

"A Whim for Strawberries"

At the Literary Table in
Les quinze joies de mariage

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*He seems a fine connoisseur, he who said that
"a good marriage is that of a blind wife to a deaf husband."¹*

—Michel de Montaigne, *Essays*, Book III, Chapter V

This aphorism by Montaigne may inspire a smile: nothing like a blind wife and a deaf husband to ensure a successful marriage! And yet far from a simple quip, the saying finds its place in a well-known anti-matrimonial current that began in the Middle Ages (Jean de Meun's *The Romance of the Rose*, Eustache Deschamps' *Miroir de mariage*, Jean Le Fèvre's *Lamentations de Matheolus*) and includes Rabelais' *Tiers Livre*, in which Panurge never stops asking whether or not he should marry.² Among these works, *The Fifteen Joys of Marriage*, an anonymous text written around 1400, continually states that man is a fish that lets itself be hooked.³ While he believes himself to be living in joy(s) (fifteen of them precisely), he is plunged into a real matrimonial—and gastronomical—hell.⁴

The Fifteen Joys of Marriage tells the unhappy story of a husband who is forced to satisfy his wife with food. In order to seduce her, he had to invite her to a lavish dinner, but even after their marriage he continuously needs to refill the pantry in order to feed his wife's insatiable family and her numerous friends. Moreover, when she becomes