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Strangers in the Frame: Inside and Outside the *Cent Nouvelles nouvelles*\(^1\)

‘Quelle fange souvent, quel musée d’obscénités que cette “glorieuse et édifiante œuvre”’.\(^2\) This assessment by Georges Doutrepont gives perhaps an unduly unsympathetic picture of that scholar’s view of the *Cent Nouvelles nouvelles* but the opinion is frequently quoted in evaluations of the fifteenth-century collection of short narratives. The sixty-sixth tale, attributed to Philippe de Loan, seems to justify this evaluation. The narrator, with his friends, ‘ung grand tas de gentilz compagnons’, repairs to a St Omer inn after a game of real tennis, and the innkeeper, to amuse the noble company, and presumably to ingratiate himself with them by showing a shared love of bawdy humour, tries to get his six- or seven-year-old son to give an account of the nude bodies of the townswomen that he has seen on a recent trip to the public baths with his mother.\(^3\) Specifically, the child is questioned as to which of the women had ‘le plus beau con et le plus gros’. The terms, which are repeated several times throughout the tale, always appear together. At first, the child is extremely embarrassed by his father’s demand, and denies seeing any female genitals at all. Then he says that he did look at the vaginas present, but that his mother will beat him if he says what he saw. Finally, after both parents have reassured him that he will not get into trouble for answering his father’s question, he confirms that not only did his mother have the finest and largest vagina on display, in what he now says was ‘une droicte garenne de cons’, but it also had ‘si grand nez’. The father sends the son away and feigns

\(^1\) Acknowledgement to be supplied in final printed version.


\(^3\) *Les Cent Nouvelles nouvelles* ed. by Franklin P. Sweetser (Geneva: Droz, 1996), 412–13 (412).
amusement in front of the noble company but both he and his wife are embarrassed by this answer and the son is later beaten for his reply. On one level, the narrative shows a failure of communication between men of different social backgrounds, resulting in the humiliation of the townsman to his social superiors through the intimate description of his wife by his undisciplined son. An examination of the implications of this scenario for different audiences reveals much about the way that the text functions in its original setting and for later audiences.

This story, which is one of the shortest and least developed of all hundred of the *Cent Nouvelles nouvelles*, has been singled out by Roger Dubuis as one that falls below the general standard of the collection. Dubuis remarks dryly that ‘Il est bien évident que cette nouvelle ne fait pas partie de celles qui honorent leur auteur, et nous aurions préféré qu’elle restât à écrire.’

Unsurprisingly, the tale has received scant critical attention, but it exemplifies tendencies which are central to the collection and crystallizes reading approaches to the text. In the context of a collection which is extremely firmly situated, socially and geographically, this tale and others like it achieve a range of literary effects depending on the positioning of the reader. Such tales set up an opposition between a diachronic ingroup and other readers, who can never fully grasp the original context. These effects are inescapable and begin to multiply from the earliest

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5 Although Henri Tajfel, who was the originator of this terminology, conceived the ‘ingroup’ as a ‘feature of most modern societies’, there is no reason to restrict the phenomenon to the industrial world, particularly in instances such as this where we see both the attraction of men of a similar social status to each other and the accompanying stereotyping of men of other social classes and
appearances of the collection in the Burgundian court of Philippe le Bon and in Antoine Vérard’s first print edition. The edition, which makes minimal changes to the text of the tales and more significant ones to the narrative frame, cannot be read in the same way as the text that circulated in the Burgundian court and acknowledging this fact gives us insight into the tales’ interpretation. Although documented critical reactions from early print readers are scant, the framing of Vérard’s edition and subsequent printed editions demonstrate that the shift in audience perspective produces a reaction observable in later critical readings, such as that of Doutrepont.

The position of the narrator, Philippe de Loan, in tale 66 exemplifies how ingroup and outgroup audiences will read the text from different positions. Philippe is a character in the tale he tells, because he witnesses the uncomfortable interview. He is also a character in the frame narrative of the collection as a whole, contributing ten tales to the collection. This is a frame narrative in only the most minimal sense: a prologue in the form of a dedication to Philippe le Bon says nothing about where the stories come from, except that they deal with events which occurred in the duke’s territories, but a table of contents and rubrics within the text attribute the tales to named male aristocrats within the duke’s circle. Only a minority of the tales in the collection are women. See, Tajfel, ‘Experiments in Intergroup Discrimination’, Scientific American, 223.5 (1970), 96–102 (p. 96).


7 The minimal nature of the frame in the Cent Nouvelles nouvelles has been commented on by Dominique Lagorgette in ‘Le style curial dans les Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles: la construction de la référence et des personnages’, Le Moyen Age: Revue d'histoire et de philologie 108:3-4 (2002)
not attributed to a narrator. Scholars reading the *Cent Nouvelles nouvelles* are divided on what this represents. Some have seen the collection as a record of an actual storytelling event, where the men named really did tell the stories attributed to them. This would explain some of the features of the collection. For example, there are many instances where the men who supposedly tell the stories are personally associated with their tales: while Philippe de Loan recounts an experience he claims he had in St Omer (tale 66), Guillaume de Montbléru tells the tale of how he tricked three of his associates in Antwerp (tale 63), and Jean d’Enghien recounts a humorous tale of couples married to the wrong partner by a short-sighted priest which may have come to his attention in his capacity of Amman—ducal representative—in Brussels (tale 53). Another piece of evidence in favour of an actual storytelling event is Roger Dubuis’s speculation that tales regarded critically as being of lesser quality, such as tale 66, may have only found their place in the repertoire because some men were too powerful to have their contribution rejected, an analysis which only makes sense if we accept that the tales really do represent the
contributions of those named individuals. Edgar de Blieck points out that most of the narrators seem to have been present in the Burgundian ducal court in the winter and spring of 1458–59 and that this may have been the occasion on which the stories were told. On the other hand, the homogeneity of style, vocabulary and syntax, together with the weight of a literary convention whereby the narrators of such tales were usually fictional characters (for example in Boccaccio’s Decameron, and its other literary imitations), has led some commentators to conclude that this too is that sort of collection, and that the appearance of individual narrators is part of the literary construct. If this is the case, it is a very carefully constructed frame, which has many of the characteristics of homosocial storytelling. For instance, stories often appear in sequences, sharing a central image or theme, just as they do in observed conversations. Jennifer Coates, who has

9 Dubuis, Les Cent Nouvelles nouvelles et la tradition de la nouvelle, pp. 42–43.

10 De Blieck, ‘The Cent nouvelles nouvelles, Text, and Context’.


made a study of such ‘Men talk’, observes that the teller of the second story in such a sequence is often the same person who has introduced the original story, and this can also be observed in the Cent Nouvelles nouvelles as, for instance, where a pair of tales featuring donkeys (tales 79 and 80) are both told by Michaut de Chaucy. Alongside the instances quoted above where the content of the story closely reflects the interests or knowledge of the purported storyteller, there are numerous examples of stories where the action is set in a location that is close to the territory of the nobleman supposed to be telling the story, and this is particularly observable at the point where a teller contributes his first story to the collection. If this is fiction, the author has gone to considerable lengths to reproduce the features of a storytelling event. Of course, the opposition between an elaborately constructed fictional frame and the sober record of a court event is not absolute and the truth may lie somewhere between the two scenarios. Werner Söderhjelm postulates an event where some but not all of the hundred tales were told in court, with the anonymous ‘acteur’ supplying the others to complete the numerical tribute to Boccaccio. Whatever the truth of the composition of the collection, though, Philippe le Bon would have known it. The collection is dedicated to him and a number of the tales are attributed to him. We know that the duke received a copy in a large illustrated manuscript which he kept in his library. We also know that this is not the one remaining surviving manuscript of the work,


14 Barrois, Bibliothéque protypographique, 1261 describes the copy in the ducal library: ‘Ung livre tout neuf, escript en parchemain, à deux coulombes, couvert de cuir blanc de chamois, historié en plusieurs lieux de riches histoires, contenant Cent Nouvelles, tant de Monseigneur que Dieu pardonne, que de plusieurs autres de son hostel; quemenchant le second feuilles après la table, en rouge lettre, Celle qui se baignoit, et le dernier, lit demanda.’ (Barrois, 1261).
which is a later, smaller format volume, currently part of the Glasgow Hunter collection, MS Hunter 252. There are further allusions to other manuscripts, one in the library catalogue of François Ier in 1518, one which may have been produced for Philippe de Clèves, and a small-format copy in Margaret of Austria’s library in 1523.\textsuperscript{15} This last copy could be the same object as Hunter 252, and there may be other overlaps between attested copies, but most commentators have concluded that the collection did not circulate widely in manuscript and remained what Dominique Lagorgette has called ‘un texte de cour’.\textsuperscript{16}

To say this is to imagine that the initial readership of the collection was composed of the same men named as narrators in the collection and their close associates. For these readers, as for the duke himself, there would have been no doubt as to the relationship between the stories and their putative tellers. For them, pleasure could be derived from either the collection’s accurate renarration of the court’s fireside distraction or from a skilful fiction which imagined the sort of tale which could have been told by men that the readers knew well. If the storytelling event is

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solely a fictional frame, we can imagine the deliberate comic effect produced by tale 50, where the verbose pedagogue Antoine de La Sale (aged around 70 by the time the tales were written) tells an off-colour tale of the young man who wanted to rape his grandmother. The incongruity of the elderly moralist telling a story which is so out of character has been remarked on by Daniel Poirion, and this may be a deliberate effect of a fictional attribution. Alternatively, it may have been the result of La Sale’s own conscious manipulation of his self-image, which the collection then commemorated and represented for the readers’ recognition. After all, La Sale had had recourse to sexual innuendo in his other works, for example in La Salade, where he repeats an anecdote in which a servant ‘bouta sa main es genitalles d’une jument’, in order to induce a stallion to whinny. In the context of an author who would tell this sort of tale in public, it might be imagined that this tendency could be exaggerated in a private gathering. In such a case, repetition of his tale of attempted raping of a grandmother and the witty one-liner that excused the behaviour would lead the ingroup reader to recognize the relaxed atmosphere where the aged moralist had felt able to take such risks. Recognition is at the heart of the effect achieved by the frame narrative when it is read by an intimate group. We as outsiders cannot determine where the joke lies, but the men named in the text would have known immediately what their role in the text’s production was. What we as readers are left with is the impression that we are looking from the outside in at an elite male joke that we are not entirely privy to.

What does this mean when we — and they — read a tale like tale 66? Philippe de Loan would have been familiar to a Burgundian court readership. He tells a tale in which a group of

nobleman, ‘ung grand tas de gentilz compagnons, tant de ceens, comme de Bouloigne et d’ailleurs’, like himself and the implied audience of the collection, witness the public discomfort and humiliation of a bourgeois family.\(^{19}\) In this way, the audience observing the humiliation is coded as not only noble, but also as geographically remote from the family. Boulogne is some fifty kilometres distant from St-Omer, while ‘ceens’ could refer to St-Omer itself but more likely designates the location in which the narrator now speaks. ‘Gentilz compagnons [...] de ceens’ would then be people geographically and socially similar to the listening public and, if the tale is supposed to recall an event that took place, this description could plausibly include members of the original tennis party who are now the audience of its renarration. This, then, redoubles the element of recognition inherent in the frame: men reading the tale recall (or do not) a fireside renarration supposedly by their associate, recalling an incident at which he was present — and maybe they were too — and, in reading it, they remember that incident — or they do not.

In this act of recognition, readers of the *Cent Nouvelles nouvelles* are invited to associate themselves with the collective enterprise, as readers who belong to the circle of men who can interpret the text. David LaGuardia has argued that

> Pour les hommes qui racontent et rédigent les *Cent Nouvelles nouvelles*,
> l’acte d’écrire n’est jamais neutre en termes de sexualité; au contraire, quand ils écrivent, ils ‘s’écrivent’ toujours en tant qu’hommes, pour les autres hommes, et afin de maintenir leur domination sur les femmes.\(^{20}\)

\(^{19}\) *Les Cent Nouvelles nouvelles*, ed. Sweetser, p. 412.

Certainly, tale 66 could be said to function in this way: the boy’s testimony draws attention to the sexual difference between the men present and his mother, who is verbally undressed before them and displayed in an unflattering light. She is not the only woman in the collection to be treated this way. The young wife of tale 12 suffers while her husband gives a lengthy description of her naked body. This description is not shared with the audience but it is heard by a labourer who has climbed a nearby tree to search for a lost calf, and his reaction prompts the narrator to share intimate details concerning the woman’s unusually lengthy pubic hair, which is compared to the tail of the missing animal. Like the mother in tale 66, this woman’s genitals present an unexpected and disturbing aspect. The ‘nose’ of the vagina and the ‘tail’ of the pubic hair recast these women’s genitalia as unfamiliar body parts, dissociated from the women to whom they belong. Told to an audience of men, these tales construct masculinity by representing female bodies as unfamiliar and foreign. In each case, the revelation of the unexpected nature of the woman’s genitals is depicted as an occasion for laughter. The commentary in the case of tale 12, that women from Holland are accustomed to wearing their pubic hair long, further removes the physical difference from the company designated by the narrative frame: they are neither women nor from Holland, so they can laugh at the woman’s physical peculiarity without feeling implicated in it.

In other tales in the collection, women modify their bodies — and more specifically their hair — for the sake of their lovers. The woman of tale 33 cuts her hair to send as a token to one of her lovers, while the women of tale 60 shave their heads so that they can enter the friary where their lovers live without being detected. In both cases, detection of the modification is regarded as

*Côte d’Opale (Dunkerque)* ed. by Jean Devaux and Alexandra Velissariou (Paris: Champion, 2016), pp. 149–63 (p. 150).
bringing shame to the women involved. It is common in many societies to assume that cutting a woman’s hair exposes her to shame, but these tales further capitalize on the fact that details of female costume may conceal a shorn head and the accompanying shame as we see in this scene where one of the lovers in tale 33 uncovers the woman’s secret:

Si fist maniere de vouloir mettre son chapperon, qui sur son espaule estoit, dessus sa teste; et en ce faisant, tout au propos luy fist hurter si rudement a son atour qu’il l’envoya par terre, dont elle fut bien honteuse et malcontente.

Implicit in these tales is a deep-seated anxiety that women, and particularly women’s bodies, may conceal unpleasant surprises. The fact that the diegetic audience for the tales is exclusively masculine casts this anxiety in a particular light. LaGuardia would argue that the male narrators of the *Cent Nouvelles nouvelles* exercise control over women by expressing their fears in an all-male environment. The situation also serves to emphasize the common characteristics of the ingroup, which is all male, by coding feminine features that they do not share as other, unexpected and menacing. Rehearsing and laughing at their anxieties could be seen as a way for a group of men to affirm what they have in common by emphasizing the strangeness of outgroup

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21 For instance 1 Corinthians 11:6, ‘If the woman does not cover her head, she might as well cut her hair. And since it is a shameful thing for a woman to shave her head or cut her hair, she should cover her head.’ (Good News Translation). Specifically, court cases contemporary with the *Cent Nouvelles nouvelles* suggest that removing a woman’s headdress was regarded as equivalent to accusing her of prostitution, De Blieck, ‘The Cent nouvelles nouvelles, Text, and Context’, p. 419.

characteristics. Whatever a man is, he is not a woman, and portrayals of women and their bodies as bizarre reinforce this point.

Within the diachronic frame of the *Cent Nouvelles nouvelles*, such homosocial bonding could certainly fulfil a useful role. The audience hinted at by the frame is elite and male and in this sense homogenous. However, the supposed narrators are drawn from the disparate territories of the duchy and county of Burgundy and exemplify the multilingual nature of those lands.\(^\text{23}\) Moreover, they represent different factions within the Burgundian sphere of influence, including associates of both Louis of Luxembourg and the de Croy family, and those of the Count of Charolais at a time when relations between the count and his father, Philippe le Bon, were strained.\(^\text{24}\) Three of the narrators belonged to the entourage of the Dauphin, the future Louis XI, whose presence in the Burgundian court was attributable to his own conflicts with his father.\(^\text{25}\) By mentioning the presence of these men and of the others from opposing factions, the frame narrative displays the extent of homosocial networks in the Burgundian court, suggesting that a narrative project formed around the person of the duke himself could overcome political divisions. Against such a background, tales that emphasise the physical strangeness of members of the outgroup serve as reminders of the shared features of the ingroup and, in this context, it

\(^{23}\) Geoffrey Roger, ‘La Mise en scène des *Cent Nouvelles nouvelles*: point de vue dialectologique sur le manuscrit Hunter 252’ in *Autour des* Cent Nouvelles nouvelles, pp. 177–92.


should be remembered that the woman of tale 66 differs from the diegetic audience, not only by reason of her sex but also because of her class. As an innkeeper’s wife, she is not a member of the elite male court society who is the audience of the frame tale. Richard Vaughan suggests that social difference typifies the collection when he points out that in many cases the targets of the humour of the *Cent Nouvelles nouvelles* are socially different from the courtly audience: ‘Usually we are told of wicked or lustful inn-keepers; of seductive chambermaids pursued by noblemen; of the erotic adventures of monks and priests; and, endlessly, of the hilarious gallery of cuckolds.’

26 If women are not part of the storytelling circle, the other categories described by Vaughan seem to be similarly excluded: narrators and listeners are not bourgeois, clerics, or peasants, and many of the tales revolve around the physical strangeness of these groups, just as is the case for women. Thus, tale 12 describes a monk whose giant penis is instantly recognizable to the touch of the nuns in the local convent, while in tale 15 another monk meets his nun lover in a parody of a romantic tryst and praises his penis in lyrical terms (tale 46).

27 David Fein has remarked that in the second tale of the collection, an adolescent girl suffering from rectal piles is covered with a sheet, except for her anal orifice, and that this reflects a tendency observable in

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the fabliau tradition to reduce female bodies to simple orifices. Fein argues that this is caused by male anxiety at female sexuality, and, while this may well be true, it is worth observing that men as well as women are reduced to their sexual anatomy in examples such as those quoted above. The fact that these are clerics, rather than noblemen, may indicate that social as well as sexual difference is being used to construct social (and sexual) solidarity. Of course, these tales also draw on the fabliau tradition where priests in particular are the subject of sexually explicit adventures, but the addition of the frame in the Cent Nouvelles nouvelles introduces a further dimension of the social difference between the storytelling circle and the subjects of their narratives. That is not to say that all members of Philippe le Bon’s court were noble: Cristina Azuela has pointed out that the Burgundian court encompassed non-noble merchants and argues that their presence in the court may account for the prominence of merchant characters in the tales. However, they were, by definition, members of the court elite, a section of society which seems exempt from the unflattering physical descriptions that are reserved for other social groups. Indeed, it could be argued that the collection serves to erase the social difference between the male narrators by accentuating the way that they differ from external social groups, thereby emphasising the characteristics that they have in common. Read by a small circle of elite readers who would know the narrators named in the collection, and understand the nature of the document as either commemorative recording or as imaginative attribution, tales like tale 66 reinforce the element of recognition within the readership. Only someone who is a member of


the circle outlined in the frame narrative will understand and appreciate the art of the Cent Nouvelles nouvelles. By definition, the reader who appreciates the nature of the collection — who understands the joke — belongs to the group and can therefore share in the humour of tales like number 66, which target people who do not belong.

Changing the position of the reader of such tales has a dramatic effect on how the tales are to be interpreted. Once the reader is no longer situated within the Burgundian court, the court itself and the narrators become a spectacle to the reading public. When not addressed to the elite male circle that produced them, the Cent Nouvelles nouvelles function as a privileged insight into the sort of literature consumed by those elites and the realization is not always comfortable. A considerable amount of critical literature has focussed on the way that the text, and the accompanying illustrations of manuscript Hunter 252, speak to the male gaze, depicting voyeurism.\(^{30}\) Analysis in these terms leads to readings derived from Laura Mulvey’s analysis of cinematic scopophilia.\(^{31}\) Mulvey’s argument is that in ‘normal narrative film’ women’s bodies

\(^{30}\) For instance, Dominique Lagorgette, ‘Staging Transgression through Text and Image: Violence and Nudity in the Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles’ (Glasgow, University Library, Special Collections, MS Hunter 252, Vérard 1486 and Vérard 1498)’, in Text/Image Relations in Late Medieval French and Burgundian Culture (14\(^{th}\)c.-16\(^{th}\)c.) ed. by Rosalind Brown-Grant and Rebecca Dixon (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015), pp. 89–104 and Adams, ‘The Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles in MS Hunter 252’.

\(^{31}\) David A. Fein, Displacements of Power: Readings of the ‘Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles’ (Lanham: University Press of America, 2003); review by Sandra Bialystok, French Studies 60.1 (2006), 93–94. Bialystok argues that Fein does not go far enough in his application of Mulvey’s analysis to the Cent Nouvelles nouvelles, pointing to the fact that there is a close correlation
are both looked at and displayed as erotic objects for both male characters and spectators, who are also coded male. Spectators identify with male protagonists and exercise their power through their exercise of the gaze. Critics such as David Fein and Sandra Bialystok have argued that this is exactly the mechanism which is at play in the *Cent Nouvelles nouvelles* when it is consumed by a court audience. Indeed, if anything, this analysis of the relationship between eroticism, power and the gaze is even more easily applied to the tales of the *Cent Nouvelles nouvelles* than to Western cinema, because the frame points explicitly to an exclusively masculine audience for the medieval tales, an audience which is specifically concerned with the exercise of power. The individual tales of the collection portray this relationship between spectacle and power in numerous scenes which offer women and other outgroup members as spectacle. So too, however, does the collection as a whole, which is almost always accompanied by visual illustration that reinforces the position of the reader as viewing subject.

If the original collection had reinforced homosocial bonds between men in an elite social group, printed editions offered to a wider market give readers the spectacle of how elite men bond. Rather than being positioned as voyeurs witnessing the physical and moral shortcomings of non-male and non-elite protagonists, readers are now given a privileged view of the private world of the court. Or rather, the suggestion of the frame narrative allows readers to believe that this is a privileged view of this world. The idea that elite men would derive amusement from the description of a St-Omer innkeeper’s wife’s vagina has the capacity to evoke reactions of shock and disgust, such as those voiced by Georges Doutrepont in his evaluation of the work. Edgar De

Blieck, who believes in a factual storytelling event, opens his thesis by inviting his reader to imagine that a sitting Prime Minister had asked his cabinet to provide a collection of racy short stories and to picture the popular reaction that this would produce. These readings demonstrate the effect that the frame narrative has on a readership situated outside the world of the fifteenth-century Burgundian court.

Although overt disapproval may be a product of modern sensibilities, the tendency to regard the Burgundian court itself as a spectacle is not purely the effect of modern approaches to the text, but is inherent in printed versions from the very earliest, that of Antoine Vérard in 1486. The trend instigated in Vérard’s edition continues in subsequent printed editions and later critical readings. Because the only surviving manuscript of the Cent Nouvelles nouvelles, Hunter 252, seems to date from approximately the same period, we cannot conclude with certainty that any of the differences between the two texts is the result of changes that Vérard made. Nevertheless, there are significant differences between the two texts which point to an awareness that the printed text was addressed to a wider reading public. Subtle differences in language mean that Vérard’s printed text is less elliptical and contains fewer ambiguities than the manuscript text.


34 The distinctive style of the Cent Nouvelles nouvelles is described in Emma Stojkovic Mazzariol, ‘L’Auteur des Cent nouvelles nouvelles et le Pogge: une rencontre manquée?’, Etudes
At the same time, the 1486 text seems to present fewer archaic forms.\textsuperscript{35} Taken together, these differences suggest that it is Vérard’s text which has been adapted to fit the needs of a younger and less close-knit reading public.\textsuperscript{36} In this context, the most significant change observable in Vérard’s edition foregrounds the frame narrative, drawing attention to the elite male nature of the storytelling group. In a note appended to the opening comments to the work, Vérard tells his readers that where the rubric indicates that a tale was told by ‘Monseigneur’, it is the work of the Dauphin, the future Louis XI:

\begin{quote}
Et notez que par toutes les nouvelles ou il est dit par Monseigneur il est entended par Monseigneur le dauphin lequel depuis a succedé a la couronne, et est le roy Loys unsieme, car il estoit lors es pays du duc de Bourgoigne. \textsuperscript{37}
\end{quote}

This clarification has long been considered misleading. Pierre Champion refers to it as ‘manifestement une erreur, ou plutôt une supercherie’ and even Vérard’s edition is not internally

\textit{littéraires sur le XV\textsuperscript{e} siècle. Actes du 5\textsuperscript{e} colloque international sur le Moyen Français}, (Milan: Università cattolica del Sacro Cuore, 1986) 3 vols, III, 103–23.


\textsuperscript{36} The presumption that the reading public for Vérard’s edition would have been younger than the tales’ original Burgundian audience is based in part on Edgar De Blieck’s observations that ‘older men with whom the duke was on friendly terms predominate amongst the raconteurs’ (‘The Cent nouvelles nouvelles, Text, and Context’, p. 224) but also on the fact that any storytelling event held in the court of Philippe le Bon would have preceded Vérard’s edition by some 20–30 years.

\textsuperscript{37} \textit{Les Cent Nouvelles nouvelles} (Paris: Vérard, 1486), fol ai recto.
consistent as to its use of ‘Monseigneur’ as opposed to ‘Monseigneur le duc’, which unambiguously refers to Philippe.\(^{38}\) So, for example, tale 17 is attributed to ‘Monseigneur’ in the table of contents at the front of the edition and to ‘Monseigneur le duc’ in the text, while the inverse is true for tales 58 and 71. Nevertheless, the change has the effect of refocussing attention on the elite male storytellers, particularly since it is accompanied by illustrations of the court setting, showing the Dauphin, which appear in two preliminary illustrations to the edition. One of these illustrations depicts a male figure surrounded by fleurs de lys seated on a dolphin throne and the other shows a crowned enthroned man in a court also decorated with fleurs de lys.\(^{39}\) Both of these underline the elite nature of the collection, by showing the trappings of royal power. Because the royal power is French, rather than Burgundian, they also perform a geographical transposition. In a sense, this is attributable to the passage of time: by the time that Vérard’s edition was published Philippe le Bon had been dead for nearly 20 years, Louis for only three, so the late king was a more present figure to contemporary readers, and the use of his image pointed more clearly to the elite status of the text itself. The use of the French royal figure also reflects the geographical origin of the 1486 edition, and possibly its envisaged readership, in Paris.

The readers of the 1486 edition are temporally, geographically, and possibly socially remote from the storytelling circle of the Burgundian court. At the very least, they are not privy to the secrets of the text’s production, but this means that there is the potential for them to read the text

\(^{38}\) Les Cent nouvelles nouvelles, ed. by Pierre Champion, I, p. xvii.

\(^{39}\) In a further iconographical complication, a title above the image of the figure on the dolphin throne labels him as ‘le duc de Bourgoingne et de Brebant’, but the presence of the dolphin throne and the fleur de lys shield above him clearly identify him as the Dauphin.
as an insight into the sort of stories told by the Burgundian male elite. Two apparently
contradictory features of the paratextual apparatus favour this reading for Vérard’s audience. The
first, which appears to associate the text more closely with identifiable individuals, is the textual
and visual insertion of the figure of the Dauphin into the collection, while the second, which
plays down the presence of specific people, is a much reduced concern for naming the
storytellers in the initial table of contents that introduces the stories. Here, however, the evidence
is mixed, and complicated by the fact that Hunter 252 is missing approximately seven leaves
from its initial table of contents and therefore contains only rubrics relating to tales 1–11 and 97–
100. In the first eleven tales, the rubrics in Hunter 252 name the supposed storyteller in each
case, sometimes doing this twice, in an initial rubric and then in a brief summary of the story
itself. These names are entirely absent from the first eleven rubrics of Vérard’s table of contents.
However, subsequent rubrics, referring to stories whose descriptions have been lost from the
table of contents in Hunter 252, do frequently contain the names of the supposed narrators in
Vérard’s table of contents. In the section of the text containing the tales themselves, the narrator
is usually named in the Vérard edition, though the name given does not always correspond to the
man named in Hunter 252. It is reasonable to conclude that naming the narrators was not as
significant to Antoine Vérard as it had been for the scribe who produced Hunter 252 because
Vérard omits narrators’ names from his initial table of contents even when they were known and
appear in the subsequent text. Of course, Vérard’s readers did not have the same personal
connection with the supposed narrators of the collection nor could they have had, as many were
dead by the time the edition appeared. The act of naming the narrator in the initial table of
contents, then, is not liable to trigger the same recognition as it does for the Burgundian reader,
and may not be as effective a mechanism for encouraging the reader to engage with a tale.
Consequently, Vérard does not apply this practice as consistently. However, Vérard’s tales are still marked with the name of the narrator at the point that the reader encounters the tales themselves. Indeed, this feature of the tale is present not only in the rubric that immediately precedes the individual tale but in the running heads to the pages containing the tales which allow the readers to situate themselves in the collection. This means that, even in a short tale like tale 66, Philippe de Loan (named ‘Laon’ as he always is by Vérard) is named twice in the paratextual material on the pages containing the tale, as well as being named, in this instance, in the initial table of contents. Naming the narrator at multiple points on the pages containing his tale has the effect of stressing the elite Burgundian origins of a tale at the very point that the reader encounters it. It is not the individual identity of the narrator that is important, as would be the case in a Burgundian reading, but the class of people to whom he belongs and the contrast between the high status of that group and the content of the tales told. This contrast is foregrounded by Vérard’s paratextual material, facilitating readings derived from this contrast which we still find in critical literature on the *Cent Nouvelles nouvelles*.

Subsequent early printed editions of the text, which reprint Vérard’s text, pick up on the implications of the contrast between ingroup and outgroup readers in a series of additions to the title which describe the contents of the volume as ‘histoires [...] et comptes plaisans et recreatifs pour deviser en toutes [bonnes] companies [par [maniere de] joyeuseté’.

This subtitle explicitly draws attention to the narrative community, now explicitly generalized to encompass a wider social circle, implicitly contrasted with the original elite audience. At the same time, the title

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40 Editions with similar subtitles appeared in 1505 (Paris: Nicolas des Prez for Guillaume Eustace); in 1524 (Paris: Philippe le Noir); in 1529 and 1532 (Paris: veuve Jean Trepperel) and in 1530 and 1532 (Lyon: Olivier Arnoulet).
draws on a narrative vocabulary of pleasure, which is often associated with sexual content (for instance in the *sermons joyeux*), signalling the nature of the content at the same time as the title announces its accessibility to all. This title recurs in multiple editions throughout the first third of the sixteenth century, suggesting that the contrast between the original narrative community and the text’s new readers was one attraction of the text. This suggestion is rendered explicit in a preface to the *Cent Nouvelles nouvelles* which appears in a 1701 edition. Here, the editor claims that ‘Si l’antiquité & la rareté rendent un livre recommandable, si le merite & l’eminente qualité de ses Auteurs, lui donnent un rang de distinction, celui-ci devroit être d’un grand prix.’ The use of the conditional mood in this sentence promises an evaluation of the text’s qualities, which does not in fact follow, raising doubt as to whether the editor feels that the status of the ‘auteurs’ does indeed act as a guarantor of the text’s quality, or whether the tales themselves frustrate this expectation. Regardless of whether the tales are seen as fulfilling their promise, it is clear that the status of the putative narrators is a key attraction for this reader of the *Cent Nouvelles nouvelles*. Indeed, such readings are inherent in a collection of this nature, which situates itself so firmly in a particular narrating and listening milieu. Once the text moves away from that milieu, the audience is different and the meaning of the tales change. An urban or partly female audience may not be as ready to laugh at the discomfort of the innkeeper’s wife and her family. As members of the outgroup originally targetted, they may regard the tale as distasteful, as Roger Dubuis clearly does. Even if the new readers do not feel uncomfortable with the content, the fact that the elite men of the Burgundian court enjoyed this sort of literature becomes a feature of the text, inviting judgements on the tastes of the storytelling circle. With a tale such as tale 66, which contains little other than a focus on the outgroup as a means of consolidating the ingroup through

41 *Les Cent nouvelles nouvelles* (Cologne: Pierre Gaillard, 1701), *preface*. 
shared mockery, the entry of strangers into the reading public makes a spectacle of the original audience.