Marguerite of Austria
and Her Complaintes

Mary Beth Winn

Marguerite of Austria has long been recognized as a pre-eminent patron of the arts.¹ At her court, music and literature flourished along with the visual arts. Renowned composers Josquin des Prez and Pierre de la Rue enjoyed her protection, as did artists Jean Perréal, Michel Colombe, Bernard Van Orley, and Conrad Meyt. Her official historiographer was none other than Jean Lemaire de Belges who composed in her honor the celebrated Épitres de l’Amant Vert, as well as the Couronne Margaritique and the Regretz de la Dame infortunée. Poets and scholars dedicated works to her: Jean Molinet and Octovien de Saint-Gelais, Erasmus, Vivès and Cornelius Agrippa. At Malines, Marguerite also established her library, which by 1524 numbered an impressive 386 volumes: 340 manuscripts and 46 printed books.

The composition and quality of this collection has been admirably brought to light by the recent studies of Marguerite Debae.² Not only has she succeeded in identifying 196 of the nearly 400 volumes cited in inventories of 1516 and 1523-24, but she has also traced the acquisition of these volumes. Curiously, perhaps, only 30 or so seem to have been “ordered” by Marguerite of Austria. Several of these are of particular importance, as we shall see, but first it will be useful to recall salient elements of Marguerite’s life.

¹ See Max Bruchet, Marguerite d’Autriche, duchesse de Savoie (Lille: Danel, 1927); Ghislaine De Boom, Marguerite d’Autriche-Savoie et la Pré-Renaissance (Paris: E. Droz, 1935), as well as the works cited hereafter.

The daughter of Maximilian of Austria and Mary of Burgundy, Marguerite was born on January 10, 1480. At the age of two, she was betrothed to the 13-year-old dauphin of France, the future Charles VIII, and she arrived in Touraine in 1483 where she spent her childhood as the “petite reine.” When in 1491 Charles married Anne of Brittany instead, Marguerite suffered a humiliating rejection and returned home to the Netherlands. Her subsequent marriage in April 1497 to Juan of Spain ended with his untimely death six months later. In 1501, she married Philibert de Savoie, brother of Louise de Savoie; after his death in 1504, Marguerite, once again a widow, assumed the famous motto “Fortune infortune fort une.” Soon afterward, her brother Philippe le Beau died (1506), leaving four children and a mentally infirm wife. In 1507 the Estates of the Netherlands offered the regency to Maximilian who assigned it to his daughter, asking her to assume the guardianship of her nieces and nephew, the future Charles V, as well. She took up residence in Malines and from there fulfilled her political and familial roles to the great admiration of her contemporaries. Among her last significant acts was the “Paix des Dames” which she signed in 1529 with her childhood friend and sister-in-law, Louise de Savoie. Marguerite died in 1530.

As the “petite reine de France,” Marguerite received her first book, a *Bible moralisé*, in which she recorded the names of her “dames d’honneur” at Amboise. This Bible (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France fr. 9561) was the only book she took home with her after Charles VIII’s rejection, but at least two poets composed texts lamenting her departure: an anonymous author of a poem entitled “Le Malheur de France,” illustrated by a miniature of Raison scolding Charles VIII (Brussels, Bibliothèque royale Albert Ier 11182),3 and Octovien de Saint-Gelais, who composed a “Complainte sur le depart d’une passeroute appelle Marguerite”.4 Although no copy of the latter seems to have been given to the princess, its influence extended beyond the realm of France. The

---

3 See the reproduction in Debae, *La Librairie*, cat. 2.

Complainte contains within its narrative structure three lyric rondeaux: "Tous les regretz", "Tous nobles cueurs", and "Le cueur la suyt". The first two were set to music by Marguerite's court composer, Pierre de La Rue, and included in prominent positions in one of her famous chanson albums (BR 228). The latter commences with an Ave Maria adorned with the arms and portrait of Marguerite. "Tous les regretz" is the first chanson following this and was originally the first piece in the manuscript. It is decorated appropriately with daisies or "marguerites." "Tous nobles cueurs" is the first piece in the section of three-part chansons; also decorated with daisies and pansies, it follows a text by Marguerite herself, "Pour ung jamais", Marguerite's misfortune at the hands of the French was recalled later by Michel Riccio in his text on the "Changement de Fortune" (Vienna ONB 2625) where two miniatures on facing pages depict Lady Fortune removing the French crown from Marguerite's head. A miniature at the end of the manuscript depicts Marguerite with only a ducal crown and facing an empty coat of arms.

From 1491 until 1497, Marguerite lived in Malines, enjoying the company of her step-grandmother Margaret of York who seems to have fostered the child's love of books. When in 1497 she departed for Spain, her sea voyage came so close to disaster that she supposedly penned her own caustically humorous epitaphe:

Cy gist Margot la gente demoiselle
Qu'ha deux marys et encore est pucelle.


The miniatures are discussed and reproduced in Otto Pächt and Dagmar Thoss, Die Illuminierten Handschriften und Inkunabeln der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek: Französische Schule (Wien: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1974) II:81-83, Abb. 170, 177.
Marguerite survived the trip only to see her husband die a few months later and to give birth to a daughter who did not live. She returned home again with various wedding gifts, including ten manuscripts. Among these is one well known to Charity Canon Willard, the scholar whom we honor on this occasion: a manuscript of Christine de Pizan's *Livre des trois Vertus*. Marguerite in fact owned several manuscripts of Christine’s works.

Marguerite’s next matrimonial tie was in 1501 to Philibert de Savoie. The terms of her marriage contract entitled her to certain possessions, including jewels and books, which explains why, after Philibert’s death three short years later, Marguerite could augment her library with a number of fabulous manuscripts, most notably the “Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry.” She also thenceforth assumed her famous motto: “Fortune infortune fort une.” Because of this series of misfortunes, Marguerite became identified with “regrets” and “complaintes,” motifs that dominate her chanson albums.

It is, however, not only as the recipient of such laments but as the author of some of them, that Marguerite continues to interest readers and critics. Acclaimed first and foremost as a patron and bibliophile, she was also a poet whose talents were praised by Jean Lemaire. Still in question, however, is the precise identification of her work.

This problem of authorship has been raised just recently in conjunction with the planned publication of treatises dealing with “l’éducation féminine.” Marguerite of Austria was proposed for inclusion in the series on the basis of the 1903 publication *De la Littérature didactique du moyen âge s’adressant spécialement aux femmes*, where Alice Hentsch identifies Marguerite as the author of the “Conseils à ses filles d’Honneur.” Hentsch had consulted the 1888 publication by Francisque Thibaut, *Marguerite d’Autriche et*  

---

7 The series, under the general editorship of Colette H. Winn, is to be published by the Editions Champion.

8 (Cahors: A. Couselant, 1903) 223.
Jean Lemaire de Belges, in which Thibaut wrote the following: "parfois, d'un ton charmant, elle donne des conseils à ses filles d'honneur, et leur communique la prudence que les années lui avaient enseignée à elle-même. Elle leur recommande de se mettre en garde contre les promesses décevantes des amoureux...." He proceeds to cite a poem found in BR 10572:

Fiéz-vous-y en vos servans  
Dehure en avant, mes demoiselles...

This manuscript, known as Marguerite’s "Livre des Ballades," contains 71 pieces of which Thibaut attributes 17 to Marguerite herself. It is one of her three "Albums poétiques" whose texts were published in 1934 by Marcel Françon.10 The other two manuscripts, BR 228 and 11239, contain musical compositions and were edited in 1965 by Martin Picker.11 Although all three manuscripts definitely belonged to Marguerite, they are anthologies of anonymous poems for which authorship is extremely difficult to establish. MS 228 was surely compiled for Marguerite, but Ms. 11239 is of Savoyard origin and may pre-date Marguerite’s marriage to Philibert.12 The contents are typical courtly lyrics of the time and in no way constitute a unified treatise of “Conseils” such as Hentsch’s title leads one to expect. To be sure, there is advice given to ladies, as to gentlemen, but it is scattered in bits and pieces throughout the many short lyric poems. Marguerite’s role with respect to the albums is difficult to determine: did she simply influence the choice of pieces? actively engage in compiling them? write some of them? and if so, which ones? Many poems in the albums use a female voice, but the convention was certainly not limited to Marguerite alone nor indeed to women writers. The preponderance of chansons with “regrets” in the incipit is striking


11 See note 5 above.

12 For a thorough discussion of these sources, see Picker’s edition, 2-5.
(7 out of 24 pieces in BR 11239, 8 out of 58 in BR 228), but again this is not conclusive evidence for authorship. Additional clues may lie in extra-textual elements: manuscript decoration (the "marguerite" or daisy), script, and titles ("Ma dame"). On this basis, at least five lyric poems can be attributed to her with some certainty. These include the probably autograph "C'est pour james que regret me demeure" which is identified in MS 10572 as a "chanson faite par se madame" and is decorated in MS 228 with daisies. Similarly, the decoration of the chanson "Me fauldra-t-il" with flowers on the initial M suggests Marguerite's authorship.\(^{13}\)

All things considered, however, Marguerite's total creative output may not have exceeded 700 lines: five or seven lyric pieces and four *complaintes*. Her earliest *complainte*, consisting of 148 decasyllabic lines, concerns her misfortunes in France.\(^{14}\) Her outrage at repudiation by Charles VIII incited an initial cry for vengeance, and in one revelatory stanza she calls on all women to read her words, heed her example, and reject faithless men:

\[
\begin{align*}
O \text{ vous, dames, damoiselles et pucelles,} \\
Voues, bourgeoises, gentiles damoiselles, \\
Voues, marchandes riches et toutes celles \\
A marier, prenez cy exemplaire; \\
Mirez vous y et lisez mes libelles: \\
N'allez pas vos faces qui sont belles \\
A hommes nulz qui vous soient rebelles \\
Comme de moy est fait, dont me doit desplaire, \\
Mais puis que a Dieu plaist, par raison me doit plaire. \\
\text{(vv. 109-117)}
\end{align*}
\]

A lament on the death of her brother (1506) is expressed in a motet-chanson combining a French poem of eight lines, "Se je souspire," with a Latin text, "Ecce iterum novus dolor." Although the music is

\(^{13}\) For illustrations, see plates 4, 5, 10 in Picker's edition, and the facsimile of MS 228.

\(^{14}\) The text has been published by Bruchet 314-317. It begins significantly with a floral metaphor: "Quant une fleur yssant d'aître d'honneur."
anonymous, Marguerite is surely the author of both texts. Not only are both written in the first person, but the French laments the loss of her “doulx amy” through death, and the Latin identifies her brother: “doleo super te frater miPhilippe, rex optime.”15 In the 56-line complainte on her father’s death (1519), Marguerite speaks as his “fille unique” and encompasses in her lament “les quattre princes qu’au monde j’aymoye mieulx”: two husbands, brother, and father. The title, as well as the text itself, leaves little doubt as to her authorship.16

More problematic but also more intriguing is the Complainte d’amour, found in a single source, a lavishly illustrated manuscript now in Vienna (Österreichische Nationalbibliothek 2584). The poem, written in the first person and addressed ostensibly to her beloved, reveals Marguerite’s sorrow at having to abandon him to save her honor. In 1954, Josef Peter Strelka published the text, claiming authorship for Marguerite. By means of the initials ALCH, painted repeatedly in the borders, he also identified the lover for whom the manuscript was apparently written: Antoine de Lalaing, Count of Hoogstraten, advisor to Philippe le Beau and subsequently to Marguerite herself. So much faith did she have in Antoine that on her deathbed she named him interim governor of the Netherlands.

Strelka’s transcription of the text, although accurate overall, contains a few misreadings that affect the meaning.17 More regrettably still, Strelka pays practically no attention to the codicological elements of the source, and these require consideration. The manuscript consists of only 15 leaves, measuring 32 by 22 cm., but it includes ten full-page miniatures for a text of just 404 lines. Strelka makes no reference to folio numbers for the text or to the placement of the miniatures: this is particularly

15 See Picker 56, 87, 384-388.

16 As recorded by Françon who published the full text in his Albums, 256-259, the title reads “Complaincte que fist la fille unicq de Maximilien Empereur depuis son douloreux trespas.”

17 For example, in the opening rondeau and in line 164 the adjective “muable” is mistakenly transcribed as “mirable.”
misleading since many of the figures portrayed hold banners containing additional lines of verse. The miniatures are "illustrations" if not gloss to the text, and although the iconography is very puzzling, it must be considered when trying to make sense of a somewhat enigmatic poem. This manuscript is, as far as we know, a unicum: no other source for the text has been located.

Debae identifies this manuscript with item no. 354 in the 1523 inventory of Marguerite's library where it is called "ung aultre petit livre, qui ce nomme Divise de Madame." The manuscript does bear her motto at the bottom of the first page, in French and in Latin:

Fortune infortune fort une
Fortis fortuna infortunat fortiter unam.

Additional clues to authorship may be found in a letter (undated but written prior to 1522) to Madame de Ravenstein (Françoise de Luxembourg, wife of Philippe de Clèves) requesting the return of a book lent to her, a book which Marguerite "avoit fait de sa main, faisant mención de ses infortunes, pour ce que Madite dame desire le parfaire." If indeed this is the book in question, then not only is Marguerite the author, but the work is perhaps unfinished. The manuscript ends nevertheless with the inscription "fin".

Given the uncertainty still surrounding its authorship, it seems useful to examine the complainte itself for further details. I have

18 Debae, La Bibliothèque, 487-489.
19 Debae, La Bibliothèque, 488.
20 Debae calls it "une oeuvre anonyme, composée après le retour de Marguerite aux Pays-Bas en 1507," before citing the letter according to which "le poème serait ainsi l'oeuvre de Marguerite," La Bibliothèque, 488. In the notice written for the Dictionnaire des Lettres françaises: Le Moyen Age (Paris: Fayard, 1992), V.-L. Saulnier and Sylvie Lefèvre write that "il n'est pas impossible qu'elle ait elle-même écrit la Complainte...", 988. Strelka believed Marguerite to be its author.
inserted [within brackets] several hypotheses concerning textual or visual correlations with events in Marguerite’s life.

The text begins (fol. 1) with a rondeau “Plaine de dueil et loing de bonne voye,” in which the poet, using a feminine voice, declares at once her faithful love for “ung amant muable” and her irrevocable separation from him. The verso of the leaf contains the first miniature: a woman in a gold dress lies beneath a black and white striped tent adorned with flowers (not marguerites, however, but pansies or “pensées”). Written within the bright red banner above her head are the lines:

Pour doux repos j’e larmes a foison
remorant la passee saison.

If this is a dream vision, it would appear that she is recalling past events which bring sorrow, rather than imagining a future.

In the text facing this image, the poet addresses Fortune and Esperance, asking why she has never obtained what she desired. She requests Honneur and Bonne Amour to keep her company, calling herself “dolente la plus qui soit en vie.” Faulx Danger prevents her from seeing her most desired object, but not from being maligned anyway. She then addresses her lover, lamenting that although she has given her heart because of his “honnesteté,” she is suffering for love. She begs him to advise her whether she should forget him, and in apparent response to this question appears the second miniature (fol. 2v): a nude nymph rises from the ocean holding a banner inscribed with the text:

Plustost la mort en tristesse m’advienne
Que par oubly de toy ne me souvienne.

21 Pächt and Thoss reproduce this miniature, Abb. 178, as well as those on fols. 2v, 6v, 7, 9v, and 13v; they also reproduce two pages of text, fols. 5 and 13, with borders containing the initials ALCH (Abb. 179-185). With this article, I have included the remaining four miniatures (fols. 4v, 5v, 8, 12v).
Facing this apparition is a ship bearing two couples and a single lady (Does this image relate to Marguerite’s voyage to Spain?). Although the verbal response on the banner seems clear, the visual elements are confusing, and nothing in the ensuing text offers clarification. The poet accuses an undefined “tu” of being punished “a ta volonté” out of revenge and asserts that “pour toyt seul me faîle l’estranger.” Is this “tu” one of the prior personifications (Faulx Danger?) or someone else altogether? She declares: “je meurs vive voyant perdre ma joye” and claims she will leave for a place “ou nul n’abîte.” This premonition of death does not threaten her reputation, for at that time all will learn that she has loved honorably. After begging Fortune to attend her, “la plus malheureuse,” she addresses “amy”, wishing she could see him to disclose her great “regret”. It is Tristesse who brings her sorrow, and presumably Tristesse who appears in the upper half of the next miniature (fol. 4v, fig.1), along with Fortune holding two wheels. In a second scene occupying the lower half of the miniature a man offers a lady a scepter and crown [Juan of Spain and Marguerite?].
Instead of joy, the poet laments the “tour que tu m’ayes faict” as well as the ill report she has been given. She insists on maintaining her reputation:

Il me vaut mieulx que choisisse la mort,
Car femme n’est digne d’estre nommee
Si plus que toy n’ayme sa renommée. (vv. 82-84)

This preference for honor over love is quickly countered by the thought that her honor could not be blemished by loving such an admirable person. She nevertheless summons Ennuy to shorten her life. In the following miniature, however (fol. 5v, fig. 2), it is a female figure holding a scale who appears before a woman seated in a vaulted chamber. Above her head is an inscription:

A tous deulx tu donne esperance,
Mais tu tiens ferme ta balence.

Fig. 2: Vienna, ONB 2584, fol. 5v.
Two pairs of disembodied hands clench the scale, as enigmatic as the initial “P” repeated on the floor (A reference to Marguerite’s brother Philippe? her husband Philibert?).

In the next verses, the poet asks Faulx Danger why he has assailed her, making her fall from the top of his castle into the sea. This action is evidently illustrated in the next miniature (fol. 6v) where a young man stands on the shore, in front of a tower, holding a woman upside down, her eyes closed and her arms extended at each side. This picture faces another one (fol. 7): it depicts within a vaulted chamber a woman pointing an arrow at the breast of a man dressed in a dark, floor-length robe who raises his right hand in apparent protest. Perhaps the scene relates to the poet’s request that Danger take pity on the one she loves and not bring him harm.

Although she does not repent for loving someone of such quality, she thinks her days are numbered because of her suffering. In the related miniature, a lady wearing a pale pink gown with full sleeves stands in a garden holding two cornucopia from which flames issue forth (fol. 8, fig. 3). From the garden fence at the rear, a red banner unrolls into the foreground bearing a text in gold letters:

> En peteuix pleurs je mets fin a ma vie:  
> Par trop aymer sera tost acomplie.

This lady with flames in each hand may illustrate the following lines:

> N’oublye point celle qui t’ayme tant,  
> Car jour et nuyct elle a du regret tant  
> Qui n’est possible a personne qui vive  
> Nombrer le feu qui par amours se a vive  
> Dedans ung cueur mort... (vv. 147-51)

Despite her suffering, she would never be unfaithful (“muable”) to him:

> Plus tost la mort me vienne assaillir  
> Que par honneur je te vueille faillir;  
> Je penseroye estre mal fortunee
Si mon amour a aultre avoye donnee. (vv. 167-70)

At this point Bon Espoir arrives. Addressing the “femme mal fortunée” he asks why she had gone to the “faulse court” where all Danger resides. Although the poet first concurs with this evaluation, she quickly rejects any regret when she realizes that had she not gone, she would never have seen the one she loves. To all similarly suffering lovers, she claims that her plight is greater than theirs. It exceeds even that which Paris suffered because of Helen, as the text of the related miniature states (fol. 9):

Fig. 3: Vienna, ONB 2584, fol. 8.
The Profane Arts / Les Arts Profanes

Pensant trouver en amour reconfort
Pour tout plaisir je n’è riens que la mort
Et si ay eu, pour l’avoir, plus de payne
Que n’eust Paris quant il ravit Heleine.

Here the image is unfortunately less limpid than the text. It depicts a female figure wearing a winged headdress of gold and a dark blue gown, standing in a room before a draped curtain. To the left rear are the prone corpses of three warriors and a Franciscan monk. It is the latter who holds the banner bearing the quatrain of verse [Even if three of the corpses represent Marguerite’s husbands, what significance lies with the monk?].

The poet wonders what she has done to deserve such pain, except to love him, and she wishes she could be like other women:

Souvent je voys des filles et des femmes
Qui vivent en payne pour avoir bonnes fames;
Je les veulx suyvre, mais je n’ay pas science
Que tel malheur puisse avoir pacience,
Car en tout lieu si de toy me souvyent
La lermé en l’oeil incessamment me vient
Et suys contraincte d’en laisser compaignie.

(vv. 197-203)

She raises here the problem so poignantly expressed by another woman writer, Christine de Pizan: how to conceal one’s sorrow in public.

Up to this point the poet has focused only on her own suffering, but now she raises another objection: the lover has been unfaithful, not to her, but to another woman. She asks him to maintain honor and avoid shame, suggesting that someone will help correct him. This someone seems to be indicated in the text by the abbreviation “I” in line 263, which may refer to “Isabelle” de Culembourg, widow of Jean de Luxembourg, whom Antoine de Lalaing married.

Finally, the poet complains that she has been banished from the one she loves but that death will perhaps bring an end to her sorrow. In the next miniature (fol. 12v, fig. 4), a man and woman stand in a
chamber in front of a tent similar in shape to the one depicted at the beginning of the poem. They hold between them a banner with the text:

Amour my ch[ange], c’est pure vérité,
Quant elle part de bonne volonté;
Je te supplie que tu regarde et avise
Come en toy la mienne y a trop mise.

Fig. 4: Vienna, ONB 2584, fol. 12v.

The lady then addresses her “plus qu’amy”, reminding him how much she suffers. In a curious sort of rebus, she finally asserts:

La feray fin a me(ct)z regretz et peines
Par dollens jours et tant longues sepmaines
Et tout pour toy tant te desire et ayme
Ne te laissant a riens plaisir que m. (vv. 321-24)
This “m” seems self-identifying, although the sense remains obscure.

In a final miniature (fol. 13v), the couple converse in a trellised garden beside a hexagonal fountain from which a stream flows into the meadow. The text records their conversation. Proposing an end to their relationship (“Faisons la fin de la nostre alliance,” v. 343), the lady accuses the man of “trop grand faintise,” v. 345) of finding joy in love while she feels only sorrow. Since she has only ill-fortune, she will write no more:

Puys qu’ainsy est que je n’ay que fortune
Qui m’est amere et par trop importune
Je ne veulx plus te faire nul escript... (vv. 371-73)

In verses resonating with leitmotifs of her lyric poetry, she claims that:

Mort sans mercy tue l’infortunée
Plaine de dueil et de bien destournée
Que suys sans fin et seray a jamais. (vv. 377-79)²³

²² Reproduced in Debae, La Librairie, cat. 38, and in Pächt and Thoss, Abb. 185.

²³ These verses recall incipits of well-known lyric pieces of the time. Several contemporary collections of verse contain poems beginning “Mort sans mercy” and “Puis qu’ainsi est.” For examples, see Marcel Françon, Poèmes de Transition (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1938). “Plaine de dueil” is the incipit of another poem whose musical setting by Josquin des Prez is included in Marguerite’s chanson album, BR 228, fol. 48v-49. The practice of chanson citation was most exploited by Jean Molinet, the Burgundian poet and historiographer who served both Maximilian and his daughter. Among his most famous poems using chanson incipits to conclude each stanza is his “Collaudation a Madame Marguerite.” See Noël Dupire, ed. Les Faictz et Dictz de Jean Molinet (Paris: SATF, 1939) I:265-268 and III:1235-1241. Marguerite’s Complainte demonstrates her familiarity with the device.
She accuses the faithless man once again of loving beauty without loyalty and of having acted dishonorably toward her, asserting that her death comes by his hand. She concludes with a question and response:

Piteusement, hellas, moy trop dolente,
Que pourray faire si pour toy ne lamente?
Aultre espoir n'ay pour te bien aymer
Que d'avoir dueil et regret trop amer. (vv. 401-4)

The last words mirror the initial rondeau of the text, “Plaine de dueil.”

Marguerite’s *Complainte d’amour* continues to raise questions of interpretation. Strelka considers it an expression of her sorrow at having to abandon her lover to save her honor. Others conclude that “la princesse renonce à l’amour de cet inconnu par fidélité au souvenir de l’époux disparu.” Everyone seems to overlook her accusations of the lover’s infidelity, and no one discusses the admittedly enigmatic miniatures. If, moreover, we accept the statement of Marguerite’s letter to Madame de Ravenstein that this poem records “ses infortunes,” then the text may concern a more extended period of misfortune. The miniatures of a ship, of three presumably dead men, of the offering of a crown, could all be viewed as depicting significant moments in Marguerite’s life. If the initial miniature of Marguerite reclining in a tent suggests not a vision of the future but a recollection of the past, then the poem and its illustrations may record in fact a life’s journey. The poem remains puzzling, nonetheless, particularly because of its allegorical mix and the apparent multiplicity of interlocutors. We know much about Marguerite’s political and official activities but very little about her sentimental life which might elucidate the text. It is equally hazardous, however, to read too much autobiography into her work, since she adopted so many of the literary clichés of her time, including the figures of *Danger, Esperance,* and *Fortune.* What cannot be overlooked, however, is the fact that the ten miniatures illustrating the text also provide an additional sixteen

---

24 *Dictionnaire des Lettres françaises*, 988.
lines of verse which have heretofore been ignored. They demand our attention as both iconographical and poetic elements of the *complainte*. Perhaps further study of the emblematic nature of the manuscript itself will unveil more of its mystery.

Marguerite’s poetry, like her book collection, is entwined with her own life. Particularly ill-fated in love and marriage, her motto echoes in her texts. If, however, she laments her fate as a victim of Fortune, she also accepts the obligations of her social and political position and uses her experience both to develop her own moral fortitude and to advise others. She cautions women against the duplicity of men while appealing to their sense of honor. In some rondeaux, this advice seems light-hearted, but elsewhere, particularly in her *Complainte d'amour*, she reveals the painful conflict between honor and affection. Writing is perhaps a weapon, although in this text she lays down her pen. With resignation and regret, tempered with faith and hope, she insists on honor, but remains “Plaine de deuil.” As proclaimed in text and in image, nowhere more than in the celebrated portrait (fig. 5) of Marguerite encircled by her motto, “Fortune infortune fort une.”

The University at Albany, SUNY

Fig. 5: Portrait of Marguerite from Jean Franco, *Généalogie abrégée de Charles Quint*, ca. 1527-1530, BnF fr. 5616, fol. 52.