

## Renaissance and Reformation Renaissance et Réforme



### Rezvani, Leanna Bridge, ed. Marguerite de Roberval: A Web-Based Approach to Teaching a Renaissance Heroine. Other

Gregory Haake

Volume 45, Number 4, Fall 2022

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1105501ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v45i4.41392>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (print)

2293-7374 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Haake, G. (2022). Review of [Rezvani, Leanna Bridge, ed. Marguerite de Roberval: A Web-Based Approach to Teaching a Renaissance Heroine. Other]. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 45(4), 229–231. <https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v45i4.41392>

© Gregory Haake, 2023



This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/>

érudit

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to promote and disseminate research.

<https://www.erudit.org/en/>

**Rezvani, Leanna Bridge, ed.**

**Marguerite de Roberval: A Web-Based Approach to Teaching a Renaissance Heroine. Other.**

Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2013. Accessed 3 October 2022.

[teachingmargueritederoberval.com](http://teachingmargueritederoberval.com).

The tale of this resource guide on Marguerite de la Rocque de Roberval (1515–42) begins with another more famous Marguerite. In the *Heptaméron*, her famous collection of 72 short stories first published in 1558, Marguerite de Navarre (1492–1549) bases the 67th tale on the extraordinary story of the former’s stranding on an island in the Gulf of St. Lawrence near Quebec in 1542. After her uncle, Jean-François de la Rocque de Roberval (c. 1500–60), discovered her dalliance with a member of their expedition’s crew, Marguerite, her lover, and a servant were left on the Isle of Demons, where the servant, the lover, and a child conceived and born on the island all perished. According to Navarre, Marguerite de Roberval was later rescued and lived out the rest of her life as a schoolmistress in La Rochelle. Professor Leanna Bridge Rezvani began to research this lesser-known figure, who is not named in the *Heptaméron*, and, in addition to researching and publishing on Marguerite de Roberval, has created an extensive digital resource for those who might want to teach—or to learn—about this young woman who inspired three published works in Renaissance France and beyond.

The site includes many standard pages that one might expect to find on such a website including a bibliography for further reading, biographies, images, and media. The “Bibliography” page lists 14 books and articles—the most recent of which appeared in 2017—that are relatively well distributed between studies of Roberval herself and studies of the *Heptaméron* and Roberval’s small role in it. Of particular note is Carrie Klaus’s article, entitled “From Désert to Patrie: Marguerite de Navarre’s Lessons from the New World,” and Rezvani’s own study of the *Heptameron*’s portrayal of Roberval, “Nature and Nourishment, Bodies and Beasts: The *Heptaméron*’s Portrayal of Marguerite de Roberval’s Marooning,” published in 2014. The “Biographies” page gives a few standard encyclopedic websites (e.g., [wikipedia.org](http://wikipedia.org), [biographi.ca](http://biographi.ca)) to consult, both in French and in English, but “Biographies” is perhaps a bit of a misnomer since many of the sites claim to recount a legend that cannot be verified. Moreover, some of the

resources should be read with caution, because even when recounting the legend there are some variations or inaccuracies. For example, one of the sites (oocities.org) misspells Marguerite's name as "de la Roche" instead of "de la Rocque." In the "Images" archive, Rezvani includes four links with brief explanations of origin and context. The images are presented as a teaching resource, namely as possible discussion starters. One set of images is from a 2015 play entitled *I Am Marguerite*, the trailer of which appears on the "Media" page alongside several other links to songs, poems, and even a film that was shot on one of the possible islands where Roberval may have been marooned.

In addition to these standard pages, Rezvani has included a page on Marguerite de Roberval's uncle, Captain Roberval, the villain of the story. Similar to the biographical page on Marguerite, this page links to sites in both French and English that give standard biographical information on the captain, as well as on Jacques Cartier (1491–1557), whose third expedition to New France in 1541–42 was the reason for this journey in the first place. The pilot of Captain Roberval's expedition, Jean Alfonso, is also profiled. In addition to a focus on the expedition that left Marguerite de Roberval stranded, there is also a resource page on the early exploration of Canada by the French, again in both English and French.

The most important pages from a literary, and less contextual, point of view are those on Renaissance and contemporary versions of the Marguerite de Roberval legend. These primary texts, with accompanying biographical and historical information on their authors, represent the heart of the matter, as it were. From the Renaissance, Rezvani includes the narratives from the *Heptaméron*, from François de Belleforest's version of the story in his *Histoires tragiques* (1570), and finally from André Thevet's account in the *Cosmographie universelle* (1575). What makes this particularly helpful is that it provides a place for students to easily come into contact with primary texts, which when teaching sixteenth-century studies can often present a barrier. The "Modern Versions" page, like the "Media" page, is fertile ground for comparative studies, with a surprisingly extensive list of texts from the recent past (going back to 1981) that treat the legend of Marguerite de Roberval.

On the "Teaching Ideas" page, Rezvani supplies pedagogical tools for intermediate and advanced students, providing both in-class techniques and possible ideas for writing and research. The "Contemporary Canadian Women & Marguerite" page presents a transcript of an interview with the playwright

of *I Am Marguerite*, Shirley Barrie; this excellent resource gives a sense of how one contemporary writer chose to engage with somewhat obscure sixteenth-century material. Finally, the media resources seem particularly fruitful given that they illustrate the enduring nature of the legend and make a convincing case for why Roberval should be studied in the first place. They would also be an excellent starting point for further comparative research on the Roberval legend across genres, media, and time.

Rezvani has created here a useful guide for introducing a historical and fictional personage whose obscurity and importance in difficult-to-teach sixteenth-century texts is clarified. The site is presented as a resource for teaching about Marguerite de Roberval, but mostly insofar as it can be offered to students as a starting point for context, research ideas, comparative studies, or for evidence of Roberval's enduring cultural and literary relevance. Students will no doubt appreciate the ready availability of primary texts from the Renaissance that portray Marguerite, but the website could use some updating. The "Latest News" page is no longer current, and there is a broken link on the "Biographies" page. In addition, a recent publication that relies on Marguerite and her story in very interesting ways could be added: Swedish author Karolina Ramqvist's 2019 novel *Björnkvinnan*, translated into English as *Bear Woman* (2022), tells the story of a woman writer from Stockholm who becomes fixated on this legendary sixteenth-century castaway. The absence of this updated material, however, only emphasizes the relevance and utility of what is a worthwhile resource for students and teachers looking to explore the woman behind the tale.

GREGORY HAAKE

University of Notre Dame

<https://doi.org/10.33137/rr.v45i4.41392>