

Platonic symbolism of Marguerite D'Angoulême in the royal courts of France and Navarre (1492-1549)

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Marguerite, born on 11th April, 1492, in the Château d'Angoulême two years before her brother François, was the daughter of Charles d'Orléans and Louise de Savoie. After the death of Louis XII of France, the Angoulêmes saw a chance of accession to the Valois throne and Marguerite and her brother were given the best of teachers, learning how to read and speak Latin, Italian and Spanish as well as becoming acquainted with the Neo-Platonic ideas that were then spreading from Florence¹. In 1509, however, a great personal sacrifice was demanded from the young princess for the sake of the Angoulême House when she was asked to marry Charles, Duke of Alençon, hardly a suitable match for her refined mind, and who was not able to give her a child. The enthronement of her brother as François Ist in 1515 must have comforted her since soon after she began to welcome Clément Marot and other poets and writers into her personal service. Her cultured mind could hardly find rest unless surrounded by educated «protégés» who soon started to look upon her as the Maecenas of the new intellectual and literary Renaissance in France.

It would be absurd to speak of the Renaissance in Western Europe as belonging to a clearly defined period. What seems to be clear is that it coincided with the revival of the Platonic tradition in the XVth century, when Cosimo de Medici founded the Platonic Academy of Florence antagonizing the Aristotelians against the so called Neo-Platonic philosophers².

Neo-Platonic thinkers tried to harmonize pagan elements with Christian ideals by combining the Platonic conception of man as a «Microcosm», whom Plato placed in between the world of the spirit and that of matter, with the Bi-

1. CH. DE SAINCTE MARTHE, *Oraison funèbre de l'incomparable Marguerite, Royne de Navarre, Duchesse d'Alençon*, Paris 1550, pp. 24-27.

2. George Gemistus Plethon and John Bessarion of Trebizond were sent from Byzantium to the Council of Florence (1438-45) to work out the reconciliation between the Eastern and the Western Churches. Both were enthusiastic Neo-Platonists who wrote works on the differences between the Aristotelian and the Platonic philosophies. Bessarion composed his *Adversus calumniatorem Platonis*, i.e. against the Aristotelian George of Trebizond who had published his *Comparatio Aristotelis et Platonis*.

blical tradition. New Translations of the works of Plato by a young scholar, Marcilius Ficinus (1433-99), together with the Neo-Platonists made Florence the centre of the new movement. Ficinus also translated the works attributed to Hermes Trismegistus, a series of mystic texts compiled in Egypt at the beginning of the Christian era. Ficinus blended the mystic tradition with Greek Philosophy, interpreting the world as a harmonious system with man as a link between the upper and the lower spheres. In 1474 Ficinus published his *Theologia platonica* teaching the divine origin of the soul, which ascends from the world of matter to the Unity of the Absolute, the One.

The («Negative Philosophy») («Theologia Negativa») of the Pseudo-Dionysius was revived by John Pico della Mirandola (1463-94), a Neo-Platonist, adding a new element to the Humanistic tradition of the interpretation of the world, namely that man can only approach the One by denying Him the Limitations of the created perfections and by transcending the world of the senses. Other Neo-Platonic writers showed interest in the Jewish Cabbala and in the Neo-Pythagorean number mysticism as a means of arriving at the understanding of the Absolute. John Reuchlin (1455-1522) an eminent German scholar who studied in France and Italy thought that Pythagoras had access to Jewish sources, and others imagined that Greek philosophers, including Socrates, had studied the Bible.

Fortunately the Humanists were critical scholars and were not easily diverted by these theosophists and occultists of their time. Instead they tried to combine Plato's search for truth with the Christian quest for perfection. Neo-Platonism soon spread through Florence to the whole of Europe; Nicholas of Cusa (1401-1464), an eminent mathematician, thought that we know what the One is not, rather than what He is. His work *De docta ignorantia* and his definition of God as the «Coincidentia oppositorum» had a lasting influence in Europe.

Neo-Platonism arrived later into France, but its success was immediately. The Humanist Jacques Lefevre d'Étaples (1450-1536) translated the works of Plato, the Pseudo-Dionysius and Hermes Trismegistus, dedicating them to Guillaume Briçonnet (1470-1534) who was soon to be chosen by them crown to organize the reformation of the Church and the Renaissance of Humanism in France. Francis Ist and his sister Marguerite were their admirers and both Briçonnet and Lefevre began and experiment at Meaux, a town conveniently situated a few miles away from Paris, where they gathered together a group of scholars. The Evangelic renewal was preached as a reversion to the purity of the Gospels and to the theology of St. Paul, which they enriched with Neo-Platonic ideas, Dionysian symbolism and Hermetic teaching. Marguerite herself decided to join the group, consenting to be initiated into this strange mixture of Pauline evangelism and Neo-Platonic ideas and the «credo of Meaux» became fashionable in the French court. The future of Meaux was unfortunately doomed to failure shortly after it began in 1521 because of the opposition of the Faculty of the Sorbonne and also on account of the disaster of the French army which fought against the Emperor Charles V at Pavia in 1525; the French crown could no longer protect the Meaux group (Lefevre, Arande, Roussel, Vatable, Mazurier, Caroli, Farel and others) who had either to escape abroad or to seek the protection of Marguerite de Navarre. Marguerite's mystic ideas were admired by the Neo-Platonists Dolet and Periers and by the Renaissance French writers Marot and Rabelais.

Mysticism was then rediscovered both in Germany and France. In Germany Luther published the *Theologie Deutsch* in 1516, while Lefevre helped in the discovery of the Mediaeval mystics at the Carthusian monastery at Vauvert, in the

Grand-Bornard valley, not far from Paris³. The semipanteistic approach of the Rhenish school (Eckhart, Tauler, Suso, Ryusbroek) teaching that the soul has no essence outside God, was interpreted as the natural tendency of the soul to reach its divine origin and lose itself in the One, as Plato had taught, according to the Neo-Platonists⁴. The Meaux group showed a great interest in the mystic texts and Marguerite chose from the beginning to become the defender of Neo-Platonic mysticism. For three years she was initiated into the theory of the mystical Purification of the soul through a long process of Illumination of the mind until it reaches the Unifying principle. Briçonnet sent her the writings of the Neo-Platonic Dionysius and of Hermes Trismegistus⁵ as well as some of the scholars of Meaux to initiate her in the mystic theory⁵. She was even initiated into the Cabbalistic interpretation of the Bible adopting the Hebrew letter capital «MEM» as a symbol of hermetic number interpretation. The letter «MEM» meant for the group of Meaux the spiritual interpretation of numbers in the chronologies of the Old Testament, which, according to Briçonnet, announced the coming of the Messiah, the Divine «MEM»⁶.

Marguerite de Navarre's early Neo-Platonism depended on her initiation into the evangelic principles of Meaux. Marguerite soon began to develop a theory of mystic experience starting from the hermetic meaning of the initial «M» of her own name Marguerite, which she revealed in her poem *Miroir de l'âme pécheresse* which was published in Paris in 1531⁷. Briçonnet had already used the symbol of the Marguerite-Pearl identifying it with the Union of the soul with the Divine: «... que l'effect soit correspondant à vostre no(m) et indissoluble union avec vostre triumpphant chief, pour, avec luy resuscitee, l'aymer viscerellement de tout vostre coeur, pour estre à jamais marguerite luisante au firmament d'eternite...»⁸.

Alchemists had explained the birth of the Pearl as the result of Light getting inside the shell and blending itself with Water⁹. The Light of the Sun represented the idea of Good in Platonic symbolism, the Universal cause of all things

3. M. CERTAU, *Memorial du Bienheureux Pierre Fabre*, Paris 1959, pp. 29-30. J. Orcibal also mentions the interest of the group of Marguerite in Mystic works; *la Recontre du Carmel Thérésien avec les mystiques du Nord*, in *Bibliothèque de L'École des Hautes Etudes*, Paris 1959, p. 3. Lefevre published Ruysbroeck's *De onartu* in 1512. Eckhart's proposition «creatures of themselves are nothing» were condemned by Pope John XXII in 1329.

4. Critics are divided on the interpretation of Plato's theory of the divine origin of the soul. The word «emanation» so dear to the Neo-Platonists was nowhere in his works and it is difficult to explain how he made the Forms derive from the One. See F. COPLESTON, *A Study of Philosophy*, vol. I: ((Greece and Rome», Part 1, p. 203.

5. Briçonnet often mentions sending mystic treatises to Marguerite in his *Correspondance* without quoting which they are. But his letters follow the Neo-Platonic way of ascension of the Pseudo-Dionysius and the symbolism of Hermes Trismegistus. Ch. MARTINEAU and M. VEISSIERE, *Guillaume Briçonnet, Marguerite de Navarre; Correspondance* (1521-1524), 2 vols, Geneva 1975 and 1979, vol. 1, p. 203.

6. *Ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 277-278. Cf. W. J. BROUWSMA, *Postel and the Significance of Renaissance Cabalism in Renaissance Essays*, Nex York 1968, pp. 252-266.

7. Marguerite's *Miroir de l'âme pecheresse* was interpreted by the Sorbonne as a pro-Lutheran work, escaping the condemnation of the Faculty only by a personal intervention of her brother King Francis Ist. Y. ORIA, *Mysticism in the Work of Marguerite de Navarre*, London Univerity Thesis 1981, pp. 73-80. At the end of the *Miroir* Marguerite says of herself: «Qu'il (i.e. Dieu) luy faire a moy sa MARGUERITE» (v. 1430).

8. *Correspondance*, op. cit., vol. 1, p. 213.

9. M. ELIADE, *Images et symboles; essais sur le symbolisme magicoreligieux*, «le mythe de la Perle», Paris, 1962, p. 195.

right and beautiful and the source of Truth and Reason¹⁰. Plato's myth of the Pearl played an important part in the Neo-Platonic theory of the Illumination of the soul which is imprisoned in the body like an oyster in its shell¹¹. The Light of the Sun would break the walls of the dark castle of the Poet-Lover in Marguerite de Navarre's mystic poem, the *Prisons*, to free him from the world of the senses¹². Platonic symbolism need not be understood from a religious view point and it is arguable whether his epistemology or theory of knowledge as the ascent of the soul to the Absolute, the One, is a mystical theory at all¹³.

Neo-Platonists, had already since the Pseudo-Dionysius, utilized Plato's myth of the Cave as the mystic ascent of the soul to God following the «Negativa Way» («Via Negativa»), by climbing to the invisible source of Light beyond the visible creatures, to the Light that blinds by the excess of brightness¹⁴. In Marguerite's circle the Pearl would grow inside the dark Prison of the shell, embodying the divine qualities of «perfection», «transparency», «roundness» and «solidity», becoming the perfect image of the Divine Union and a definition of the Godhead¹⁵.

The last years of Marguerite's life were more clearly marked by personal disenchantment and she retired to her domains, taking refuge in writing, producing a series of Neo-Platonic works, among them a collection of little stories which was published as the *Heptaméron*, and a few mystic plays and poems that we now consider as her mature works: the *Chansons spirituelles*, *la Navire*, *la Comedie jouée au Mont-de-Marsan* and *les Prisons de la Reine de Navarre*. Her partial retirement from political life after the marriage of her daughter Jeanne d'Albret to Guillaume, Duke of Cleves, in 1540, against the wishes of both mother and daughter, to satisfy the politics of François I.^{er}, was to be the most important for her career as a writer. She spent from 1542 to 1544 in her domains, the small kingdom of Navarre, for whose reunification she valiantly fought; she went first to Nerac, then to Mont-de-Marsan and Pau¹⁶. At Nerac, the capital of Navarre, she had given asylum to some of her friends from Meaux, Roussel, Lefevre and Farel, and to other people who were threatened by the Sorbonne such as Calvin, Marot and des Periers. Marguerite's husband would hear none of it. Later Marguerite welcomed the Libertins Spirituels who were disliked both by Protestants and Catholics, and Calvin wrote a treatise accusing the group of Nerac of being «Nicodemites», since they did not take a clear stand in the work of reforming the Church¹⁷.

10. B. JOWETT edit., *The Dialogues of Plato*, 4 vols, London 1970, vol. 4 *The Republic*, p. 517.

11. Ibid., vol. 2 *Phaedrus* p. 267.

12. A. LEFRANC edit., *Les Prisons de la Reine de Navarre in Dernieres Poesies de Marguerite de Navarre*, Paris 1896, p. 125.

13. Critics are divided in their opinions on Plato's supposed mysticism. A. E. TAYLOR, for example, maintains that Plato describes the same spiritual voyages which St John of the Cross relates in *En una noche oscura*, or St Bonaventure in his *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*. TAYLOR, *Plato; the Man and his Work*, London 1926, p. 226. C. RITTER, on the other hand, argues that recent attempts to stamp Plato as a mystic are based on forged passages of his *Epistles*. RITTER, *The essence of Plato's Philosophy*, London 1933, p. 11.

14. COPLESTON, *A History of Philosophy*, op. cit. vol. 3, Par II, p. 187.

15. SAINTE-MARTHE, *Oraison funebre*, op. cit., p. 16.

16. R. RITTER, *Les Solitudes de Marguerite de Navarre*, Paris 1953.

17. The nickname «Nicomedites» given to Marguerite's group by Calvin refers to Nicodemus, a rabbi who was afraid to come to talk to Jesus except at night time (John 3). F. M. HIGMAN edit., *Jean Calvin; Three Treatises*. 3. «Excuse aux Nicomedites», Lon-

For the first time in her life the Queen of Navarre was able to retire from public life and devote herself to conversing with her friends, reading her favourite writers, no doubt the Neo-Platonists, and writing her own works. Martineau quite rightly contests Lefranc's and Lajarte's concept of Platonism as applied to Marguerite, since there might not have been a direct impact of Plato's work on the Queen as there was in the case of Dolet or Bonaventure de Periers, nor can one properly speak in her case of «neoplatonisme amoureux». Marguerite's Neo-Platonism was clearly dependent on her eclectic initiation by Briçonnet in the readings of the Pseudo-Dionysius, of Nicholas of Cusa, Hermes and de Cabbala writers¹⁸. However she diverges at least once from the mystical interpretation of Neo-Platonic love by accepting the «love of friendship», condoning her brother's adulterous attachment to the Duchesse d'Etampes to whom she dedicated her Platonic poem *la Coche*¹⁹. When Marguerite was touched in the 1540s by a Neo-Platonic «coup de foudre», she was simply recalling her early reminiscences (in the Platonic sense) of her initiation by Briçonnet into symbolic mysticism. The main themes that will appear in her later works will reveal her Neo-Platonic upbringing:

1. The nature of the essence of God.
2. The negative way («Via Negativa») of knowing the Divinity.
3. The opposition between the soul and the body.
4. Mystic experience as a way of ascension.
5. The problem of evil.
6. Marriage as a symbol of mystic union with the divine.
7. The knowledge of Christ as the summit of all speculative understanding.

Like all Neo-Platonists Marguerite thought that the soul has a natural tendency to liberate itself from its imprisonment in the body. Plato's myth of the imprisonment of Man in a Cave in Book VII of his *Republic* will appear over and over again in her mystic poetry. She begins her *Prisons* by announcing that man's soul is a prisoner in the body, often forgetting that it had been once free:

don 1970, pp. 131-153. Cf. Y. ORIA article on *Calvino y la Corte de los Labrit en Navarra: 1534-1564* in *Institution Principe de Viana*, Pamplona 1984, pp. 517-525.

18. There are a few studies on Marguerite's Platonism: E. LEFRANC, *Marguerite de Navarre et le Platonisme de la Renaissance* in *Grands Ecrivains de la Renaissance*, Paris 1914, pp. 139-239. Ibid., *Les Idées religieuses de Marguerite de Navarre d'après son oeuvre poétique*, Paris 1898. E. PARTURIER, *Les Sources du mysticisme de Marguerite de Navarre* in *Revue de la Renaissance*, Paris 1904, pp. 1-16 and 49-62. P. SAGE, «le Platonisme de Marguerite de Navarre» in *Travaux de Linguistique et de Littérature*, Strasbourg 1969, pp. 65-82. Recently critics prefer to refer to Marguerite's Neo-Platonism: G. CAPELLO, «Nicolo Cusano nella Corrispondenza di Briçonnet con Margherita di Navarra», in *Rivista di Storia della Filosofia Medievale*, Padova 1975, pp. 139-182. ibid., «Neoplatonismo e Riforma in Francia, dall'«Epistolario tra Guglielmo Briçonnet e Margherita de Navarra», in *Logica e Semantica et Altri Saggi*, Padova 1975, pp. 139-182. Ch. MARTINEAU, «Le Platonisme de Marguerite de Navarre?» in *Bulletin de l'Association d'Etudes sur l'Humanisme, la Reforme et la Renaissance*, France du Centre et du Sud-Est 1976, pp. 12-36. Y. ORIA, *Mysticism in the Work of Marguerite de Navarre*, Thesis at London University, 1981.

19. R. MARICHAL edit., *La Coche*, Geneva 1971. Introduction: «la Conception de l'amour» and «La Date de la Coche et la Duchesse d'Etampes», pp. 22-40. Marguerite's doctrine of Neo-Platonic love is described in her *Heptameron* and in Book II of her *Pri-*

Je vous confesse, Amye tant aymée,
 Que j'ay longtems quasi desestimée,
 La grand doulceur d'heureuse liberté
 Pour la prison où par vous j'ay esté,
 Car j'en trouvoys les tourmentz et lyens
 Doulx passetemps et desirables biens .

The liberation of the soul is not an easy process according to the mystics. Eckhart taught that there is an «Agent» in the soul that makes it struggle to rise up towards the Absolute²¹. Plato called it «Power», a daimon, which is an intermediate stage between the mortal and the Divine²². Marguerite's eclecticism would teach that the Holy Spirit illuminated both pagan and Christian mystics, philosophers and writers as well as the prophets. Socrates was encouraged to take the hemlock by the power of the Spirit, the same spirit which inspired the works of Plato:

Ceste lumiere a Socrates receue
 Quant doucement accepta la cigüe,
 Croyant si bien que l'ame est immortelle
 Que pour avoir ceste vie eternelle
 La mort receut comme en alant aux nopces,
 (***)
 Platon tres bien a suyvi sa doctrine,
 Qui est si très subtile et si très fine
 Que l'on voyt bien, et de tous ses semblables,
 Par leurs escriptz tant grans et admirables,
 Que chair et sang ne les ont pas appris,
 Mais ung esprit seul parle en leurs espritz²³.

Plato used the symbol of the Wing to explain the natural tendency of the soul to rise towards the Absolute, the One: «The Wing is the corporeal element which is most akin to the Divine, and which by nature tends to soar aloft and carry that which gravitates downwards into the upper region, which is the habitation of the gods»²⁴. Neo-Platonists would call this power inside the soul «Fureur Poétique» or madness, through which poets, mystics and prophets can foresee the future:

Lors je congneuz que les poets tous
 Ont très bien dit de dire «Dieu en nous»,
 Car Dieu en eulx leur a fait souvent dire
 Ce que jamais par ouyr ne par lire
 N'avoient congneu. O pouvoir autentique
 Qui les (a fait), par fureur poétique,
 Le temps futur predire clerement
 Et le passé monstrer couvertement²⁵.

20. A. LEFRANC edit., *Les Prisons*, op. cit., fol. 265 ro, p. 121. Also cf. P. JOURDA edit., *Dialogue en forme de vision nocturne*, Paris 1926, vv. 508-510 and J. L. ALLAIRE edit., *Miroir de l'âme pécheresse*, Munich 1972, vv. 662-663 and 691-692; also R. MARICHAL edit. *La Navire ou consolation du Roy François I.^{er} a sa soeur Marguerite*, Paris 1956, vv. 310-312.

21. R. B. BLACKNEY, *Meister Eckhart; a Modern Translation*, Sermon 14: «Nothing above the soul: Consideravit semitas domus suae et panem otiosa non comedit» (Proverbs 29, 31), New York 1941, p. 163.

22. B. JOWETT edit., the *Dialogues* op. cit. vol 2 *Symposium*, pp. 216-217.

23. *PRISONS*, op. cit., fol. 306 vo, p. 209. Hermes's inspiration by the Spirit is in fol., 306 ro, p. 208.

24. JOWETT edit., *Phaedrus* in *Dialogues*, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 263.

25. *Prisons*, op. cit. fol. 309 ro, p. 214. Rabelais also mentions «la fureur poétique»

Marguerite is here referring to St Paul's recognition of the inspired Greek poets in his speech at the Agora of Athens (Acts 17); the French poets of the Pléyade believed in the Platonic doctrine of the «Fureur Poétique», following the teaching of one of the main French Renaissance Platonists, Pontus de Tyard, who had been welcomed by Marguerite in her Court²⁶. «Fureur» is a synonym for «Extasis» or «Raptus Mysticus», during which the soul is temporarily allowed to be in contact with the Divine; St Paul describes his own experience on his way to Damascus when a blinding light threm him from the horse in I Corinthians 2,9²⁷. Marguerite de Navarre's mystic poem the *Miroir de l'âme pécheresse* uses expressions such as «ravi», «navré», «bruslé», «esbahi» or «perdre contenance», «perdre sens» and «devenir fol», meaning that the soul finds it difficult to realize whether it is in the body or our of the body²⁸.

At this stage the Neo-Platonists would teach that the soul became somehow paralysed, unable to feel. Rabelais made an unforgettable description of mystic «Ataraxia» in his «Dédicace» of his *Tiers Livre* «à l'esprit de la Royne de Navarre»; in it he is trying to make her descend from her ecstatic «manoir divin perpetuel» and deigning to read the down-to-earth stories of Pantagruel in his book:

Esprit abstrait, ravy, et ecstacic,
Qui frequentant les cieulx, ton origine,
As delaisé ton hoste et domestic,
Ton corps concords, qui tant se morigine
A tes edictz, en vie peregrine,
Sans sentement, et comme en Apathie:
Vouldrois tu poinct faire quelque sortie
De ton manoir divin, perpetuel?
Et ça bas veoir une tierce partie
Des faictz joyeux du bon Pantagruel?

This description of Marguerite by one of France's best writers is totally Neo-Platonic. In it the Quietistic attitude is stressed, as it was in some of Marguerite's mystic poems, particularly in her *Dialogue en forme de vision nocturne*, in her *Chansons spirituelles* and in her *Comédie jouée au Mont-de-Marsan*²⁹.

Neo-Platonists understood that the soul gravitates towards the centre of the universe, the «Cosmos», where God is. The soul, like the «Androgyne» is yearning for the lost part of itself, signified in the Biblical cosmology by the division of Adam into a Man and a Woman while he was a dream (Genesis, 2, 21)³⁰. Mathematical language was applied to God, calling Him the perfect Circle, to

in *Tiers Livre*, Chapter 22. Profesy is compared to «madness» by Plato in *Phaedrus*, op. cit., p. 260.

26. S. BARIDON edit., *Pontus de Tyard; Solitaire premier*, Geneva 1950. Tyard mentions «la fureur poétique» as a power of ascension: «monter au sommet peu accessible de tant haute montaigne, que'est la difficile congnoissance de la divinité» (p. 3).

27. *Miroir*, op. cit., vv. 1400-1403 and 1382-1384.

28. Ibid., vv. 811; 345; 348; 358; 888 and 243-246. See a recent work by M. A. SCREECH, *Ecstasy and the Praise of Folly*, London 1980.

29. See mystic portraits of Marguerite de Navarre in ORIA, *Mysticism in the Work of Marguerite de Navarre*, op. cit., pp. 315-319. Also Marguerite's Quietistic tendencies in her *Dialogue* vv. 583-585 and her *Comédie jouée au Mont-de-Marsan*, H. P. CLIVE edit., *Marguerite de Navarre; Oeuvres choisies*, 2 vols. New York 1968, vol. II, vv. 858-863.

30. The sixteenth century alchemical texts presented the creation of man and woman as a single being. Marriage was said to be a mystical yearning for the lost part of oneself, since the Divine Image has been lost in the separation of man from woman. J. FERGUSON, *Encyclopaedia of Mysticism and the Mystery Religions*, London 1976, «Andogy-

explain the circular movement and attraction of the soul towards its other self. Plato wrote that God can hold all the Cosmos together as He is the Circle³¹. Pythagorean mathematical vocabulary was used by the Neo-Platonists to describe the Absoluteness of the One and the circular movement of the soul towards God. Nicholas of Cusa explained that the centre of the world coincides with the circumference; the world cannot have a circumference since it is impossible to limit it between the corporeal centre and the circumference; the centre of the world and its circumference were God³². Ficinus explained it thus: «Who is God then? As we have already said He is the Spiritual Circle, whose, centre is everywhere, but the circumference can be found nowhere»³³.

God was thought to control the Universe from its central position from where He would attract the soul: «The soul on the other hand has a circular movement attracted always towards the Centre in its search for Unity», wrote the Pseudo-Dionysius³⁴. Briçonnet, Marguerite's teacher, had followed the Neo-Platonic tradition, interpreting God as the great architect of the Cosmos, residing in its centre: «...Combien que partout est le milieu, puisque elle (i.e. la terre) est sphaerique et n'y a milieu en circumference de forme sphaericque plus d'un costé que d'autre, mais par le milieu de la terre, en laquelle le grand architecte a fait oeuvre de salut, entend la vie avoir esté centrale en toute nature humaine et, comme lignes innumerables viennent du centre de la circumference, esgallement distantes, aussi la restitution est a tous uniforme (...); mais au milieu est nostre salut»³⁵.

Marguerite followed the Neo-Platonists the Pseudo-Dionysius, Cusa and Briçonnet, interpreting the ecstatic movement of the soul in its search for the One, as the movement of concentration from the outside into the inside towards the centre:

'De l'extérieur en l'intérieur entre
'Qui va par moy, et au milieu du centre
'Me trouvera qui suys le point unique,
'La fin, le but de la mathématique;
'Le cercle suys dont toute chose vient,
'Le point ou tout retourne et se maintient.
'Je suys qui suys triangle très parfaict³⁶.

ne», pp. 12-13. The «Androgyne» appears in Plato's *Symposium*, op. cit. vol. 2, p. 205. Rabelais also mentions it in Gargantua Chapters 8 and 9. HEROËT wrote his *l'Androgyne* on Platonic love and presented it to François I.^{er} in 1536; it was published in 1542. According to Marguerite Christ is the real Divine Androgyne since he is Man in search of His other self, the Divine Nature; *Prisons*, op. cit., fol. 310 ro, p. 217.

31. *Phaedrus*, op. cit., p. 264.

32. NICHOLAS DE CUSA, *De docta ignorantia*, II, II: «Centrum igitur mundi coincidit cum circumferentia». Non habet igitur mundus circumferentiam (...) cum igitur non sit possibile mundum claudi intra centrum corporale et circumferentiam, non intelligitur mundus, cuius centrum et circumferentia sunt Deus».

33. M. FICINUS, *Theologiae platonicae de immortalitate animarum*, Libri XVIII: «Quid ergo est Deus: Ut ita dixerimus, Circulus Spiritualis, cuius centrum est ubique, circumferentia nusquam».

R. LULL, also used the symbol of the Circle as the perfect figure: «Circulus est figura ultimal et dicitur ultima, eo quod perfectior est quam aliqua alia figura» *Ars generalis ultima*, «De Circulo», pars 10, cap. 14, art. 46.

34. C. E. ROLT edit., *Dionysius the Areopagite; the Divine Names and Mystical Theology*. *Divine Names*, Chapter 4, 9, pp. 98-99.

35. *Correspondance*, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 240.

36. *Prisons*, op. cit. fol. 308 ro and vo, p. 213.

Marguerite's global conception of the world and her mystical epistemology or theory of spiritual experience is totally based on Neo-Platonic sources as well as on self analysis. It would be difficult to decide whether her mysticism was based on personal experiences as she never refers to any extraordinary event in her life. Her spirituality seems to derive from the readings of Biblical material and of Neo-Platonic sources; in fact she defines extasis as the soul's «Fureur» felt while reading a passage from the gospels³⁷. We hardly hear Marguerite speak of Christ's soteriological events, i.e. his death and resurrection the essence of Pauline theology. Unlike Lefevre and Erasmus who were announcing modern spirituality, and the «Biblical Meditations» by Luther or the «Spiritual Exercises» by Ignatius of Loyola, her mysticism is a Neo-Platonic «God-Centred» rather than «Christ-centred» conception of the world as «Cosmos». Her spirituality from her first major poem the *Dialogue* (1527) to her last, the *Prisons* (1547), followed the eclectic path of the Neo-Platonic tradition, trying to combine Hellenistic philosophical insights with the Biblical tradition of the Johannine «Logos» relationship towards the One, using the famous expression of Albert Schweizer³⁸. In sum, neither she nor Briçonnet, her Master, ever crossed the line that separated the old Neo-Platonic tradition revived by some of the Humanists, from the new challenging ideas brought into being by Erasmus, Lefevre and Luther the reformer.

37. Ibid., fols 302 vo and 303 ro, pp. 201-202. See Marguerite's concept of «Ecstasy» in ORIA, *Mysticism in the Work of Marguerite*, op. cit., pp. 205-206.

38. Albert Schweizer distinguishes two kinds of mysticism in the New Testament, the first one is, according to him, «Pauline» based on the contemplation of the «historical Jesus» as can be traced in the Epistles of St Paul; the second mysticism is based on St John's beginning of his Gospel (1, 1) which is nearer the Hellenistic God-mysticism, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, New York 1931.

YON ORIA

MARGARITA DE NAVARRA

(Nota biográfica)

Margarita nació en Angulema en 1492; recibió la educación más esmerada de su madre Luisa de Savoya, llegando a ser uno de los pilares del Humanismo en las cortes de Francia y de Navarra.

En 1509 se le obliga a casarse con Carlos, Duque de Alensón, de carácter más bien superficial, quien no le dejó descendencia; Carlos moriría poco después de la batalla de Pavía en 1525 a consecuencia de las heridas recibidas. El destino familiar de Margarita estará condicionado a la política de su hermano, Francisco I de Valois. En 1519 Carlos V será coronado Emperador y las luchas de Francia y España/Alemania por consolidar la hegemonía sobre Italia, junto con los esfuerzos de los humanistas por reformar la Iglesia, serán el marco histórico en que se desarrollará la vida de Margarita en su doble papel de diplomática y de escritora.

En 1521 se une a un grupo místico fundado en Meaux por el Obispo Guillermo Briçonnet. En 1525 escribirá Margarita su primera obra el *Diálogo en forma de visión nocturna*, una conversación imaginaria con su sobrina, la Princesa Carlota de Valois, que acababa de morir.

En 1527 se casará Margarita con Henrique de Labrit, Rey de Navarra, que se había aliado con Francisco I en sus luchas contra el Emperador.

En 1530 la Sorbona quiere condenar como luterana una obra de Margarita de Navarra, el *Espejo del alma pecadora*. Francisco I logra esquivar la censura a última hora, pero la obra poética de Margarita aparecerá desde entonces asociada a la Reforma.

Margarita se retira en gran parte de la vida política en 1540 en su Reino de Navarra donde protege a sus amigos humanistas perseguidos por la Sorbona, haciendo de su corte uno de los centros renacentistas más importantes de la época. Quiere resolver el problema político de la división del reino navarro casando a su hija Juana de Labrit con el príncipe Felipe de España, pero Juana estaba bajo el tutelaje de Francisco y tuvo que casarse Juana con Guillermo de Cleves en 1540, aunque su matrimonio fue anulado por el Papa Pablo III en 1545. En la tranquilidad de sus territorios navarros escribiría Margarita el *Heptamerón*, un retablo de cuentos renacentistas de la corte que tiene como escenario el Pirineo. Compuso igualmente una serie de poemas, *El navío*, *Canciones espirituales*, *La carroza*, *Prisiones*, etc., que reflejan sus preocupaciones místicas y sus contactos con el simbolismo hermético de los Neoplatónicos.

Margarita murió en su castillo de Odós el 21 de diciembre de 1549; poco después moriría su marido en 1555, sucediéndoles en el trono el único heredero, Juana de Labrit.

PLATONIC SYMBOLISM OF MARGUERITE D'ANGOULEME

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