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Marguerite de Navarre
A Renaissance Death for Medieval Theater: Reconstructing Stage Directions in the Plays of Marguerite de Navarre

George Hoffmann
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Vladimir: This is Awful!
Estragon: Sing something.
Vladimir: No, no!

—Beckett

If the Renaissance transfigured all the Arts, none was altered more rapidly than theater. Within a single generation, farce and religious spectacle gave way to classical-based models that had not evolved from the earlier stage but, rather, simply supplanted it. This change left its mark on history when the Parisian parliement in 1548 forbade the performance of mysteries in the capital. Written only a few years prior to the official disgrace of medieval theater, Marguerite de Navarre’s sacred and profane plays, both on the cusp of the dying Mystery tradition yet at the same time marking the dawn of secular humanist theater, would seem a missing link holding clues to why sixteenth-century drama mutated so rapidly.

First, however, we need to place her work within a history of the French stage—not an easy task given the paucity of documents that

1I wish to thank Cynthia Skenazi for inviting me to give this study as a paper at the 1992 annual Kentucky Foreign Language Conference, as well as Mary McKinley for the seminar that inspired this article.
reveal how plays were performed in the Renaissance. The task is also made difficult by the play’s apparent unsuitability to the stage: they were written, it is generally assumed, to be recited rather than to be acted out. V.-L. Saulnier, alone among critics who have studied Marguerite’s plays, asserts they were intended for public performance. Yet historical evidence for such a conclusion is slight, consisting of one vague sentence from Brantôme and an account in 1542 from William Paget, an English ambassador to François I’s court, which suggests only that Marguerite presented a “farce.” Despite the conclusions that Raymond Lebègue drew from this comment, it is not clear that the play was necessarily one Marguerite wrote herself.

One might suspect that Marguerite’s sacred drama, in particular, was unsuited to the stage. The rare stage directions we do possess appear in the profane works, whereas the sacred plays’ devotional and sober character, so unlike the raucous mystères and farces of the time,

Raymond Lebègue long argued against this attitude in respect to Renaissance drama (La Tragédie Religieuse en France, le début, 1514–1573, 148); and more recently in “Unité et pluralité dans le théâtre français,” part of a collection that did much to redirect critical attention back toward performative aspects of Renaissance theater, emphasizing, however, the development of the Italian perspectivist stage, which will not concern us here (Jean Jacquot et al., eds., Le Lieu théâtral à la Renaissance, 347–55).

Raymond Lebègue, “Marguerite de Navarre et le théâtre,” 332. Pierre Jourda gives Brantôme’s comment (Marguerite d’Angoulême, II.iii, 432–34). V.-L. Saulnier, ed., Marguerite de Navarre: Théâtre profane, xix, and 46. Six of Marguerite’s eleven dramas were published in Jean de Tournes’s 1547 edition of Les Marguerites; but printed plays at this time, H. M. Brown assures us, were almost certainly not destined for the use of actors; instead they were meant to be read at home by a mainly bourgeois clientele (Music in the French Secular Theater, 1400–1550, 17). A facsimile edition of Les Marguerites was published by Ruth Thomas in 1970.

Even here, we know only that La Comédie de Mont-de-Marsan was probably performed in the city of the same name in 1547 (Saulnier, 241).

has led many to consider Marguerite’s theater to be indistinguishable from her spiritual poetry. Although Pierre Jourda begrudgingly admitted that there is no evidence to prove that Marguerite’s plays were written only to be read, he nevertheless concluded:

The form of a drama is but a convenient vehicle for the Queen to breathe life into her religious theories. To the point that her plays no longer even constitute theatrical works, but lyrical poetry put to dialogue.⁶

Such a statement denies the dramatic unity of Marguerite’s works and reduces them to a series of spiritual attitudes embedded in detached poetic structures. This opinion has made a lasting impression on critical approaches to Marguerite’s theater and, given the absence of explicit stage records, illustrations, or surviving edifices to contradict the view, still finds wide currency among scholars.⁷ By default, her corpus has been effectively cut off from the entire tradition of the medieval stage, and the hope is dim indeed of ever articulating the Middle Ages’ mystery tradition with Marguerite’s humanist influences.

Since Marguerite’s plays distinguish themselves through the great variety of their versification, I propose looking first at it to

⁶"La forme dramatique n’est plus pour la Reine qu’un moyen commode de donner forme vivante à ses théories religieuses. A ce point ses comédies ne sont même plus du théâtre, mais de la poésie lyrique mise en dialogue.” (Jourda, Marguerite d’Angouleme, 462; cf. 434 for Jourda’s admission that no evidence supports this view.)

⁷Robert Cottrell, for example, introduces the chapter on Marguerite’s plays in his excellent study of Marguerite by declaring that the distinction one might draw between the Queen’s plays and her poetry is simply “arbitrary” (The Grammar of Silence: A Reading of Marguerite de Navarre’s Poetry, 131); Donald Stone quotes approvingly Jourda’s judgment (French Humanist Tragedy: A Reassessment, 66); and Madeleine Lazard: “la valeur [des pièces de Marguerite] est plutôt lyrique que dramatique” (Le Théâtre en France au XVIe siècle, 34).
determine whether there is any dramatic dimension to her works. Would an actual audience (as opposed to the reader who can see indented verses upon the page) have been sensitive to Marguerite's elaborate diversity of stanza forms? Study of both the musical structures that underlie lyrical verse as well as manuscript conventions suggests that the Renaissance ear was highly attuned to the importance of stanza disposition. Observing how Marguerite distributes her stanzas between characters permits us to confirm just how sensitive the theatergoer might have been. In Marguerite's drama, players' speech closely corroborates stanza division: if one of her actors must speak fewer words, Marguerite almost always shortens the stanza size accordingly, rather than have one player interrupt another within the middle of his or her stanza.

Why, then, does voice not coincide with stanza breaks in the following exchange between Joseph and Mary (Les Innocents, lines 181–90; 110/143):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>JOSEPH</th>
<th>MARIE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Allons sans faire nul séjour;</td>
<td>Dieu, vivant en nous par amour,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A fin qu'avant le point du jour</td>
<td>Fait à son Enfant une tel tour,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soyons hors de ce territoire.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sylvia Huot shows conclusively that this was the case from as early as the thirteenth century (From Song to Book, 47).

For example, the shepherds' couplets starting line 623, in La Nativité, 8t/29–30. For the texts: the first page number refers to Grace Frank; the second, to the facsimile edition of Jean de Tourne's 1547 Les Marguerites, by Thomas. Even when such is not possible, Marguerite still appears to prefer preserving the stanza's configuration by having the speaker change at a natural break in the rhyme: for example, the following rhyme schema has a clear median point, A B A B / B C B C, and this is precisely where Marguerite has Balthasar, Melichor, and Gaspard take turns speaking in L'Adoration des Trois Roys (lines 525–60; 96–97/89–91).
Qu'à jamais en sera mémoire: B
A luy tout seul en soit la gloire, C
Qui l'Enfant deliure des mains C
Du danger, qui sera notoire, B
Du plus cruel des inhumains. C

Why have suspended stanza conformity? Now, Joseph begins this stanza by agreeing to flee Israel for the “désert” in order to escape Herod, “Allons sans faire nul séjour . . .” (line 181). But in the very next dizain, it becomes clear that Joseph has already arrived in the desert, “Sailliz sommes dehors des termes d’Herode . . .” (line 191), and Mary confirms this by beginning the next stanza with “Ce lieu est désert et sauvage . . .” (line 201). It seems that the broken stanza corresponds to movement upon the stage. One can hypothesize that Joseph neglects to finish his dizain because he has already begun to mime (as was common in the Mystery tradition) his journey across the stage to suggest that he is forging ahead towards the desert, likely situated at the opposite side from Israel, after the traditional medieval disposition of Hell opposite of Paradise.10 Mary lingers to finish Joseph’s stanza and then perhaps repeats Joseph’s mimed voyage across the stage, or church floor.11 Meanwhile Joseph, who has “arrived” on the other side, begins the new stanza, and we know Mary has caught up to him when she begins the following stanza by expressing her shock at the barren land into which God has sent them (emphasis mine):

10Henri Rey-Flaud, Pour une dramaturgie du Moyen Age, 38–39 sq.
11It is now thought that Mysteries may have been performed inside churches (rather than outside on the parvis) (Maurice Accarie, “La mise en scène du Jeu d’Adam,” 1–16. For further indications, see Jacquot). The most extensive and complete reconstruction of a religious drama on the Renaissance (La représentation d’un mystère de la Passion à Valenciennes en 1574) is by Elie Konigson, who, however, reaches conclusions opposite those drawn by Rey-Flaud (Rey-Flaud, Le cercle magique: Essai sur le théâtre en rond à la fin du Moyen Age; Pour une dramaturgie du Moyen Age).
Like the rope attaching Lucky to Pozzo in Waiting for Godot, versification links Joseph’s and Mary’s movement upon the stage of the Innocents.

Is the stage movement in this example related to a more general problem of early Renaissance mise en scène? Jourda counts at least three different decors necessary for the staging of La Nativité, six for L’Adoration des Trois Rois, five for Les Innocents, and two for Le Désert: these multiple locations were most likely “contiguous” upon the late medieval and early Renaissance stage, possibly even undistinguished by props.\(^\text{12}\)

\(^{12}\)Jourda, Marguerite d’Angoulême, 443, 455. See Lebègue’s explanation of multiple decors and “décors simultanés” (Etudes sur le théâtre français, 1:65–66 and 149). Rey-Flaud opposes the term “décors simultanés” because technically, the different theatrical spaces are not “décors,” lacking props and other means of differentiation (Pour une dramaturgie du Moyen Âge, 40–41).
To communicate change of location to the audience, characters had to mime travel from one place to another within relatively limited confines; Marguerite's three wise kings, for example, must convey to the audience their voyage of hundreds of miles upon a stage of at most several meters.13 Jourda assured his students that “one should not regard staging as holding much more importance than did Marguerite,”14 but a “performative” use of versification in the preceding example from the *Innocents* suggests Marguerite had fairly concrete notions of how she wished her *comédies* to be staged. As a matter of fact, the technique of dividing a stanza between different characters is used again precisely to convey the three wise kings’ voyage to Bethlehem. Balthasar, Melichor, and Gaspard have been speaking in even quatrains, but they suddenly break form with Melichor’s interjection, “C’est icy devant” (lines 1064; 103/116), and dissect their stanzas into pairs of verse as they move across the stage towards Jesus’ manger (lines 1065–74, emphasis mine):

**BALTHASAR:** L’estoille ne va plus avant.
Voicy Bethlehem la cité;
Voyons ou est le lieu cité
Par elle.

**MELCHIOR:** C’est icy devant.

**GASPARD:** En ce lieu ouvert à tous vents
Pensez vous tel Roy trouver?

**BALTHASAR:** Nous ne pouvons que l’esprouver;
La preuve fait l’homme scavant.
O quelle consolation!
Quelle grande joye me tient!

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13Brown, 75.

14“Il faut ... ne pas attacher à l[a] forme scénique [de ces pièces] plus d’importance que ne lui en donnait la Reine ... ” (Jorda, *Marguerite d’Angoulême*, 497).
MELCHIOR: Je ne sçay dont cecy me vient,  
Mon coeur brusle en dilection.\textsuperscript{15}

Joseph and Mary have already cleaved a dizain into three sections when they, themselves, arrived at Bethlehem (La Nativité, lines 41–50; 75/73, emphasis mine):

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{ll}
\textbf{JOSEPH:} & Or puisque tel est vostre bon désir,  
& \textit{Allons nous en vous \& moy à loisir;}  
& Obeissons à DIEU en toute chose. \\
\textbf{MARIE:} & Certes amy, mieux ne pouvons choisir  
& Que d'obèir; car là gist mon plaisir;  
& Qui obeît à DIEU, il se repouye. \\
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

En allant.  \textbf{JOSEPH:}  
Vous dites bien, ma tresloyale espouse;  
Mais \textit{en allant}, de vous voudrois sçavoir  
Comme Esaië de Bethleem s'expouse,  
Veu que petite à nostre oeil se fait voir.

Stanza irregularities are repeated as Joseph moves from hotel to hotel until he finds the manger and then again when he returns into the city to find provisions (lines 100–62; 75–76/6–8). In Les Innocents, the murderous “Capitaine” and Herod split the huitain form they had been carefully respecting when Herod leaves the stage and the Captain goes out to hunt the newborn children (lines 327–36; 111/149–50):

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{ll}
\textbf{HERODES:} & Gardez vous bien d'estre gaignne\textsuperscript{z}  
& D'argent, de crainte, ou de pitié. \\
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

\textsuperscript{15}Though Balthasar maintains quatrain length, one will note that he straddles the rhyme schemes of the preceding and following verses; see the following remarks concerning rime chevauchante.
Le Capitaine: 

De leur sang nous serons baignez
En les couppant par la moitié
Crainte n’aurons, ne amitié
A nul, & rien n’esparnerons.
Si le Christ est bien chastie
Par nous, assez nous gaingnerons.

These, and numerous other examples of how Marguerite displaces voice midstanza, allow us to reconstruct in some detail how she handles scenic transitions, using versification to almost literally block out stage movement suggesting at least a potential—if not an actual—staging of the play. Shifts, breaks, and irregularities in the lines’ versification consistently appear at moments when characters’ leave the action or replace one another. Such a poetic archaeology affords us a glimpse into Renaissance staging and how we may partially restore a mise en scène in the absence of any direct documentary evidence concerning stage direction.

In addition, such a use of versification might also have responded to actors’ needs, for it was common enough to use the *rime chevauchante* as a prompt to help the next actor remember his or her lines. However, for Marguerite, overlapping rhymes does more than merely safeguard against the less-than-professional performers one often encountered upon regional stages.¹⁶ In *La Comédie de Mont-de-Marsan*, which very likely was performed upon a regional stage, the Mondaine, the Supersticieuse, and the Sage almost never share a rhyme until the Bergère arrives, at which time the *rime chevauchante* becomes not only a frequent, but an absolute rule. Even when speaking in stanzas as short as couplets, no player finishes her lines without rhyming with the verse of

both the preceding and following actor. There is no purely technical reason to explain why the *rime chevauchante* is necessary in the play's second half, but not in the first. Rather, one might suppose that Marguerite intends to convey subtly to the audience that, despite their lengthy and rational discussion, the Mondaine, the Supersticieuse, and the Sage are incapable of sharing a rhyme between one another; they are thus incapable of communicating upon a 'poetical' level, until being brought together by the Bergère, whose use of lyrics and song to convey the play's evangelical message intimates the ascendancy of music over discourse in Marguerite's theater and illustrates how her plays rely upon poetico-musical structures to move from one action to another.

The most visible difference, therefore, of Marguerite de Navarre's drama from her poetry is not an overtly theatrical flavor, but rather the very extravagance of its poetic variation. Even her longest devotional lyrics tend to maintain a constant versification, and, at most, one will find rather restrained meter changes: thus Marguerite's 1521–1524 *Dialogue en forme de vision nocturne*, very likely her first sustained work, prefaches the terza rima in the main of the poem with three rondeaux. In contrast, Marguerite's plays flicker from one rhyme scheme to another, swell and shrink stanza length at will, and flirt with daring metrical shifts. She used meters of three, four, five, six, seven, eight, ten, and twelve syllables; she used stanza lengths of two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve, and thirteen lines; and she used thirty-eight different rhyme schemes (see Appendix).

It was just such diversity that led Jourda to suggest that Marguerite was guilty of "contresens métriques" [metrical mistakes] and to question whether she had ever taken the time to develop her versification technique at all. In Jourda's own critical edition of *La Nativité*,

17 On the subject of the *Dialogue*, see Jourda, *Revue du seizième siècle*, 1–49, and for a discussion of dating the work, 5. Since Marguerite includes within her plays allegorical and semi-allegorical figures, her theater seems to bear generic relation to the *moralités*, in which a *limited* amount of variation in meter was standard practice (see Brown, 8).
however, he himself inaccurately accounted for the very technique he sought to criticize in Marguerite: he makes no fewer than six mistakes in counting the play’s versification. Elsewhere, he claimed that the decasyllabic line was the longest meter Marguerite ever employed in her theater, whereas, for example, she uses alexandrines in the very same Nativité. Analyzing Le Désert, Lebègue counted only nine of the twelve rhyme schemes, and Saulnier likewise underestimated the variety of meter in his edition of the profane plays. Stanza counting is the kind of purely formal exercise French critics once insisted upon; yet even conducted as an end in itself, the number of errors committed betrays that scholars’ interests lay elsewhere and that it is rather we moderns who have lost a sensitivity to the details of versification.

One of the most extended verse forms that Marguerite uses in her drama is the decasyllabic dizain; displaying, in the number of its syllables and lines, the “ideal” 10 x 10 format that Marguerite returns to in the Heptaméron, this stanza is the preferred form of address for Dieu, angels, and allegorical figures such as Philosophie and Consolation, while earthly characters such as Mary and Joseph often use this form only when addressing God. But lest we conclude too quickly that the

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18For Jourda’s disparaging judgment of Marguerite’s versification, see Marguerite d’Angoulême, 481. Jourda’s own errors occur in his edition of La comédie de la Nativité, in which he misses one false rhyme (line 230); mistakes a five-line stanza for a dizain (lines 377-81); inexplicably groups two sizains together as a douzain (lines 428-39); misses a shift from octosyllabic lines to decasyllabic ones (line 635); overlooks four alexandrines (lines 960-63, or 966-69, counting the entire refrains of the shepherds, 671-727, which are given in the edition merely as “Chantons Noël, etc.”); and mistakes an octosyllabic stanza for a decasyllabic one (lines 984-87) (La comédie de la Nativité, 102–3). Lebègue, La Tragédie Religieuse en France, 96; Saulnier, 2 sq.

10 × 10 stanza form held some mystical significance for Marguerite, it should be noted that the selfish hotel owners who refuse lodging to Mary and Joseph, as well as Herod, also use the decasyllabic dizain. Saulnier opened a more promising line of inquiry by claiming that the “ingenious variety of stanza form successfully emphasizes the plot’s transitions and the play’s division into scenes.” While Marguerite often introduces both her plays and her players’ early lines through the most widely used verse form at the time—the decasyllabic dizain (in “undifferentiated” meter, then)—in the subsequent action she quickly distinguishes one character’s words from another’s by a process of subtracting certain numbers of syllables and verses to quicken their speech into various rhythms. These observations suggest that dramatic significance is found not in numerical configurations of static stanza forms, but in the audience’s perception of a shift from one form to another.

A shortening of the decasyllable to a hexasyllabic line in La Nativité signals to the public the angels’ passage from the divine realm

20La Nativité (lines 81–90, 101–10; 75/5–6) and Les Innocents (lines 631–50; 115/165–66).
21“[La] variété ingénieuse de formes strophiques souligne avec bonheur le coude de l’aventure qui se déroule et le découpage scénique,” xxi; see also the remarks for specific plays (Saulnier, 94, n. 1; 215, n. 1; and 273).
22See La Nativité, Les Innocents, Le Désert, Les Quatre Femmes, Le Mont-de-Marsan, and Le Parfait Amant. All of the following characters begin speaking in decasyllabic dizains: Joseph, Mary, Herod, the hotel owners, God, and the angels in La Nativité; Balthasar, Melichor, Gaspard, and Philosophy, Tribulation, Inspiration, Intelligence, and Mary, and Joseph in L’Adoration des Trois Rois; God, the angels, and Mary in Des Innocents; Joseph, God, Contemplation, Mémoire, and Consolation in Du Désert; the first and second Filles, the first and second Mariées, and la Vieille in Les Quatre Femmes; la Mondaine, la Supersticieuse, la Sage, and la Ravie in Le Mont-de-Marsan; la Femme and first Fille in Le Parfait Amant.

The decasyllabic dizain constituted a standard form throughout the medieval and early Renaissance periods, but see Lebègue’s observation that the octosyllabic line was more frequent in the mystères (La Tragédie Religieuse en France, 23, 96).
to the human, first toward Mary and then toward Joseph. Similarly, an acceleration of the rhythm (this time to a pentasyllabic line) in *L'Adoration des Trois Roys* moves the audience from the angels’ hymns to the allegorical discussions in which *Philosophie, Tribulation,* and *Inspiration* convert the three wise kings.23 In some instances the shift to a shorter meter coincides with a movement from speech to song (*La Nativité*, the first example in *L'Adoration des Trois Roys*, and the first three examples in *Le Désert*). It has been suggested that Marguerite’s incorporation of song in her plays should be viewed not as a “proto-operatic” technique, but as a dramatic device.24 This recalls H. M. Brown’s observation that songs often served for entrances, exits, and transitions between scenes in general.25 Such metrical effects are not innovations of Marguerite’s; on the contrary, they were traditionally

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23 Lines 294–303; 77/14; 427–38; 79/20; 153–65; 92/73. Further examples of versification changes coinciding with a transition in the play include the following: the pulse of *L’Adoration des Trois Roys* quickens when the three kings finally enter the manger, perceive the infant Jesus, and present their gifts (lines 1149ff.; 104/120). In *Les Innocents* this technique accompanies the angel’s movement from Heaven to Bethlehem (lines 91–94; 109/139) and marks Herod’s discovery that he has caused the death of his own son (lines 577–616; 115/163–65). In *Le Désert*, the verse again shortens as the angels move from God towards Mary (lines 203–19; 122/192–93), then as the angels move away from Mary to look for provisions (lines 351–60; 123/198), then when Joseph reapproaches camp (lines 855–62; 132/232–33), and finally when the angels return again to summon Joseph twice to return to Israel (lines 1072–89 and lines 1137–55; 134/242, 135/245–46). In this vein, Saulnier remarked how the change from an octosyllabic to a decasyllabic meter in *Le Trespas du Roy* coincides with the characters’ exit from the house (215, n. 1).

Nevertheless, see Cottrell’s remarks on the numerical significance the number “33” and stanza counts in *Du Désert* (163–64).


25 Brown, 81–88. However, other examples that contain no explicit singing (the second example in *L’Adoration des Trois Roys, Les Innocents,* and the last examples in *Le Désert*—cf. n. 23) suggest that quicker rhythm alone was enough to convey these same functions.
integral to medieval drama: Rutebeuf for example had used them extensively in his *Miracle de Théophile* to signal movement upon the stage.\(^\text{26}\)

The different ways metric variation in Marguerite’s plays indicates movement upon the stage from one “location” to another and transitions in the plot from one theme to another are skillfully combined in her comédie (or moralité) *L’Inquisiteur*. First, the Inquisiteur’s decasyllabic line shortens to an octosyllabic one with the arrival of his valet and his decision to exit his house; the line shortens again to pentasyllables when the children enter. And as we observed between Joseph and Mary in *La Nativité*, the Valet and the Inquisiteur split stanzas precisely at the time they decide to go outside (lines 81–89, 51, emphasis mine):

```
LE VALET: Où voulez vous aller, mon maistre,
         En ce temps, qui est si divers?
L’INQUISITEUR: Je ne saurois plus icy estre
LE VALET: Il a l’esprit de travers:
         Les prez sont de neiges couvertz
         Et ne s’en peut lon retirer.
L’INQUISITEUR: Je voys veoir s’il y a des vers
         En quelque nez, pour les tirer.
         Il fait froid?
LE VALET: Non fait, ce me semble . . .
```

and again (lines 105–8, 52, emphasis mine):

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L’INQUISITEUR: Quel fol voicy? Te tairas-tu? le frappant A
         T’appartient il d’ainsi parler? B
LE VALET: Mon maistre, vous m’avez battu. A
         *A dieu dongs: je m’en veulx aller . . .* B . . .
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\(^{26}\)G. Frank, ed., *Les Marguerites de la Marguerite des Princesses*, 5, 9, 17, and 22.
Finally, once the children break into song—by now a characteristic signal to us that a “conversion” is imminent (recalling also Saint Augustine’s conversion during children’s song)—it is the Valet (like the simple Bergère) who is first to understand the religious significance of the children’s lyrics. This empathy between the Valet and the children is poetically figured by an extended *rime chevauchante* that suggests the Valet’s interjections are spoken simultaneously to the children’s song. As Cottrell remarks, the Inquisiteur’s ultimate conversion is a conversion to the children’s meter, when he finally drops his longer decasyllabic and octosyllabic lines and speaks in the children’s shorter pentasyllables, eventually joining them in song.

Abrupt alteration in style and incorporation of external or heterogeneous modes of communication such as proverbs, song, and enfantilisms in Marguerite’s theater systematically accompany interior illumination. Obviously then, changes in versification are the first and most evident signs that the play is in the process of moving from one level of language to another, and examination of lyrical forms provides one of our best measures of how Marguerite richly exploits discursive disparity. We are also in a better position to appreciate how a judgment such as Jourda’s that “her style is more that of a lyrical poet than of a playwright” creates a false dichotomy for Marguerite’s theater.

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27 Lines 283–365, 62–66; Louis Auld remarks that the children and the Valet’s shared syntax “et que” hints at a parallel between their thinking (lines 345, 348, *art. cit.*, 204). I believe that this grammatical dovetailing further suggests that these lines are being recited simultaneously.


29 “son style est d’un poète lyrique plus que d’un dramaturge” and following comments such as “ces pièces ne sont que de simples dialogues, prétextes à développer les idées chères à la princesse,” “malgré la forme dramatique [de son théâtre], on n’a pas l’impression de lire une comédie . . . [mais] une moralité polémique,” and “[Marguerite montre une] indifférence aux conditions du genre dramatique” (Jourda, *Marguerite d’Angoulême*, 480, 487, 495, 496). Using more recent terminology, we could perhaps say that it is hazardous to attempt to separate too cleanly paradigmatic functions (overall tone and attitude) from syntagmatic ones (sequence of action) within Marguerite’s dramatic style.
anything, one is tempted to reexamine Marguerite’s poetry in light of this confirmation of her theatrical interest. Studying the interdependence between poetic and dramatic action in Marguerite’s work teases us beyond the pale of Aristotelian attitudes formed during the later years of the Renaissance, attitudes which eventually concluded lyrical stasis to be incompatible with dramatic action. We have seen how apparently static or purely expressive lyrical verse and song in Marguerite’s plays actually signify, through the juxtaposition of their various poetic forms, transitions in the decor and advancement of action. Her disposition of meter, rhyme, and stanza becomes a properly dramatic expression, constituting a focus for much of Marguerite’s scenic imagination. Rather than a simple expression of attitude or sentiment, lyrical form becomes mimetic of both the play’s scene and its plot; versification achieves, in fact, overall structuring functions comparable to the Aristotelian definition of the play’s action. Reconstructing Marguerite’s intended mise en scène from internal poetic indications inaugurates what may appear a novel method of investigation, but one entirely appropriate for theater written to music at a time when fixed verse had not yet supplanted diverse poetical innovation in rhythm and meter, which was the rule in medieval drama.

On the basis of Marguerite’s dramatic use of versification, I propose that the “rediscovery” of Aristotelian rules of drama by Scaliger, Castelvetro, and La Taille over an eleven-year period from 1561 to 1572 did not supplant a waning medieval tradition, but was invented precisely to fill the void left by an artificial discontinuation of poetico-musical models for theater. It seems possible that medieval staging did not die so much as it was killed by Pléiade poets who, by imposing fixed verse, would have quickly abolished Renaissance dramatists’ ability to exploit poetic form in the ways Marguerite clearly still did.

30Petit de Julleville, 279–92; Jean Michel, Le Mystère de la Passion, cii–cxii. For the use of music, John Stevens, Words and Music in the Middle Ages, 308–47; R. A. Baltzer, et al., eds., The Union of Words and Music in Medieval Poetry.
in the 1540s. Less than ten years after Marguerite, everything had changed: close to the Pléiade, Jodelle, La Péruse, and Grévin all confined metrical variation to the chorus (an expediency that Des Mauires, Matthieu, La Taille, and Garnier would continue in the following decades). Alone, Des Mauires and Bèze—like Marguerite, an associate of Marot—still used changes in meter to correspond to movement on the stage. Yet even in their plays, heterometric verse had become rare, poetic variation was vastly reduced, and shorter verse tended to be limited to explicit “cantiques,” anticipating the beginning of the seventeenth-century restriction of lyric’s poetic license to discrete stances. Playwrights’ concurrent shift towards couplets or “flat” rhyme abolished almost entirely the notion of stanza form in plays.

The amputation of mixed verse, of an entire dramatic technique, suggests not only why authors increasingly felt the need to add explicit didascalies, but also why Renaissance playwrights moved so quickly to embrace Aristotelian dramatic structure. It implies, in particular, the way in which Aristotle’s Poetics were distorted into la règle des trois unités, for with the demise of variable verse ends one of the major supports of the so-called medieval “simultaneous set.” Once poetic differentiation is no longer available to modulate between different time/space continuums drawn together on the same stage, there is a stronger encouragement to move towards limiting duration and place. The final unité, that of action, emerges to replace central performative factors which had formerly given cohesion to the medieval stage: song, mime, music, and poetic variation, all of which are now missing or in the process of disappearing from Renaissance theater.

31 Lines 270–71, 545–46, 670–705, 938–49; cf. Keith Cameron et al., eds., Abraham sacrifiant, 37; and for remarks upon Des Mauires, see Françoise Charpentier, Pour une lecture de la tragédie humaniste, 16.
Appendix I

Schemes only found in the profane plays:

A A A A A A A A A A A A A A A A A A A A A A A A
A A A B B A A A A A B B A A A B B B B B B
A B A B A B A C B A A C C C A C C C A A A A
A B A A C C C A C C C A C C C A A B A
B B B C C C B B B C B C B C
B C B C B B A
C A A C A

A A A A A A A A A A A A A A
B A B B A A B B
A B A B B B A A
B A B A A A B B
B A C A A A B A
C B B A B B C B
B B C B C B B A
C C B B B B C B
B C C D C D A
C B C B B B C B
D C C A
D B

A A A A A A A A A A A A A A
B A B B B A A B B A
B A C A A A B A
C B B A B B B A B
B A A B B A A B B A A
B A A B B A A B B A B
C B B C B B A A B B
C B A B B A A C
D B B C B C B
C C B C A A C
D B C C
B C
C
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