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Emily E. Thompson, ed., *Storytelling in Sixteenth-Century France: Negotiating Shifting Forms*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2022. vi + 281 pp. Illustrations, notes, and index. \$120.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 9-78-1644532379; \$46.95 U.S. (pb). ISBN 9-78-1644532362.

Review by Emma Herdman, University of St Andrews.

How does narrative—unstable and open to interpretation—relate to knowledge? That question is at the heart of sixteenth-century storytelling, with its flexible and multi-layered tales that repeat and contradict themselves across proliferating versions. It gives rise to the humanist concern with epistemological insecurity, and also to this rich and engaging volume, which emerges from a study day held at Washington University in 2016. The eleven chapters focus not on the veracity of individual narratives that combine the true, the false and the possible across a variety of media, but rather on the wider truths that stories, considered as artefacts, may convey. Sixteenth-century storytellers are consciously ethical, working to legitimize tales that are interactive, both in creation, through the narrative layering of existing tales, and in reception, through the engagement and manipulation of the reader. The volume's three main axes, as set out in Emily E. Thompson's introduction, are the transformation of a historical event into a narrative, the negotiation with an implied reader, and the decision to repurpose old story forms.

The four chapters in part one explore the narrative representation of history, focusing on the storyteller's authority, character, and relationship with the reader. Amy Graves Monroe questions the early modern introduction of history writing as an art with a distinct method by examining storytellers in histories, memoirs, and historical fiction. History's proximity to the storytelling of fiction threatens its myth of objectivity and its claims to authority and truth: yet while early modern history writing presents narrative as naturally connected to the (factual) events it recounts, the ever-present storyteller governs the reader's affective response to those events. The chapter discusses the storyteller within the four forms of historical narrative represented by the four so-called digressions in Mme de Lafayette's *La Princesse de Clèves* (controversially combining the *vraisemblable* and the *vrai*): the historical account, the moral tale, the memoir of historical events, and the autobiographical apology. The historian, who has a responsibility to present historical enquiry reliably, may do so with detachment or emotion; the memorialist ties historical narrative to a persona, highlighting the personal decisions behind events. The chapter highlights the importance of the character and historical judgment of the storyteller as the actor emerges within history.

Kathleen Loysen considers how female storytellers in Jeanne Flore's *Comptes amoureux* and Hélienne de Crenne's *Angoysses douloureuses* employ multiple perspectives to resist the idea of a

universal truth intended to persuade an imagined, obstinate reader. The *Comptes amoureux* are framed as tales told to persuade Dame Cebille—and also the reader—to overcome her chaste resistance to love. Yet the text acknowledges that multiple individual examples do not constitute a universal truth. Cebille's silence, generating more exemplary tales that still fail to persuade her, constitutes an under-narrated divergent voice that represents freedom of interpretation in the face of group opinion. The oral and multi-vocal *Angoysses douloureuses* questions the truth of the written word that the narrative presents as more reliable than speech. The effectiveness of the *Angoysses* as a cautionary tale is undermined by its counter-model, as Hélienne herself has been an obdurate reader of extensive *exempla*, reflecting the sixteenth-century crisis in exemplarity. By exploring multiple viewpoints without privileging any, both texts deliberately undermine the moral mechanism (telling true stories to convince others how to behave) that they implement.

Marian Rothstein explores the didactic and political tension in *libelles justificatifs*, or stories that describe and justify events for obstinate and for partisan readers. Jeanne d'Albret's *Ample Déclaration* is a political narrative written simultaneously for Catherine de' Medici, portrayed as reasonable and even sympathetic, and for the Protestants, whose actions and cause it justifies, emphasizing their unquestionable patriotism. Jeanne's tale of her accidental discovery of a letter from Catherine circulating without authorization suggests that the Queen Mother, like Jeanne, is being threatened and manipulated by the Guises, portrayed as the real enemy of France. The tale successfully combines the probable, the less likely, and the verisimilar to support its political intention: it represents the embattled Jeanne as sympathetic and astute; it portrays Catherine as apologetic for the anti-Protestant sentiments she has been forced to write; it suggests that the providential discovery of the potentially damaging letter and the mutual trust between the two women that neutralizes its danger show that they, like the Protestants, are favoured by God.

David LaGuardia examines what the *canards*, considered as an artefact, reveal about the economic and conceptual frameworks structuring the understanding of events in early modern France. *Canard* stories are violent and transgressive: they are portrayed as factual current events, but they are polemical and usually unverifiable; they are printed for profit; and their exaggerated horror is hyperbolically affective. They help create a national identity as curious collectors and they endorse aristocratic rank: tales from abroad, permitting evaluation of what it means to be French, derive their authority from the social class of their teller. The stories' moralizing function can take priority over their claims to truth, as when a condemned woman implausibly confesses her sins in the complex language of a clerical harangue. Such textual rhetoric, announcing the author's status, indicates the commonplace knowledge that the readers are assumed to share (for example, the truncated Latin proverb "alea fuge" invites readers to supply a vast intertext on the dangers of gambling). The *canards* thus reveal more about early modern France's cultural contingency upon representations by the learned class than about the social reality suggested by the excessive and titillating descriptions in the tales.

The four chapters in part two focus on the pleasure and utility of tales told in novel genres to prompt an active curiosity in their readership. The first two chapters examine poetry as a reliable medium for scientific or historical knowledge, the second two consider the contextual reframing of extant tales. Colette H. Winn considers the functions of the seven stories told within Girolamo Fracastoro's early and influential study of syphilis (and of a new theory of contagion), strikingly written in the form of a dactylic hexameter poem. Fracastoro's seriocomic combination of science and poetry leads to a defence of the pleasure and utility of poetry within the hierarchy of knowledge. The seven embedded stories attest to the value of narrative, recording the narrator's

scientific observations of the disease, his emotional reaction to the death of a brilliant young physician and friend, and his assessment, based on patient testimony, of the aggressive mercury and the gentle *lignum vitae* or guaiac wood resin as remedies. Fracastoro presents the New World as the source not of the new disease, but of this new (and in his view, superior) treatment. The poem represents syphilis as divine punishment for sin. The New World Indians are shown to have learned this lesson, unlike the Europeans, to whom they explain the disease's cause and cure. The poem establishes a common humanity between the Indians and the Europeans, with echoes between the tales inviting readers to make connections between the Old World and the New.

JoAnn DellaNeva examines Lancelot de Carle's use of a long narrative poem to recount the execution of Anne Boleyn, which he witnessed as secretary to the French ambassador in London. Where the imperial ambassador's prose account is brief and factual, Carle's verse epistle—which seems to be the official diplomatic account—questions the relationship between history, diplomacy, and poetry, associated with literary falsification, but allowing a subjective narrator to provide a reflective moral commentary on the tale. Carle's account focuses on the prohibited and unauthorized stories, potentially based on misinterpretations, on which the charge against Anne was based. The tale of Anne's incest with her brother George—first told defensively, by a narrator legitimizing and distracting from her own far less egregious infidelity—is part of forbidden discourse: Henry VIII's law of 1534 forbade impugning the legitimacy of his marriage. Carle, impossibly, records the dangerous narrative in direct speech, adding Latinate maxims that signal the place between truth and historical fiction of a plausible dialogue that does not contradict any historical facts. The transgressive silences of George and Anne cast doubt on the veracity of their accusers' tales. Even if the transgressive nature of the accusation guarantees its authenticity, it may nonetheless be a misreading of an ambiguous situation. Carle's unique account, defying literary convention, reflects the unprecedented events he describes.

Thompson examines Henri Estienne's defence of Herodotus as a model for the oral and literary storytelling tradition in contemporary history. Estienne's own recounting of vernacular French tales—inconsistently redesignated as educational *histoires* rather than vulgar, if entertaining, *contes*—in the literary model of Bonaventure Des Périers and Marguerite de Navarre constitutes a new departure as he seeks to widen his readership. His purpose is to collect and transmit both Herodotus's Greek and the colourful French of the oral tradition, whose pleasure and utility he defends despite Genevan objections to obscenity, frivolity, and ambiguity. Maintaining the evangelical tradition of anti-dogmatic questioning enquiry, Estienne promotes a method of analogous reading that invites moral reflection by comparing stories from Antiquity and the present, in conflicting versions that together suggest the truth. Such critical reading encourages sceptical questioning even of Estienne's own text and leads Thompson to ask whether Galiot Du Pré's inclusion of nine of Estienne's stories in his 1568 edition of Des Périers constitutes legitimate free reading of tales from a French oral tradition that Estienne, by popularizing Herodotus as a model, elevates into a serious source for moral history.

Dora E. Polachek explores the comical retelling by Brantôme—whose reading of Marguerite de Navarre is still influential—of ten *nouvelles* from the *Heptaméron* in his *Vies des dames galantes*, a collection of largely erotic tales and sexual banter in seven light-hearted pastiches of literary and philosophical discourse. The chapter analyses the comedy and generative potential in Brantôme's versions of *nouvelles* 26 and 43, allowing him to become Marguerite's eleventh *devisant* and revealing the circulation of her tales at court. Where Marguerite's *nouvelle* 26 applauds the Dame de Pampelune's virtuous control of her unrequited love, Brantôme includes the tale amongst

stories of cuckoldry to suggest that adultery is both pleasurable and harmless. Where Marguerite's *devisants* unite in condemning the hypocritical and adulterous Jambique in *nouvelle* 43, Brantôme condemns Jambique's lover for revealing his discovery of her identity and so ending the double pleasure of this secret knowledge and of the tryst. Brantôme's pleasure-seeking version is provocatively designed to elicit further stories, as Jambique's story becomes an *exemplum* for adultery, inspiring and thwarting imitations of the trick by which her identity was revealed. Brantôme thus rises to Marguerite's challenge of writing new tales and of freely interpreting hers, making them about entertainment, pleasure, and admiration for infidelity and creative dissimulation.

These last two chapters question the legitimacy of retelling open-ended tales, which invite interpretation, against their original grain. The question of recontextualized readings recurs in the three chapters in part three, which move away from textual narrative to consider the reading practices required by stories told through music, tapestry, and stone, or through material and immaterial forms whose longevity, placing them outside a historical context, gives them an enduring unintelligibility. Cathy Yandell highlights the significance of auditory knowledge by discussing the polemical use of musical *contrafacta* as propaganda during the Wars of Religion. *Contrafacta* operate through recontextualization, extending the longevity of a melody. The replacement of secular lyrics with religious texts (or vice versa) creates a form of palimpsest, in which both versions co-exist, raising questions about authorship and plagiarism. The repurposing of familiar, accessible, and memorable melodies allows secular songs to be reclaimed for worship; conversely, it also leaves religious music open to parody and satire through the application of irreverent or even lascivious texts. The chapter emphasizes the significance of communal singing: the Psalms (despite the ineffective bans on their vernacular translation and on public psalm-singing) give coherence to Protestants, inspired by David in victory and defeat, while Catholic songs celebrating victory over demonized Protestants function both as battle cries and as justifications for conquest.

Sheila Ffolliott examines the materiality, resonances, and storytelling techniques of tapestries, used as a form of (moral) literature. Large-scale and visibly expensive tapestries are essential for a prince. They would be hung at ground level, placing life-size figures at eye-level, and usually seen by candlelight, isolating the viewer's focus upon specific details. They function as portable stage-sets, depicting and encouraging audience interaction with the narrative, as (contemporary) spectators are shown witnessing a historic or miraculous scene, or as portraits gaze out at viewers like actors in mystery plays. The chapter focuses on two sets of tapestries with narratives conceptualized around Catherine de' Medici: the Artemisia set and the Valois tapestries. The Artemisia narrative was intended to serve as a legitimizing backdrop for the widowed Queen Mother's regency. It was never woven for Catherine, although it was later redeployed for Marie de' Medici. The 1570s Valois tapestries, which Catherine gave in 1589 as an engagement present to her granddaughter, Christine de Lorraine, celebrate Catherine's family and her *fêtes*, presenting the festive battles that end in reconciliation as her *res gestae*, recorded for posterity. Both tapestry sets powerfully reiterate stories of royal power.

Phillip John Usher focuses on early modern fossil stories, told over long chronological periods, and argues that geology must influence critical reading of literature in the Anthropocene era. The chapter explores a modern geological sensibility in sixteenth-century France, before Ulysse Aldrovandi's coining of the term "geologia" in 1603. Usher reads the tales of petrification in Rémy Belleau's *Des pierres précieuses* as stories of fossil production. The metamorphoses of

Amethyst and of Opal emphasize the living in a relic, anticipating both the modern sense of a fossil having a trace of a former life (rather than its early modern sense of having been dug from the ground) and the idea of a fossil as a recording medium. Usher then considers the fossil story told by the statue of David, the slayer of Goliath, in the Hôtel d'Escoville in Caen. Where the iconographic tradition reads such a statue allegorically and immaterially, seeing David as symbolizing an individual owner's virtues, a material reading of the statue, fashioned by an Italian sculptor, suggests the cultural story of France's artistic inheritance from the Italian Renaissance and the geological story of Normandy limestone, which is itself a fossil. Where Burckhardt and Michelet saw the Renaissance as the moment of Man's separation from Nature, Usher argues that Anthropocene eyes should consider a statue and its material as inseparable, seeing stories as fossils and stories in fossils.

With its combination of narrative scepticism and literary-historical enquiry, this volume itself has a story to tell about our post-truth age that persists in seeing stories, however fanciful their narratives, as truthfully reflecting and defining the societies that produce them, in the past and now.

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