

# The Power of a Single Word: “Honneur” in the *Heptaméron*

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# Marguerite de Navarre

- April 1492-December 1549
- Sister to King Francis I
- Mediator between the Roman Catholics and Protestants
- Great patron of art and ideas
- Charitable and generous



# The *Heptaméron*

- Unfinished
- 72 short stories about love, lust, sex, and infidelity
- Its frame narrative contains ten diverse *devisants*, or storytellers
- Marguerite's complex, courageous discussion of her society
  - Focused on women's lives



# Honneur

- Marguerite uses *honneur* over 300 times
- Cultural starting point:
  - *Honneur* = usually masculine
  - *Chasteté* = usually feminine



# Leveling the Playing Field

- Marguerite's revision of the cultural norm:
  - Men and women must share *honneur*
    - Masculine *honneur* = exterior, horizontal
    - Feminine *honneur* = interior, vertical
- Marguerite's Goals:
  - Women must be empowered by their honor
  - Women must be given the ability to protect their honor

# How Marguerite Addresses the Cultural Definition of Chastity

- Cultural foundation of women's honor: chastity
- Story 2
  - tears
- Story 11
  - laughter



# The Solution: Connecting Honor to Conscience

- Marguerite's innovation: Conscience and honor
  - “Conscience”
    - Small voice
    - Awareness of existence
    - Self-reflection (an interior, feminine action)
    - Power of a vertical connection to Heaven
- Story 10



# The New Woman: *Honneur*

- Personification of honor and conscience: *dame d'honneur*, or “Honneur”
  - Story 4
  - *Honneur* is:
    - Old and wise
    - Loyal and always close by
    - Powerful enough to repulse enemies
    - Able to empower women through their own characteristics





# Conclusion

- *Honneur* is used for both genders
  - Privileges, compliments, heroics, seductions, chastity
- Marguerite undermines chastity
  - Tears and laughter
- Conscience empowers the interior, where “*Honneur*” resides
  - Heaven’s authority
  - Self-knowledge stemming from self-reflection
  - Women have an ally in their conscience, or *Honneur*

Women’s value is between themselves and God

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