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## SETTING A PLACE IN THE *CENT NOUVELLES NOUVELLES*:

### The illustrations of Glasgow, Hunter 252

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Reading MS Hunter 252 as a performance, this article examines the way that the manuscript's illustrations enhance the spatial element of the collection. The case of tale 65 is examined in particular to show how the illustration of an identifiable place contributes to the tale. The illustration sets up multiple interrelations between different levels of diegesis, different spaces on the page and different stories in the collection to implicate the spectator (the viewer or reader) in the manuscript's performance.

### Manuscript as Performance

In the recent decades, scholars of fifteenth-century French literature have made productive use of notions of performativity and spectatorship to inform analyses of the way in which illustrated manuscripts of the period transmit their message (Desmond and Sheingorn; Nichols).<sup>1</sup> Whether the text on the page is intended to be read aloud or consumed visually by a silent reader, the inclusion of an illustration lends additional dimensions to the performance.

One such dimension is interpretative: the illustration usually represents the interpretation of a second reader of the text (Goodman, 25), who selects the key elements of the narrative to be depicted (Nichols, 151). In so doing, the illustration may literally enact the author's verbal metaphors, giving visual representation to what would otherwise be considered abstract turns of phrase. Alternatively, an image may present the scene with a focalization that differs from the written text, so that a spectator consuming both has a different view of the narrative. Examples of this have been identified by Nicola Jones, who demonstrates

how the illustrations in two manuscripts from fifteenth-century France present partial views of what occurs in the narrative corresponding to one character's limited perspective.

One of the manuscripts which Jones discusses is the only surviving manuscript of the Burgundian *Cent Nouvelles nouvelles*, now [Glasgow, Hunter, 252](#). This manuscript lends itself in particular to a study of manuscripts as performance, since the text it contains alludes to a performance event, which is never described explicitly but which the text hints was an act of communal storytelling (or possibly a series of such acts, given the time it would take to tell the large number of tales present), in which members of the entourage of Philippe le Bon, Duke of Burgundy, gathered to contribute tales to what became the collection of one hundred largely ribald stories making up the work. Each tale is accompanied by an illustration, which is usually placed at the beginning of the tale, but the frame narrative is not illustrated. This is perhaps especially surprising since books commonly opened with illustrations showing the presentation of the work to a patron, surrounded by his court.

Such a court setting is precisely the setting of the frame for the *Cent Nouvelles nouvelles*. Indeed, both printed editions of the text produced in the fifteenth century opened with standard illustrations showing the presentation of the book to the patron (Vérard, 1486, 1488). The fact that there is no comparable illustration in the manuscript means that the images of Hunter 252 are on a different diegetic level from the text. Whereas the text reminds the reader of the court setting with its noblemen narrators (through its rubrication but also through incidental references to previous tales in the series and knowledge common to the men present), the illustrations refer only to the material in the tales that they tell. In this, they are diametrically opposed to the rubrics, which identify the tale by its number in the sequence and by its supposed narrator, and which therefore only operate on the diegetic level of the narrative frame. The page layout of ms Hunter 252 means that these two elements are most usually situated next to each other, and so, as the spectator's eyes move from one to the other, they engage with different layers of the narrative.

Neither the illustrations nor the rubric, however, tell the spectator much about the content of the tale. Dominique Lagorgette (2011) has described how the images allow the reader to identify the tale once it has been read, but frequently do not allow the spectator to predict the narrative. The illustrations therefore act as prompts to the spectator to

speculate what might happen in the accompanying narrative and this speculation may be confirmed or undermined by the accompanying text.

One of the significant textual elements which is not frequently illustrated is the geographical location of the tales. The overwhelming majority of the tales in the *Cent Nouvelles nouvelles* are attributed to an identifiable location, but only a very few illustrations in Hunter 252 give visual expression to this location. Examining the instances where the illustration does reference the location allows us to draw some conclusions about the role of place within the text, and the way that it is performed in the specific context of Hunter 252. At the same time, the illustrations occupy the same physical space in the manuscript — visual space — allowing the spectator to observe links between them, and to establish meaningful connections between visual details to add another dimension to the narrative. The illustrations of Hunter 252, therefore, structure space in a number of different ways: creating connections which are internal to the manuscript, but also linking the manuscript to real-world locations in a collection where physical location is an important referent.

### **Location in the *Cent Nouvelles nouvelles***

The vast majority of the tales of the *Cent Nouvelles nouvelles* open with an indication of where the narrative is set. This can be a precise reference to a city or a parish, or a more vague geographical location such as “les metes et marches de France” (tale 98). Only 17 tales have no indication of geographical location at all and in two cases (tales 64 and 88) the narrative states that this is a deliberate choice, and that the narrator does not want to name the setting of the events. This might suggest that the content of these tales is particularly compromising, and to an extent it is, since they describe the extra-judicial castration of a priest at a dinner party and the reduction of the period of Lent due to ecclesiastical incompetence. However, these tales are very much in keeping with the collection as a whole, and there seems to be nothing that lends them more to anonymity than the other 98 tales, which are a carnival of sexual misdemeanor, clerical incompetence, and deception. In this, they resemble the *fabliaux*, which inspire many of the plots of the *Cent Nouvelles nouvelles*.<sup>2</sup> As in the *fabliaux*, too, geographical location is a frequent component of the narrative and a number of reasons can be identified for this. Roger Dubuis (1990) has described how the tales of the *Cent Nouvelles nouvelles* present as the narration of an adventure, usually a recent one, which is claimed to be a genuine event and is of interest because it is unusual or presents a surprising turn of events. In

this context, details about where the story took place fulfil a function in defining the genre of the tale, because they guarantee the veracity of the story and give readers or listeners the impression that they really are hearing about actual events (Dubuis, 1981). However, as Dubuis (1973, 32) points out, this is a rhetorical effect, rather than a genuine guarantee of truthfulness, since those stories which are borrowed from earlier sources are somewhat more likely to be attributed a location than those which appear to have been created for the collection.

In cases where a tale has been taken from an earlier source, the tale in the *Cent Nouvelles nouvelles* has most usually been set in a new location. This is true even where the location attributed in the *Cent Nouvelles nouvelles* seems perfectly suited to the tale. An example is tale 65, where a husband makes the error of repeating to his wife and friends rumours regarding the extraordinary size of the penis belonging to an innkeeper at Mont-St-Michel. His account inspires the wife to undertake a journey to Mont-St-Michel, ostensibly as a pilgrimage, but actually to verify the truth of her husband's words. The story seems firmly rooted in its setting because it incorporates the well-known pilgrimage to Mont-St-Michel as a pretext for travel, as well as misogynistic commonplaces which see female devotion to pilgrimages as a pretext for licentiousness.

In actual fact, as Raphael Zehnder has pointed out (19, 124), the tale draws its inspiration from the same source as a tale from Poggio Bracciolini's *Facetiæ*, number 175, in which a poor man carrying others across a river for money encounters a client who pays him in advice rather than money. The advice he receives is always to agree a price in advance of performing his service and the value of this first piece of advice is reinforced by the second piece, which is never to reveal to his wife that another man has a larger penis than he does himself. In recounting his adventure to his wife, he unwittingly reveals that their local priest is better endowed than he is, and awakens her sexual interest in the priest, thereby punishing him doubly for neglecting to arrange payment.

This particular tale in Poggio's collection is not ascribed to a specific location, but many of his tales are, and they are invariably given a new location when they are transferred to the Burgundian *Cent Nouvelles nouvelles*. Tale 65 is unusual, in that the new location, with its pilgrimage associations, adds a dimension to the plot. More usually, the change seems to contribute nothing to the content of the tale. For instance, the *Cent Nouvelles nouvelles* locate a fight between two women over a token given to them by an ecclesiastical lover (tale 92) in Metz, while Poggio sets the same

story in Rome (Facetia 78). Tales from other sources are given the same treatment: a tale about a merchant, his wife, and a child of dubious origin is set in London (19), while one about a woman who tricks her husband out of a lamprey is set in Tours (38). Both stories also appear in thirteenth-century *fabliaux* collections, but without these specific indications of place.<sup>3</sup> Adding these spatial markers has the effect of appropriating these tales to the Burgundian collection. Although the examples cited in this article have mainly been of tales situated outside Philippe le Bon's territories, this is not true of the collection as a whole: 45 of the tales are situated in the Burgundian lands, with a further nine tales set in liminal spaces. In one case, this liminality arises because the narrator, supposedly the duke himself, claims that the tale originates from "ce royaume" (29), which situates the tale in France, but without specifying whether it comes from the duchy of Burgundy. Other tales are situated in border regions, on the edges of Burgundian territory or of other territories that border Burgundian lands.

The naming of places in this collection serves to appropriate tales from diverse origins to Burgundy. Even when the tales are not set in Burgundy itself, they frequently designate locations in the wider Burgundian sphere of influence, important political centers such as London and Paris and other locations in Northern France and Germany which were close to the duke's lands. Alexandra Velissariou has written about the way that the collection as a whole is staged to foreground the prestige of the men associated with the Burgundian court and the richness of their narrative culture. Read from this perspective, the text's use of narrative settings serves to emphasize the geographical extent of that court's networks. At the same time, the attribution of a particular location can link a tale to its supposed narrator. Frequently, the narrator will be indicated with a toponymic, suggesting his origin or his ancestral lands, and the tales an individual tells often appear to come from the same region.

Additionally, individual narrators can be shown to have particular associations with the tales that they tell: Jean Enghien, *Ammam* (ducal official) in Brussels, contributes a tale of confusion during a double wedding that leads to the wrong partners being married to each other and a resultant court case that may well have involved Enghien himself, although this is not stated explicitly in the narrative (tale 53, De Blicke, 2004, 355-60). Guillaume de Montbléru appears to tell a tale (63) about the way that he tricked two of his own associates on a trip to Antwerp.<sup>4</sup> The fact that some of the tales are linked to their narrators in this way serves as

a guarantor of the veracity of not only those tales, but of the other tales in the collection that indicate an identifiable geographical setting.

In this context, the geographical locations at the beginning of a tale serve as a generic marker, much as they do in *fabliaux* and in the genre of the urban legend, to which the *fabliaux* have been compared (Corbellari). In the case of urban legends, mentions of proximate locations form what Brunvand calls “predictable adaptations to make the stories fit local conditions” (Brunvand, 14). A similar dynamic can be assumed in the *Cent Nouvelles nouvelles* where pre-existing stories are assigned locations in the Burgundian sphere of influence and narrators who could plausibly have heard stories from these geographical locations. The mention of the location thus, as Dubuis, suggests, works at once as a guarantor of a tale’s veracity and as a generic mark of the *nouvelle*.

### **Illustration of identifiable locations in MS Hunter 252**

It is clear that the location of the tales in the *Cent Nouvelles nouvelles* therefore perform important narrative work in the collection, and in particular that they point to the narrative frame by maintaining a focus on the Burgundian nature of the collection and the personal links to the male narrators. Comparatively few of the illustrations, however, show identifiable locations that echo the settings provided by the narrative. This is perhaps to be expected, given that the text, the rubrication, and the illustration occupy different diegetic spaces, entertaining different relations with individual tales and with the frame narrative. Moreover, most scenes illustrated show domestic space: interiors or exteriors with few identifying details. Nevertheless, there are a small number of illustrations depicting exterior scenes where identifiable locations can be observed. It is difficult to quantify these, since the illustrations range from being vaguely suggestive of a location (as with the orange-roofed houses on fol. 108r, which presumably evoke the terracotta tiles of Roman houses) to being unambiguously an illustration of a specific place.

One illustration which falls into the latter category appears on folio 145r of the manuscript [Fig. 1]. This illustration accompanies tale 65, discussed above, which deals with a wife’s motivations for making a pilgrimage to Mont-St-Michel. For those readers who know that the story is set in this location, Mont-St-Michel is very identifiable in this illustration. The pink terrain on which the two figures ride is not typical of the illustrations in Hunter 252, but clearly represents an attempt to depict the pathways through the mud flats which lead to the island at low tide. Spectators who have not yet read the text will not know that

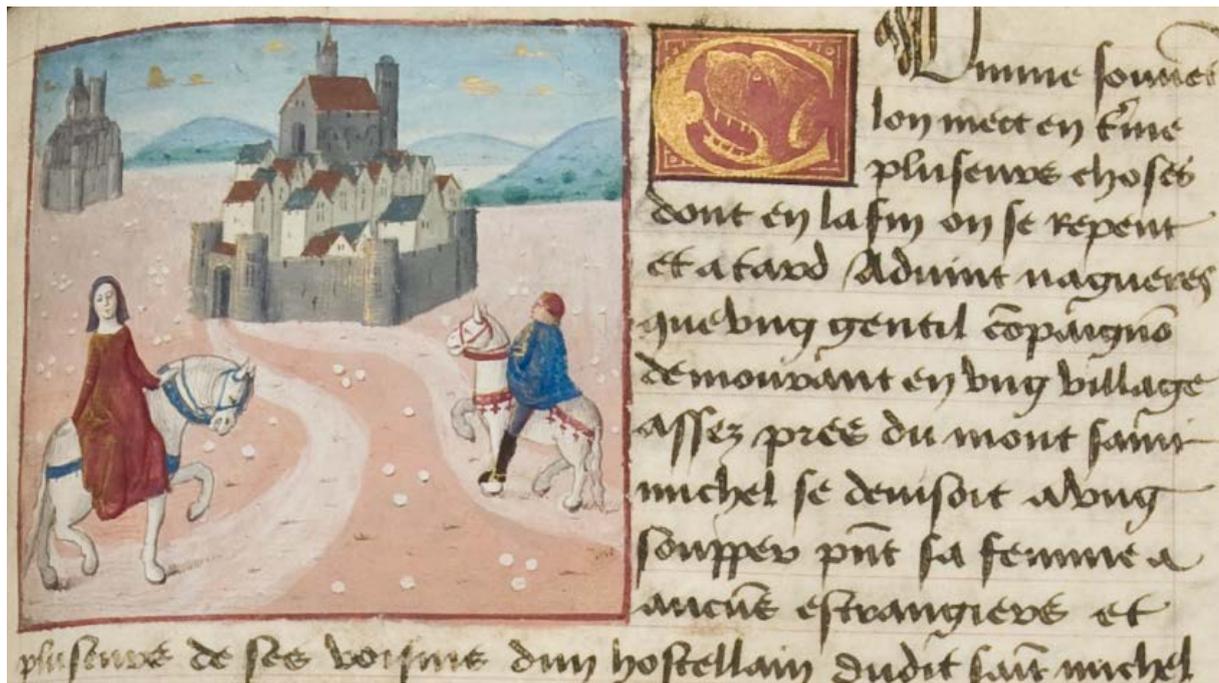


Fig. 1. *Les Cent Nouvelles nouvelles*, ms Hunter, 252, fol. 145r, by permission, University of Glasgow Library, Special Collections.

the two riders represent a married couple, travelling separately to the place of pilgrimage, she with lascivious desires on her mind and he with the intention of thwarting her. The illustrator has hinted at the marital status of the two figures by the way in which their costumes and the trappings of their horses mirror each other. She is dressed in red and rides a blue-harnessed horse; for him the colours are reversed. The legs of their horses, too, are mirror images of each other. They travel on separate roads which converge at the same destination, just as the text confirms is the case (Sweetser, 408). The road that the man follows appears somewhat more direct than the woman's journey, which goes some way to explaining why the text tells us that she left before her husband but arrived after him. An additional explanation for this is provided by the text, which informs us that the husband "pique tant qu'il peut au Mont-Saint-Michel", and the illustrator has not omitted to depict the spurs on his boots, which allow for this speed.

The illustration to tale 65, therefore, demonstrates detailed attention to the contents of the tale. It also displays a concern to illustrate the geographical location of the tale's setting, with its depiction of a walled community in the middle of a bay, crowded round a monastery with a spire. The presence of a second walled island, also topped with a significant architectural structure (a church or a castle) gives rise to questions. A

second destination is not mentioned in the text of the tale, and so the spectator is obliged to interpret its presence without reference to the text. It could be a straightforward depiction of the second smaller island of Tombelaine, which is visible from Mont-St-Michel and which once also had ecclesiastical buildings and fortifications on it. If this is the case, then its presence in the illustration shows a geographical knowledge of the area which goes beyond the information provided by the text. This would suggest that, for this tale at least, the geographical setting is considered very important. Alternatively, the second fortified island may represent Mont-St-Michel viewed from another angle. Elsewhere, the illustrator frequently shows successive stages in the narrative within the same illustration: characters appear twice in the same image and the spectator is called upon to interpret the narrative sequence, which may be read in any direction, and from foreground to background or *vice versa*. As a consequence, there is no conventional line of approach to a duplicate image in an illustration. A second Mont-St-Michel in the left-hand background may, in the context of illustrative conventions in this manuscript, represent a prior or subsequent stage in the narrative. There are no human figures to indicate what actions might occur there, and so, once again, the text does not provide the necessary information to allow the spectator to construct a narrative from the available visual material.

If the second island is to be interpreted as a double of the island in the foreground, this supplements the narrative in an interesting way. Whereas the island in the foreground is approached by two roads, allowing wife and husband to take different routes, the island in the background has no paths leading to it at all. As such, it represents a destination that cannot be reached, the Mont-St-Michel of the couple's imagination, in which the wife can experience at first hand the extraordinary sexual capacities of the Mont-St-Michel innkeeper. Sitting side saddle and facing the spectator, the woman has no sight of the fact that there are two islands. Her husband, on the other hand, has his face turned to both. He presumably sees both destinations and knows that he can prevent his wife from arriving at the island of her dreams. Mary J. Baker (1995) has written about how many of the tales of the *Cent Nouvelles nouvelles* exploit the emotional reactions of the characters to the "disnarrated", the events in the narrative which were possibilities, and could have happened but do not. If the second island in the illustration on Hunter, 252, 145r is indeed a duplicate Mont-St-Michel, this is the physical embodiment of the disnarrated, the erotic potential which the wife will never see fulfilled.

The fact that there is no indication in the image of the sexual meaning of the island is in keeping with the tenor of the volume as a whole. Dominique Lagorgette (2015) has pointed out that the illustrations of Hunter 252 are comparatively restrained when it comes to depictions of sexuality. Moreover, any sex that occurs between the wife of tale 65 and the innkeeper remains on the level of the disnarrated, in that it exists only in the woman's imagination (and perhaps that of her husband). The illustrations of Hunter 252 do not show what does not occur in the tales they accompany, and so the disnarrated adultery is not depicted.

### **Illustration, Reading, Spatial Experience**

In this case, decoding the illustration adds to the reader's understanding of the events in the tale. Viewed as a performance, the manuscript communicates the story on a verbal and non-verbal level: it shows at the same time as it tells. By using recognizable visual images of specific locations, the pictorial dimension reinforces the points made by the evocation of these locations in the verbal narrative. The importance of place in the verbal narrative is supported by the evocation of place in the illustration.

At the same time, the illustration allows the spectator to orientate himself in the collection.<sup>5</sup> Although the image presented is not sufficient to betray the intricacies of the plot, it does permit the viewer to identify a story once its plot is known. Again, this can be seen from the illustration to tale 65: once the story has been read, the illustration of its geographical location can be used to pick it out of the series of 100 images. The close juxtaposition of the image of Mont-St-Michel with the textual designation of this location (visible in fig. 1, lines 8, 9, behind the husband and at the beginning of the path that he is riding), confirms for the observer that this is the tale set in that location. In this way, the illustrations to Hunter 252 act as bookmarks, allowing readers and spectators to situate themselves rapidly within the collection and, if they wish, to move between tales in ways other than the straightforwardly sequential. This gives the illustrations a paratextual function, even though they are on a completely different diegetic level from other elements of the paratext, such as the prologue and rubrications, illustrating only the individual tales, while the prologue and rubrications designate only the frame narrative.

Nevertheless, text and image work together in Hunter 252 in a way that is co-dependent: the image is largely impenetrable without the contribution of the text, but it adds dimensions to the interpretation of the

text. Dominique Lagorgette (2015) and Elise Boneau present two instances of this, which work in slightly different ways. The illustration to tale 36 (Hunter, 252, fol. 89v) depicts a reclining man viewed through a window, while in an adjacent room we see a woman standing between two men. Meanwhile, tale 80 (Hunter, 252, fol. 168v) shows a group of seven characters standing round a table, ostensibly at dinner [Fig. 2]:



Fig. 2. *Les Cent Nouvelles nouvelles*, ms Hunter, 252, fol. 168v, by permission, University of Glasgow Library, Special Collections.

Reading the texts that accompany these images reveals dimensions that could be overlooked on first viewing. In tale 36, a rejected lover is told that the object of his attentions is not simply having innocent fun with her male companions but that “elle tient chacun d’eulx par la resne” (Sweetser, 253). The expression is ambiguous: it might be imagined to designate a metaphorical control exercised by the woman over her companions, but a re-examination of the accompanying illustration confirms what is suggested by the spurned lover’s appalled reaction in the text: the woman’s arms disappear into the genital regions of her two companions, and the expression clearly refers to masturbation. In this case, neither the text nor the illustration is clear.

At first, the spectator, like the would-be lover, does not see what the illustration depicts. It is only on reading the text that the reader is

encouraged to return to the picture to check if his interpretation of the euphemism is justified by the image. By contrast, the text in tale 80 tells the reader exactly what is going on: a newlywed woman, disappointed with the size of her husband's penis, persuades him to display it in front of her relatives, whereupon it becomes apparent that her point of comparison is the more sizeable appendage that she has seen on a donkey foal. Here, although the text also uses euphemism, it is quite clear what is going on. The accompanying image is also explicit, in that it shows the male character actually laying out his genitals on the table for the other characters to inspect. However, as Boneau has pointed out, this is not immediately apparent on first viewing. This may be because the man's act is unexpected in the context of what appears to be a gathering around a table or because the illustrations are relatively small, meaning that the genital display can be overlooked. In both cases, the text encourages a reinterpretation of the illustration, and in the case of tale 36 the illustration also confirms an interpretation of the text.

In addition to the relationships developed between the individual tale and its illustrations, the series of illustrations allows the spectator to observe parallels between the characters depicted in the different images. These parallels are most obviously on the level of costume, since the images are too small to allow for detailed depiction of facial features, but they allow the illustrator to develop a visual shorthand that shapes the spectator's horizon of expectations as he encounters characters in similar costume. For instance, the adulterous wife is frequently depicted in a long blue robe with a black headdress. Indeed, the association between female infidelity and the black headdress is so strong that the illustration to tale 33 (Hunter 252, 80r) depicts the moment where a woman compromises herself by cutting her hair to send to her lover, showing her with her black headdress lying before her as she does so. Edgar De Blicq (2004, 419) has written about how removing a woman's headdress signified public disgrace with connotations of prostitution in fifteenth-century France, but the illustrator has reinforced this by making the headdress itself a symbol of infidelity, through repeated appearances in different narrative contexts. Similarly, the young lover is frequently depicted wearing a floor-length red robe and a grey cap, so that the spectator expects any character thus depicted to fall into this category. Figures in the illustrations are positioned as stock characters. The wife of tale 65 is positioned as an unfaithful woman, by the fact of her wearing a black headdress, like many of the

other women in the illustrations, whom the text has revealed to be unfaithful. The fact that her dress, unlike that of many unfaithful women, is red rather than blue, might suggest that her story will not be one of simple adultery, and so it transpires. However, expectations created by the figures' costumes are not always fulfilled by the narrative, and sometimes the text presents very different scenarios from those suggested by the costumes.

In this way, MS Hunter 252 presents a series of relationships: between text, illustration and rubric and between different stories and different illustrations in a linear fashion as the spectator or reader moves through the collection. The spatial metaphor of movement here is capital, because movement is key to the way that the manuscript performs the text, by orchestrating the spectator's experience of the page. In order to correctly interpret the various visual and verbal elements of the page, the spectator's eyes must move from one to another, and back again, to check that all the information contained in text and image have been correctly interpreted. This makes reading the *Cent Nouvelles nouvelles* in Hunter 252, as in so many other illustrated manuscripts a spatial experience, with different levels of information being conveyed in different parts of the page. In a collection such as this, where physical location is an important element of the stories, the illustrations reinforce the spatial element of the reading experience by making the spectator engage physically and mentally with different spaces on the page, and even different pages in the volume, in order to interpret the document. The manuscript orchestrates these engagements in a way that creates meaning through its performance.

## Notes

1. I would like to thank the University of Glasgow for awarding me the Stirling-Maxwell fellowship that allowed me to do much of the work on this article.
2. For instance, tale 19 is a straight retelling of *L'enfant qui fu remis au soleil*, whereas tale 66 draws heavily on the same tradition as *Du prestre crucifié*. See also Baker (1987) and Bibring.
3. Indeed the two *fabliaux* that most closely resemble these, *De l'enfant qui fu remis au soleil* and *Les Pertri*, appear in the same manuscript, Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, fonds français 837.
4. In this case, the same individuals can be situated in Antwerp in September 1457, although Edgar DeBlieck (2001, 252) argues that this is a separate occasion.

5. The manuscript's audience is designated here with a masculine pronoun because the diegetic audience of the tales is exclusively masculine. Nevertheless, we can imagine female readers of the collection: a manuscript copy of the work appears in the inventory of Margaret of Austria's library in 1523 (Rossi, 74).

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