

Love, Mercy, and Courtly Discourse:

Marguerite de Navarre Reads Alain Chartier

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In the *Heptaméron*, Marguerite de Navarre makes two direct references to Alain Chartier's *Belle Dame sans Mercy*. Both references highlight the elaboration of lovesickness and courtly discourse as strategies of seduction. In Marguerite's text, Chartier is criticized by womanizing *devisants*, who see his *doctrine* as spoiling their game, and praised by women, who speak of his teachings as profitable to young ladies. Marguerite's frame-tale and *nouvelles* proffer both illustrations of and commentaries on the subversion and gendering of words such as *mercy* that have been subtly redefined, often in ambiguous or ambivalent ways, to create no-win situations for women, who frequently fall prey to the perilous semantics of courtly discourse.

In this study, we will examine Marguerite's dialogic relation with Chartier in the frame of her collection of *nouvelles*, along with some tales that accompany these intertextual references and that appear to be informed by the ongoing *Querelle des femmes*. We will see that Chartier's text is used to bolster Marguerite's critique of courtly love as anti-feminist, and that religious and profane definitions of love, which often appear to be divided along gender lines, complicate the uses of *mercy* in the *Heptaméron*. Ultimately, we will suggest that both texts offer keen insights into the discursive dimensions of love and the impact these may have on the construction of the self and of reality.

By including direct references to Chartier's poem in the frame of her *nouvelles*, Marguerite seems to be consciously inscribing her text in what has come to be called the *Querelle de la Belle Dame*, which has a dialogic relationship to the *Roman de la Rose* and the

subsequent *Querelle de la Rose* initiated by Christine de Pizan (during Chartier's youth).<sup>1</sup> The devisants in the frame of Marguerite's work explicitly carry on the debates staged in and around Chartier's work, which was still widely read a century after its creation, if we are to judge not only from Marguerite's work but also from Anne de Grailleville's 'translation' of Chartier's poem into *rondeaux*.<sup>2</sup>

Both references to Chartier's *Belle Dame sans Mercy* in the *Heptaméron* occur in the debate between *devisants* in the frame of Marguerite de Navarre's *nouvelles* (after tales 12 and 56). In both cases it is one of the female discussants, Parlamente, who speaks of Chartier's work and both times she refers to the same stanza in order to criticize men's manipulative appeals to women's sympathies. In each instance, mention of Chartier's poem also gives rise to a story told by Parlamente that is critical of courtly discourse and in which the notions of speech, silence, and deception are central.

The *Belle Dame sans Mercy* is first mentioned during the discussion after the twelfth tale of the *Heptaméron*, when Dagoucin addresses the female discussants in the frame, asking them not to allow their beauty to cause the kinds of cruel deaths evoked in the story he has just told (in N12, a man kills a lustful duke to protect his sister and his family honour from

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<sup>1</sup> *Le Roman de la Rose* is also explicitly mentioned in the *Heptaméron* (Saffredent uses a quote from the text to support his viewpoint after N9, for example). Indeed, the *Heptaméron* appears to engage with the symbolic exchange examined by Emma CAYLEY in 'Collaborative Communities,' *Medium Aevum* 71:2 (2002), pp. 226-40.

<sup>2</sup> Anne de Grailleville's modernized version of Chartier's *Belle Dame sans Mercy* (approximately 100 years after the composition of the original) might give us an idea of its reception by ladies at the court of François 1er. Her text is composed of a dedicatory epistle and 71 *rondeaux*. She omits almost all the material from the narrative frame of Chartier's poem, so that readers come upon the dialogue between Lover and Lady *in medias res* rather than through the *Acteur's* introduction. Only one stanza of the narrator's speech is included after the debate and no mention is made of the fate of *Amant* after he leaves the scene. The final stanza referring to the Lady as a 'Belle Dame sans mercy' is absent, as is the *Acteur's* request for ladies to be more merciful. Truncating the frame, and especially Chartier's ending, eliminates much of the ambiguity of the original. According to Mawly BOUCHARD, the *Rondeaux* present the Lady's response as exemplary of the ways to deal with the language of an admirer steeped in the rhetoric of literary models, which present real dangers for unsuspecting women ('Les Belles [in]fidèles ou la traduction de l'ambiguïté masculine: les *Rondeaux* d'Anne de Grailleville' *Neophilologus* 88 (2004): pp.193-95). The only modern edition of Anne de Grailleville's translation was published in Sweden by Carl WAHLUND in 1897: '*La Belle Dame sans Mercy*' *en fransk dikt författad...* (Upsala : Almqvist & Wiksell).

certain ruin<sup>3</sup>). Dagoucin seems to be blaming women not only for attracting such attention with their beauty – attention which often leads to their downfall – but also for choices made by men unbeknownst to the ladies in question, as is the case with the murder of the duke in N12. Perhaps Dagoucin's statement is meant to be reminiscent of the admonishment to Ladies by the narrator at the very end of *La Belle Dame sans Mercy*, where he asks them not to emulate the cruelty of the *Belle Dame* in the poem but to take pity on lovers, for Parlamente replies – citing Chartier's text as if it were a manual for ladies – that women have learned from his poem to counter that love is no killer. She states: 'Dagoucin, *la Belle Dame sans Mercy* nous a appris à dire: sy gracieuse malladye / ne met gueres de gens à mort!'<sup>4</sup>

This statement might seem ironic in view of the twelfth tale, wherein the duke is killed because of his concupiscent love for a man's sister. Had he not been driven by such lust for the young woman, he might not have died at her brother's hands. This is, of course, *not* the Lady's meaning in Chartier's poem, for she is speaking of the impossibility of dying of lovesickness. Yet, one might remember that Chartier's *Acteur* contradicts the statement by the *Belle Dame* in his text: the narrator reports that in the end, he has heard tell that the Lover did die of unrequited love. Marguerite also offers such counter examples, perhaps most famously in *nouvelle* 9, wherein Dagoucin tells the story of a young man who dies of lovesickness just when gratification appears attainable. Yet it should be noted that in the discussion after N9, Hircain and Saffredent find this foolish youth's death laughable, reproaching him for not being bold enough to get what he wants and for dying instead of achieving his ends through daring and persistence.

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<sup>3</sup> This is apparently one of the first versions of the story of Lorenzaccio.

<sup>4</sup> All quotations of Marguerite's text are from the edition by Renja SALMINEN: *MARGUERITE DE NAVARRE Heptaméron*. (Textes littéraires français 516) Geneva: Droz, 1999, XCIV+858 p., p. 117.

The lines of the *Belle Dame sans Mercy* cited by Parlamente are those of the Lady. She speaks of love, or at least unrequited desire, as a 'gracious illness,' an oxymoron suggesting its ambivalence:

– Si gracieuse maladie  
Ne met gueres de gens a mort,  
Maiz il chiet bien que l'en le die  
Pour plus tost actraire confort.  
Tel se plaint et guermente fort  
Qui n'a pas les plus aspres deulz;  
Et s'Amours greffe tant, au fort,  
Mieulx en vault ung dolent que deulx.<sup>5</sup>

The Lady's speech in Chartier's text is ironic, pointing to the undesirability of the Lover's condition. Moreover, her logic is impeccable: either *Amant* is using the discourse of lovesickness to get the comfort he desires; or, if he is genuinely tormented by such a malady, he really should keep it to himself. Either way, she has nothing to gain from granting him what he wishes; she does not want to give up her freedom or her good name, nor does she wish to be contaminated and suffer along with him. Indeed, we might suggest that what happens in *nouvelle* 9 of the *Heptaméron* could serve as an *exemplum* of the logic of the second alternative outlined by the *Belle Dame*. Instead of being saved by an embrace with his beloved, the lovesick youth in N9 dies in her arms. The girl, on the other hand, appears to have been contaminated by this contact with the lover on his deathbed and we are told that she remains inconsolable for the rest of her life.

As for the first alternative outlined by Chartier's *Belle Dame*, one might say that countless *nouvelles* in the *Heptaméron* explore the problems it presents for women. Many male characters complain that they suffer from lovesickness, whether in the tales or in the frame of Marguerite's text, yet most of the stories illustrate that what is often called love is more likely to harm women than men: women are treated as objects of desire and exchange

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<sup>5</sup> All quotations of Chartier's text are from the bilingual edition by David F. HULT and Joan E. MCRAE: Alain CHARTIER, Baudet HERENC, Achille CAULIER, *Le Cycle de 'La Belle Dame sans Mercy.'* (Champion Classiques) Paris: Champion, 2003, LXXX+611 p., p.38, ll. 265-72.

and, as such, are often victimized by men who decide to take what they want by any means available to them, sometimes through subtlety, sometimes through force.

In the frame of Marguerite's text, Dagoucin uses the word *mercy* to appeal to ladies on behalf of lovers in a typically courtly fashion, pointing to the problems and contradictions implicit in courtly discourse. His words contain the inherent assumption that women are responsible for men's desires and must therefore accede to them.<sup>6</sup> We know the dangers of that sort of logic: it all too often causes women to be blamed for their own victimization, as can be seen in the discussions after the tales of rape or attempted rape in the *Heptaméron*.<sup>7</sup> Dagoucin insists that perfect lovers would never want to do anything to damage their lady's honour, yet Marguerite's examples cast doubts on the existence of such selfless *serviteurs*. Even the speech of a discussant such as Dagoucin, who acts as a defender of courtly love, is put into question, as his statements echo the courtly arguments used strategically by Amadour to win his prize in the tenth tale (still fresh in the reader's memory).<sup>8</sup> Amadour, who initially uses all the vocabulary of *parfaicte amytié*, does so as part of a carefully planned bid for conquest, and, when courtly discourse fails to deliver the desired reward, he shows himself to be a brutal warrior, or conquistador, who sets out to conquer Floride as he would any other enemy territory. He is so mad with the desire to possess her that he will stop at nothing, not even rape. If she manages to escape his ambushes, it is only by calling for reinforcements. Moreover, when help does come, Amadour again demonstrates his

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<sup>6</sup> This is an assumption expressed in many texts on lovesickness, including Neoplatonic texts such as Ficino's *Commentary on Plato's Symposium* (see N. FRELICK 'Contagions of Love: Textual Transmission' in *Imagining Contagion in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Claire L. CARLIN. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, pp. 46-62.

<sup>7</sup> See Patricia Francis CHOLAKIAN, *Rape and Writing in the 'Heptaméron' of Marguerite de Navarre*. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois UP, 1991, XIV +301 p.

<sup>8</sup> Let us remember that Parlamente tells N10 in response to the anti-feminist statements made by Hircain and Saffredent after N9.

duplicitous nature by inventing stories to cover his guilt. Indeed, his divide and conquer tactics even succeed in turning Floride's own mother against her.

Dacougin's statement about the integrity of courtly lovers also seems particularly ironic in view of the very *uncourtly* tale he himself has just told. Clearly, the duke in N12 is presented as a vile man who will use any means at his disposal to get what he wants. He is killed not by lovesickness, but because his lust threatens the honour of the lady he desires. If any kind of love (other than lust) can be blamed for his death, it may be the young man's brotherly devotion to his sister and her good name. For some of the discussants in the frame, and the ladies in particular, the gentleman who murdered the Duke is praised as a hero for saving his sister from such a brute, as well as for rescuing Florence from such a wicked tyrant. The male discussants express a different view: for them, the young man, who chooses loyalty to his family rather than to his master – thus betraying the homosocial<sup>9</sup> feudal code – is a 'traistre et meschant serviteur' (116).<sup>10</sup>

This example shows that, just as some uses of courtly discourse can create harsh realities for ladies (leading to their downfall even as it may appear to elevate them), the male order is generally at odds with women's interests. Perhaps this is in part because the courtly model is already an inversion of the feudal order and, as we have seen in N10, the realities of knighthood (war and conquest) are at odds with the courtly ideals of chivalry (love and service to a lady). To be sure, the disagreements between male and female discussants also reflect the problematic uses of the ambiguous word *amour*, which is clearly an 'ungracious malady' when it manifests itself in the wanton lust and power plays of the Duke in the twelfth tale or in the elaborate scheming and brutality of Amadour in the tenth story.

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<sup>9</sup> I borrow the term from the work by Eve Kosofsky SEDGWICK in *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*. New York: Columbia UP, 1985.

<sup>10</sup> MARGUERITE DE NAVARRE *Heptaméron...*, p. 116.

Indeed, the persistent and contradictory use of *amour*, *amytié*, and their cognates in the *Heptaméron* to refer to everything from Christian charity to unbridled concupiscence, coupled with the constant disagreement among characters and discussants as to the meaning of words and narratives, reminds readers that these unstable signifiers cover such a large semantic field and reflect so many contradictory codes that they are bound to lead away from the very kinds of unity and harmony that love so often seems to promise in its mythologies.

The contradictions between religious and profane definitions of love (and the opposition between the religion of courtly love and the Christian faith) also complicate the use of the term *mercy* in Marguerite's text.<sup>11</sup> When Dagoucin takes up the term to appeal to the ladies' sense of compassion in the discussion after the twelfth tale, he says that he believes that they would not wish to have the reputation of being merciless or of resembling the unbeliever (in the religion of love, in this instance) who is held responsible for the death of her devoted servant (presumably *Amant* in Chartier's text): 'je croy [que toutes celles qui sont en ceste compaignye] ne voudroient point avoir le nom d'estre sans mercy, ne ressembler à ceste incredible, qui laissa mourir ung bon serviteur par faulte d'une gracieuse response.' Parlamente retorts: 'Vous voudriez doncq, [...] pour saulver la vye d'un qui dict nous aymer, que nous myssions nostre honneur et nostre conscience en danger!'<sup>12</sup> Their debate echoes that of the Lover and the Lady in Chartier's own work (and in the ensuing *Querelle de la Belle Dame*), with Dagoucin espousing the position of the courtly lover (as well as the narrator) who makes the woman responsible for his state, while Parlamente's voice

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<sup>11</sup> It is important to note that the Christian dimension present in Marguerite's text is absent in Chartier's. The only god he speaks of in the *Belle Dame* cycle is the courtly *Amours*, the judge in the court of love to whom he gives a voice in the *Excusacion*.

<sup>12</sup> MARGUERITE DE NAVARRE *Heptaméron*..., p. 117.

echoes that of the Lady who sees through this problematic discourse and makes men responsible for their own choices.<sup>13</sup>

Just as the *Heptaméron* can be said to illustrate the ways in which terms such as *honneur* or *vertu* differ in masculine and feminine spheres (one being defined in opposition to the other, as male *virtus* or virility is often proved at the expense of female virtue or chastity), so too does it explore the gendered meanings of the word *mercy*. In the male system, which is ordered according to the laws of property and conquest (even if veiled by courtly discourse), *mercy* is associated with what can be obtained from women. Rather than being a selfless quality associated with goodness and compassion (*caritas*), in the adversarial male order, the appeal for *mercy* is all too often a request for gratification and thus has to do with the goods one wishes to possess (*concupiscentia* or *cupiditas*). As a result, women often find themselves in the double bind of wanting to be charitable and loving in a Christian sense (the Christian virtues of *caritas* or *agape* praised in women), and yet having to mistrust men who appeal to these qualities, lest they ruin their reputation and become just another story of conquest. Indeed, the compassion Floride shows Amadour in N10 is repaid with cruelty and deception, for, in the end, he is incapable of seeing her as anything other than an enemy to be conquered or destroyed.

In the discussion after N12, the cynical Saffredent, a male *devisant* and libertine *avant la lettre*, even admits (indeed boasts) to being a kind of wolf in sheep's clothing, using words such as *honneur* and *vertu* to deceive women.<sup>14</sup> He mocks the old-fashioned Geburon, saying:

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<sup>13</sup> See the reading of the Lady's role in Chartier's poem by David HULT in 'The Allegoresis of Everyday Life,' *Yale French Studies* 95 (1999), p. 229.

<sup>14</sup> The predatory image of a wolf in sheep's clothing is frequently used to portray errant monks and priests in Marguerite's text – indeed, a fitting image for the monks in N56, which is told by Hircain just before the discussion that leads to the second reference to Chartier's work, in which two greedy monks fleece a lady and her daughter out of 500 ducats by marrying one of them to the girl and collecting the bride price from the mother.



Je pensoys, Geburon, que l'amour de vostre femme et le bon sens que vous avez, vous eust mis hors du danger d'estre plus amoureux. Mais je voy bien que non, car vous usez encores des termes dont nous avons acoustumé de tromper les plus fines et d'estre escoutez des plus saiges. Car, qui est celle qui nous fermera ses oreilles, quant nous conmançons nostre propoz par l'honneur et la vertu? Mais, sy nous leur monstrons nostre cueur tel qu'il est, il y en a beaucoup de bien venuz entre les dames, de quy elles ne tiendroient compte. Et nous couvrons nostre diable du plus bel ange que nous povons trouver, car soubz ceste couverture, avant que estre congneuz, recevons beaucoup de bonnes cheres. Et peust estre tirons les cueurs des dames sy avant que, pensans aller droict à la vertu, quant elles congnoissent le vice, elles n'ont le moyen ny le loysir de retirer leur pied.<sup>15</sup>

Saffredent's words hark back to Amadour's strategic moves in the tenth tale and make it clear that men often use treacherous means to win their prize, tricking and ambushing women when necessary. These are explicit reminders that men often consider themselves to be at war with women and therefore consider warriors' tactics fair game in their amorous pursuits.

The other reference to Chartier's *Belle Dame sans Mercy* (after N56) also highlights the ambiguity of the word *mercy* and the ways men use it to achieve their desired ends. Here again it is Parlamente who brings up Chartier's poem to put into doubt the notion that Simontault could possibly be suffering because of his love for a lady. She states:

Jesus! [...] combien de foiz vous vous pleignez des dames; et toutesfois, nous vous voyons si joyeux et en bon point qu'il n'est pas acroyre que vous ayez eu tous les maux que vous dictes. Mais *la Belle Dame sans mercy* respond qu'il siet bien que l'on le dye, pour en tirer quelque confort. – Vous alleguez ung notable docteur, dist Simontault, qui seulement n'est facheuse [sic], mais le fait estre toutes celles qui ont leu et suivy sa doctrine. – Si est, dist Parlamente, sa doctrine autant proufictable aux jeunes dames que nulle que je saiche. – S'il estoit ainsi, dist Simontault, que les dames fussent sans mercy, nous pourrions bien faire reposer noz chevaux et faire rouiller noz harnois jusques à la premiere guerre, et ne faire que penser du mesnage. Je vous prie, dictes moy si c'est chose honneste à une dame d'avoir le nom d'estre sans pitié, sans charité, sans amour et sans mercy! – Sans charité et amour, dist Parlamente, ne fault il pas qu'elles soient, mais ce mot de *mercy* sonne si mal entre les femmes qu'elles n'en peuvent user sans offencer leur honneur. Car proprement *mercy* est d'accorder la grace que l'on demande, et l'on sçait bien celles que les hommes desirent.<sup>16</sup>

Parlamente and Simontault's discussion points to the difference between *mercy* as one of the greatest aspects of Christian love, which is characterized by compassion and charity, and the

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<sup>15</sup> MARGUERITE DE NAVARRE *Heptaméron*..., p. 118-19.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p.422-23.

profane *mercy*, which is associated with granting the physical favors desired of the lady by the concupiscent lover. Parlamente's answer to Simontault, cautioning that *mercy* only gets women into trouble, once again echoes the Lady's advice in Chartier's text:

– Pitié doibt estre raisonnable  
Et a nul desavantageuse,  
Aux besoingneux tresprofitable  
Et aux piteux non domageuse.  
Se dame est a altruy piteuse  
Pour estre a soy mesmes crüeile,  
Sa pitié devient despiteuse  
Et son amour hayne mortelle.<sup>17</sup>

Indeed the citation from the *Belle Dame sans Mercy* to which Parlamente refers (before tales 13 and 57) contains an important *caveat* about speech, highlighting the consolation that may be gained by men from speaking of their afflictions to women, who are at risk of losing their reputations if they show any mercy. Parlamente's statements also seem to be directed at Simontault, who sees himself as her *serviteur*. Her words imply that speech is the only comfort he may receive for his attentions and remind him that the expression of love should not tarnish a lady's reputation, nor should it result in antifeminist statements.

As we stated earlier, both references to Chartier's work in the *Heptaméron*, are made by Parlamente and each time it is to criticize the deceptive use of love-sickness to win the favours of women. After each reference to the *Belle Dame sans Mercy*, Parlamente is invited to become a storyteller, giving voice to a tale that exemplifies negative aspects of courtly love. In N13 she recounts the narrative of a good woman whose older husband wishes to go on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and hires a captain to take them. Unbeknownst to the wife, the captain becomes enamored of her and, after concealing his feelings for some time, sends her a long love poem accompanied by a diamond ring. Far from suspecting such ardor, the pious lady is surprised at first, but then seizes the opportunity to use these gifts to good advantage by sending them to the captain's estranged wife, thus making her exceedingly happy. The

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<sup>17</sup> Alain CHARTIER, *Le Cycle de 'La Belle Dame sans Mercy' ...*, p.70, ll. 665-72.

pious lady does this by pretending to be a nun to whom the captain has confessed and given this task. News of the captain's death soon follows. The lady later has the opportunity to meet the widow, who now mourns the death of a husband who seemed to have been taken from her just when he loved her most. When the lady recognizes the diamond ring and hears the positive outcome of her plan, she retreats to a private place to enjoy a good laugh. The pious lady has upheld the values of society and of Christianity at the expense of the courtly code. She is clearly presented by Parlamente as an exemplary, virtuous wife, who is also clever and good-humored. In this tale, as in the *Belle Dame sans Mercy*, the hero is not the tormented lover, but an intelligent woman who sees through the specious arguments of courtly rhetoric, maintaining her dignity and equanimity while using speech (and even deception) in a masterful way to uphold values that support what we might call the community of women.

*Nouvelle* 57 also pokes fun at the courtly code. In that tale (which I have examined in some detail elsewhere<sup>18</sup>), an Englishman sporting a bejeweled lady's glove as a sort of courtly relic is clearly perceived as ludicrous by a second level embedded narrator (Parlamente's narration comes to us through the mediating gaze of Guillaume de Montmorency). Although the Englishman proudly boasts of the glove as a trophy, Montmorency, who would clearly prefer a real woman to an empty fetish, views it as a symbol of his foolishness and mocks him:

Le seigneur de Montmorency, qui eust myeulx aymé la main que le gand d'une dame, luy loua fort sa grande honnesteté, luy disant qu'il estoit le plus vray amoureux qu'il avoit jamais veu, et digne de meilleur traictement, puis que de si peu faisoit tant de cas, combien que, veu sa grande amour, s'il eust eu myeulx que le gand, peult estre qu'il fust mort de joye. Ce qu'il accorda au seigneur de Montmorency, ne souspeçonnant point qu'il le dist par mocquerie.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> See FRELICK 'Fetishism and Storytelling in Nouvelle 57 of Marguerite de Navarre's *Heptaméron*,' *Distant Voices Still Heard: Contemporary Readings of French Renaissance Literature*, eds John O'Brien and Malcolm Quainton. Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 2000, pp. 138-54.

<sup>19</sup> MARGUERITE DE NAVARRE *Heptaméron*. ..., p. 425.

The critical gazes implied in the various levels of narration in this text point not only to the fetishistic and vainglorious Englishman as a figure of ridicule, but also to the emptiness of courtly discourse, and ultimately underscore the ambivalent nature of speech and storytelling, which sometimes become signs of their own failure. Indeed, as we have seen, speech on the part of the lovers in the 13th and 57th *nouvelles* fails to get them the object of their desire, turning them, instead, into objects of mirth or mockery.

Much of the debate in Chartier's work also highlights issues related to the treachery of speech. Indeed, the Lady speaks of 'Faulx Semblant,' the personified 'False Pretence' who often uses courtly language in order to take advantage of ladies:

Faulx Semblant fait l'umblé et le doulx  
Pour baillier dames en aguet,  
Et pour ce chacune de nous  
Y doit bien l'escoute et le guet.<sup>20</sup>

These words from the *Belle Dame* remind us both of the discussions in the frame of the *Heptaméron* and of the examples in the tales we have examined. In N57, to give another instance, the lady puts her hand on the heart of the English lord out of compassion rather than love: 'plus par charité que par autre amytié.'<sup>21</sup> The appeal to her charity, reminiscent of Saffredent and Simontault's strategic uses of words such as *mercy*, is a trap into which she falls unwittingly. Her kindness brings her no good. It can only serve to damage her reputation, as the Englishman attempts to turn her into a story of conquest – another kind of speech that is ruinous for women.

It is no doubt significant that the name of the *devisante* (Parlamente) who cites the *Belle Dame sans Mercy*, and who is critical of courtly rhetoric in a number of tales, should

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<sup>20</sup> Alain CHARTIER, *Le Cycle de 'La Belle Dame sans Mercy,'*... p.78, ll. 749-52. The Lady also speaks about Faulx Semblant in lines 361-68.

<sup>21</sup> MARGUERITE DE NAVARRE *Heptaméron*..., p. 424.

conflate words related to speech, love and courtly debate (*parler, amante, parlement*), highlighting the discursive dimension of love (and its dangers, especially for women) throughout the text. By showing the ways in which conflicting ideologies or codes, gendered language, and contradictions between sacred and profane ideals combine and complicate all utterances, Marguerite de Navarre demonstrates the difficulties involved in navigating through such a perilous linguistic landscape.

Yet, the complexities unveiled by Marguerite and Chartier also offer hope for women and for anyone struggling with issues related to identity, responsibility, and self-determination. Indeed, part of what makes the works of both authors so modern is not only the fact that they give women a powerful voice, but also their keen psychological insights: Alain Chartier and Marguerite de Navarre seem to have understood the importance of discourse – the way it shapes our perceptions of reality –, whether it be the discourses of literature or society, or our own inner dialogues. That awareness can empower us if we realize, like the Lady in Chartier’s poem (rather than the Lover who chose to believe in a reality constructed by a discourse that failed him), that we can create different options for ourselves depending on the narratives we choose to define ourselves and make sense of our lives.