feminine” unitive mysticism over “masculine” intellectualism (a distinction that was not nearly so tidy in reality). This gendered division is significant in the context of the later thinker’s feminist approach and its difference from Marguerite Porete’s. As Emile Telle has concluded, a major element of Marguerite de Navarre’s feminism resides in her idea that men should more closely follow good women’s example as models of appropriate behavior and of Christian virtue (Telle 397). Her *Heptaméron* provides numerous narratives that exonerate women and critique men’s (mis)behavior (such as men’s tendency toward violence, sexual libertinism, mistreatment of women, and so on). While the *Heptaméron* presents

examples of women worthy of imitation on a worldly level, the *Prisons* depict Marguerite Porete as exemplary on a spiritual and literary level. The *Prisons* embrace affective mysticism with a special interest in women's literal and symbolic role in bringing souls into union with the Divine. It is in the service of this agenda, rather than in the interest of historical accuracy, that Queen Marguerite de Navarre constructed her "portrait" of Marguerite Porete.

Suzanne Kocher
University of Oregon

1 My references to the *Prisons* are to book number and line number, following Simone Glasson's edition. References to the *Mirouer* are to Romana Guarneri's edition (by chapter number and page number) or to the Chantilly manuscript (by folio number). The English translations are mine.

2 For instance, her brother François I affectionately called her "la marguerite des Marguerites;" the queen named her collected poetic works *Les Marguerites de la Marguerite des Princeses*; her spiritual director, Guillaume Briçonnet, wrote her letters playing on the pun "Marguerite/marguerite," calling the queen "vraye marguerite," "perle et marguerite." On Briçonnet's letters, see Renja Salminen ("Introduction" 49). For a discussion of Porete's syntagm "precieuse marguerite," see Catherine Müller (101-111). It remains to be shown whether the queen's admiration for Marguerite Porete preceded her use of the name "Marguerites" in the plural, which puts the queen's given name in the context of other Marguerites, perhaps construing Porete as the first in a series that includes Marguerite de Navarre.

3 "... une vierge si basse"/ ... remplye de la divine grace,/ ... / ... remplye d'ignorance,/ Qui n'avoit point des lettres apparence,/ Et qui n'avoit frequenté nulle escolle. . ."

4 Evidence for Porete's skills as a scribe is provided by the circulation of *Mirouer* manuscripts and the rapidity with which they were produced. Around 1305-06, the text was first condemned and Porete's copy was publicly burned in Valenciennes. Probably soon after this initial condemnation, Porete sent manuscript copies to Jean de Châteauvillain, Godefroy de Fontaines, Jean de Querayn, and Franc de Villers. In 1308 she was arrested again, in possession of another copy which was likewise confiscated. During the last eighteen months of her life, in 1309-10, Porete remained imprisoned by the Inquisition and would have been unable to send copies of her book to anyone. This means that during 1305-08 she sent a copy or copies of her *Mirouer* to the four clerics and also relinquished her two personal copies of the book. It seems unlikely that Porete could afford the considerable expense of commissioning multiple copies by another scribe in so short a time period, especially since she apparently was not a member of a wealthy noble family nor a religious order. For details on the approximate expense of copying the *Mirouer*, see Bertho (29-32).

5 "[S]e voit myeux sa puysance divine/ Oû moins reluyt science feminine."

6 "[P]ar amour l'ignorante subtile/ Rendue il a, et sçavante, et gentille."

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GENDER, PALEOGRAPHY, AND THE QUESTION OF AUTHORSHIP IN LATE MEDIEVAL DOMINICAN SPIRITUALITY

In defining the Sisterbooks as "a collection of texts written by female authors in Dominican communities of fourteenth-century Germany," Gertrud Jaron Lewis presents a model of authorship largely absent from studies of late medieval women writers of Teutonia.¹ Unlike the works of Hildegard of Bingen, Marie de France, and Christine de Pisan, which long ago succeeded in gaining acceptance among the elite medieval authors of both genders,² the authorship of devotional, biographical, hagiographic, and didactic literature composed by women of the Order of Preachers has been accorded marginal status, either ascribed to the anonymous work of women's collectives within religious houses³ or else filtered through the influence and sometimes the editorial voices of powerful confessors, on the model of the *cura monialium*.⁴ In the former case, the names, identities, and oeuvres of the authoring sisters are submerged in formulas such as "wir hatend