

## Marguerite de Navarre

Born: Angoulême, France; April 11, 1492

Died: Odos (Hautes-Pyrénées); December 21, 1549

LONG FICTION: *L'Heptaméron*, 1559 (*The Heptameron*, 1597).

DRAMA: *Théâtre profane*, pb. 1946 (*Theatre Profane*, 1992).

POETRY: *Dialogue en forme de vision nocturne*, wr. 1524, pb. 1533; *Le Miroir de l'âme pécheresse*, 1531 (*The Mirror of the Sinful Soul*, 1548); *Les Marguerites de la Marguerite des princesses*, 1547 (includes *Chansons spirituelles*); *Suyte des marguerites*, 1547 (includes *La Coche*); *Les Dernières Poésies de Marguerite de Navarre*, 1896 (includes *Les Prisons*, trans. *The Prisons*, 1989, and *Le Navire*).

NONFICTION: *Guillaume Briçonnet, Marguerite d'Angoulême: Correspondance*, 1975.

Marguerite de Navarre was a French Renaissance princess who had great influence on politics, religion, and literature. She was the daughter of Charles d'Orléans, Count of Angoulême, and Louise de Savoie. Her first disappointing marriage, in 1509, was to Charles IV, Duke of Alençon, who died in 1525 after the French defeat at Pavia. When her brother Francis I acceded to the French throne in 1515, Marguerite was summoned to his court, where she not only enjoyed status as the king's confidant and intermediary but also helped introduce the ideas of the Italian Renaissance to France. She actively administered the realm and acted as surrogate queen on many occasions. Therefore, it was Marguerite who, after Francis' captivity by Charles V of Spain, negotiated the Treaty of Madrid (1526) to obtain her brother's release. In 1527 Marguerite married Henri d'Albret, King of Navarre, and in 1528 she gave birth to her first and only surviving child, Jeanne d'Albret, the future mother of the first Bourbon king, Henry IV of France. As queen of Navarre, Marguerite continued to play a political role both in her husband's extensive but futile endeavors to regain his Spanish lands and in French politics until 1547, when her brother Francis died and she withdrew to Navarre, where she died in 1549.

Marguerite's second sphere of influence was the religious arena, which was then just beginning the struggle of the Reformation. As a deeply religious woman, she supported evangelical reform of the Catholic church from within. In 1521 Marguerite started to correspond with bishop Guillaume Briçonnet, who spearheaded internal reform in Meaux and who influenced her greatly. Although Marguerite never abandoned her Catholic faith, she openly supported the reformers, granting refuge to Lefèvre d'Étaples, Guillaume Farel, Clément Marot, Gérard Roussel, Michel d'Arande, Pierre Caroil, Antoine Papillon, and John Calvin at her courts in Nérac and Alençon; she also sponsored translations of the Bible and distributed German evangelical treatises. There was, indeed, some fallout from her religious dealings in connection with her literary activity, when in 1533 the Faculty of Theology at the Sorbonne banned her *The Mirror of the Sinful Soul*, which went through seven printings between 1533 and 1539 because of its perceived heretical tendencies. Francis had to intervene on his sister's behalf. Marguerite's *The Mirror of the Sinful Soul*, however, gained influence, even outside France: It was the literary work upon which the eleven-year-old Elizabeth, future queen of England, sharpened her translation skills. Furthermore, Marguerite's varied charitable activities included the founding of hospitals and the reformation of convents.

Marguerite's literary tastes were undoubtedly nourished by her excellent scholarly education and her correspondence with many notable figures, such as François Rabelais. At her court in Nérac flourished numerous scholars, churchmen, and poets, such as Luigi Alemanni, Cardinal du Bellay, Mellin and Octa-

vien de Saint-Gelais, Victor Brodeau, Étienne Dolet, Antoine Héroët, and Bonaventure des Périers. The queen commissioned the French translations of many Italian works, especially Giovanni Boccaccio's *The Decameron* and the works of the Florentine Neoplatonists.

Marguerite's own literary fame rests on her collection of seventy-two tales in a framing story, *The Heptameron*. These tales are obviously an imitation of *The Decameron*, but they are representative of a Platonic-idealistic conception of love. Five men and five women tell the tales and comment on the stories they hear, thus allowing Marguerite, unlike Boccaccio, to express a moralistic view of human conduct. One of the most prominent motifs of *The Heptameron* is marriage and the relationship between the sexes, especially the questions of love and fidelity in marriage. With its analysis of differentiated feelings and actions, Marguerite's *The Heptameron* foreshadows the beginnings of the psychological novel. While some of Marguerite's poetic works, such as *La Coche*, include pieces inspired by the courtly love tradition, most of her lyrical and dramatic poetry was religious, inspired by Neoplatonic and mystical ideas. Therefore, in each of her major poems, a conversion pattern emerges as the speaker turns from sin to mystical unity. Her collected editions of works contain an impressive number of meditations, allegories, dialogues, and verse dramas, demonstrating her interest both in literature and in spiritual life, two realms she enriched immensely with her presence and patronage.

BIBLIOGRAPHY: Jules Gelernt, *World of Many Loves: The Heptameron of Marguerite de Navarre*, 1966; Marcel Tetel, *Marguerite de Navarre's Heptameron: Themes, Language, and Structure*, 1973, 1996; and Betty J. Davis, *The Storytellers in Marguerite de Navarre's "Heptameron,"* 1978, are still valuable studies. *The Heptameron* is available in the 1984 translation by P. A. Chilton. Robert D. Cottrell, *The Grammar of Silence: A Reading of Marguerite de Navarre's Poetry*, 1986, examines her mostly neglected devotional works. Paula Sommers, *Celestial Ladders: Readings in Marguerite de Navarre's Poetry of Spiritual Ascent*, 1989, and Gary Ferguson, *Mirroring Belief: Marguerite de Navarre's Devotional Poetry*, 1992, discuss Marguerite's major works against the backdrop of her religious sentiments. Patricia Francis Cholakian, *Rape and Writing in the Heptameron of Marguerite de Navarre*, 1991, provides a long-overdue feminist reading. Two 1993 essay collections, *Critical Tales: New Studies of the Heptameron and Early Modern Culture* and *Heroic Virtue, Comic Infidelity: Reassessing Marguerite de Navarre's Heptameron*, engage a variety of new approaches. For a complete bibliographical overview, see H. P. Clive, *Marguerite de Navarre: An Annotated Bibliography*, 1983, as well as the studies listed above.

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