



PROJECT MUSE®

Honor and Gender in the *Heptaméron* of Marguerite de Navarre

Cynthia Nazarian

L'Esprit Créateur, Volume 60, Number 1, Spring 2020, pp. 87-99 (Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/esp.2020.0009>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/751488>

Honor and Gender in the *Heptaméron* of Marguerite de Navarre

Cynthia Nazarian

IF MARGUERITE DE NAVARRE'S *HEPTAMÉRON* is a book about love, it isn't of the happy kind. In the aristocratic milieu of its storytellers, a woman's honor is prized, but it is radically vulnerable. It's no wonder then that *parfait amitié*, for all its Neoplatonic idealism, seems a dangerous game. As often as the tales speak of love, they also examine the honor that it so frequently endangers: the Queen of Navarre creates what might be read as a conduct book for women navigating the treacherous waters of male desire with an eye to conscience and reputation. She does not teach resignation, nor passive acceptance, nor silence for its own sake. Instead, through a sustained critique of the brutality and excess that often undergird early modern aristocratic masculinity, she saves the best of honor for her brave and virtuous women. My goal in this article is twofold: first, to lay out how men's and women's honor interact in Marguerite de Navarre's text, and second, to argue that, rather than emphasize gender-based difference, the *Heptaméron* instead showcases assertive, even martial forms of self-defense and justification by honorable women who model traditionally masculine modes of aristocratic-heroic virtue. Among these, *parrhēsia*, frank speech in the face of risk, plays a central role in defending an active, assertive women's honor with tools traditionally available only to men.

Many critics writing on questions of gender in the *Heptaméron* have stressed the differences between men's and women's honor.¹ The text itself makes this distinction more than once. In *Nouvelle* 26, the virtuous, married lady courted by the young Seigneur d'Avannes mentions on her deathbed that "l'honneur des hommes et des femmes n'est pas semblable."² The *devisante* Parlamente, often read as a stand-in for Marguerite de Navarre herself, supports this view in the discussion that follows the tale. However, in addition to differences between men's and women's honor as the *Heptaméron* defines them, there are also fundamental similarities—crucial overlaps in structure and principle that blur distinctions not only between masculine and feminine visions of honor, but between men and women themselves.

Honor and violence

The *Heptaméron* rather conventionally defines women's honor as synonymous with chastity, while shaping men's honor as aggression and *hardiesse*.

As Parlamente tells her male companions in the discussion of *Nouvelle* 26, “vostre honneur [gist] à tuer les hommes en guerre” (390), and in the discussion of *Nouvelle* 43, she distinguishes men:

desquelz la fureur et la concupiscence augmente leur honneur; car ung homme qui se venge de son enemy et le tue pour ung desmentir en est estimé plus gentil compagnon; aussy est-il quant il en ayme une douzaine avecq sa femme. Mais l'honneur des femmes a autre fondement: c'est douceur, patience et chasteté. (508–9)

Parlamente's stark contrasts criticize the ethical laxity of standards of masculine honor, and the excess and disproportionality they allow. In this citation, men's honor is indistinguishable from the capacity for violence on the one hand, and sexual desire on the other.

The association of men's honor with violence is an old one, with deep roots in aristocratic ideals of masculinity. Although characters from across the social classes guard their chastity, specific references to honor rarely apply to those who are not highborn. Instead, the Queen of Navarre primarily uses her own world of aristocratic actors to examine the problem of honor. Among them, honor and the capacity for violence are virtually synonymous. Nowhere is this link clearer than in *Nouvelle* 10 about the warlike Amadour, who loves the higher-born, virtuous Floride. After years of a seemingly chaste love, Amadour tries to pressure her into a sexual relationship and attempts to assault her when she refuses. Ultimately, Amadour dies of self-inflicted wounds on the battlefield, and Floride, who escapes his clutches, enters a convent. As Amadour is a younger son, his social advancement relies on his reputation, which is gained entirely on the battlefield. The tale presents Amadour as an unparalleled fighter, and over the course of the story, even as his love for Floride turns vicious, his bravery and militarism are never in doubt. As the tale weaves between Amadour's interactions with Floride and his departures to fight in Spain's wars, battle repeatedly interrupts love in its scenes.

Over the course of *Nouvelle* 10, the text brings Amadour's militarism to bear more and more heavily on his relationship with Floride. When confessing his feelings, he frames his future military exploits as both the result and proof of his love. This is devotion expressed primarily through violence—the willingness both to suffer and to inflict it: all his glorious deeds will be in Floride's name and will exceed any he performed before, but only if she consents to his desires (169–70). In making his continued military success conditional upon Floride's consent, Amadour articulates a theme that runs throughout *Nouvelle* 10 and the *Heptaméron* at large: the proximity of love to violence. Christine Martineau suggests, “Aucun livre, à notre connaissance,

ne fait de ce vocabulaire guerrier appliqué à l'amour un usage aussi constant et répété [...], l'univers amoureux de l'*Heptaméron* est véritablement lui-même un univers guerrier."³ Indeed, the text repeatedly brings them into contact with one another, portraying the barrier between as thin and porous. Here, although Floride loves Amadour, she rejects his advances. In response, he turns on her; the text plays out this shift on the battlefield:

après avoir fait tant de belles choses que tout le papier d'Espagne ne les sçauroit soutenir, imagina une invention très grande, non pour gaingner le cueur de Floride, car il le tenoit pour perdu, mais pour avoir la victoire de son ennemye, puis que telle se faisoit contre luy. Il meit arriere tout le conseil de raison, et mesme la paour de la mort, dont il se mectoit en hazard; delibera et conclud d'ainsy le faire. (187)

In this pivot, the text shifts its martial language (“victoire,” “ennemye,” “hazard”) from the wars onto the reluctant lady, demonstrating as it will repeatedly how quickly the love of the *Heptaméron*'s men turns to violence. In Amadour's case, the tale ends in an excess of bloodshed when, enraged, he turns his sword on himself. Not, however, before the tale once again makes the analogy between battle and desire: “luy, qui ne vouloit non plus estre prins qu'il n'avoit sceu prendre s'amy, ne faulser sa foy envers Dieu, qu'il avoit faulcée envers elle, [...] rendant corps et ame à Dieu, s'en donna ung tel coup, qu'il ne luy en fallut poinct de secours” (194–95).

The *Heptaméron*'s blurring of lover and warrior lays bare the startling consequences of violent heroic masculinity. In the discussion following *Nouvelle* 4, the story of the Princess of Flanders (often taken to be Marguerite de Navarre herself) who defends herself from a nighttime assault by a suitor, these consequences are exposed by the *devisant* Hircain, who argues that her attacker should not have given up so easily:

Il devoit tuer la vieille, dist Hircain, et quant la jeune se feut veue sans secours, eust esté demy vaincue. —Tuer! dit Nomerfide; vous voudriez doncques faire d'un amoureux ung meurdrier? Puis que vous avez ceste oppinion, on doit bien craindre de tumber en voz mains. —Si j'en estois jusques là, dist Hircain, je me tiendrois pour deshonoré, si je ne venois à fin de mon intention. (126–27)

Nomerfide's disbelieving interjection articulates the text's criticism, highlighting the alarming and deeply problematic repercussions for women of a masculine honor that cannot lay down arms.

Laying bare the proximity of love to violence in a milieu that equates honor with the use of force, the *Heptaméron* explores this association's implicit threat: that men's desire, if met with refusal, will end in rape. Hircain

suggested as much following *Nouvelle* 10, but following *Nouvelle* 18, the story of a young man who falls in love with a lady who tests him repeatedly, the *devisant* Saffredent goes a step further, arguing that rape and desire or admiration—in fact that rape and honoring—are the same:

Il me semble, dist Saffredent, que l'on ne sçauroit faire plus d'honneur à une femme de qui l'on desire telles choses, que de la prendre par force [...]. Et quant vous oyez dire que ung homme a prins une femme par force, croyez que ceste femme-là luy a osté l'esperance de tous autres moyens; et n'estimez moins l'homme qui a mis en dangier sa vie, pour donner lieu à son amour. (276–77)

Saffredent's language of victory recognizes no difference at all between desire and war. In fact, he argues for violence as the very highest form of appeal: while other women can be cajoled, bribed or tricked, the intelligent, honest, and unwilling woman represents the greatest challenge (Martineau 318). For him, rape requires the same courage that establishes a man's honor on the battlefield. The dangers for women from this line of thinking are obvious. That both Saffredent and Hircan should openly advocate rape, and that they are not alone among male characters in blurring love, honor, and violence, reminds the *Heptaméron* reader repeatedly that desire places women at risk.

A zero-sum game: the contest between men's and women's honor

However, in weighing these hazards, the tales portray the values and motivations of its women as strikingly similar to those of its men. Honor is equally at stake for both, and the tales explore the meaning and precarity of women's honor at even greater length. Following *Nouvelle* 43, the story of Jambicque, who cultivates a harshly chaste reputation but takes a lover in secret and turns on him when he unmasks her, Parlamente argues:

celles qui sont vaincues en plaisir ne se doivent plus nommer femmes, mais hommes, desquelz la fureur et la concupiscence augmente leur honneur; car ung homme qui se venge de son enemy et le tue pour ung desmentir en est estimé plus gentil compagnon; aussy est-il quant il en ayme une douzaine avecq sa femme. Mais l'honneur des femmes a autre fondement: c'est douceur, patience et chasteté. (508–9)

Men's honor, as we've seen thus far, is violent and aggressive, but Parlamente also highlights its excess: it is an uncontrolled "fureur" and disproportionate. In sharp contrast, the traits that define women's honor all demonstrate restraint. It would be a mistake to see these as passive: Parlamente first equates women who succumb to pleasure with men, implying that women exercise greater self-control. More specifically, she portrays this self-control

as a form of combat, as the term “vaincues” implies. In her arresting formulation, a woman’s honor increases when she is victorious over pleasure; if she loses the fight, she is no more than a man.

Faced as it repeatedly is with excessive, unrestrained, and violent masculine honor codes, it is no wonder that women’s honor in the *Heptaméron* appears constantly threatened. In the discussion following *Nouvelle* 10, Hircan claims women “ont l’honneur autant que les hommes, qui le leur peuvent donner et oster” (197), but beyond the open menace of men’s desire and aggression, there is also the danger of wagging tongues, “les oppinions de ceulx qui plus tost jugent mal que bien” (287). Honor, after all, is intricately tied to reputation. Its precarity is therefore multivalent; it is at risk from anyone with ill intent, and even at times from oneself.⁴

However, the female storytellers often support the punishments that unchaste women face. Following *Nouvelle* 32, which recounts macabre punishments meted out by a German seigneur on his adulterous wife, Parlamente declares his vengeance just, and Longarine agrees: “quelque chose que puisse faire une femme après ung tel mesfaict, ne sçauroit reparer son honneur” (427). Following *Nouvelle* 36, Parlamente acknowledges that killing his adulterous wife restores the honor of the magistrate’s lineage, and even defends his actions: “ceste pauvre femme-là porta la peyne que plusieurs meritent. Et croy que le mary, puisqu’il s’en voloit venger, se gouverna avecq une merueilleuse prudence et sapience” (453–54). In using “vengeance,” a term weighted toward aristocratic-heroic violence, Parlamente seems to read honor like one of the *Heptaméron*’s men.⁵

By depicting their honor as precarious, high-stakes, and equally prized by the *Heptaméron*’s women, Marguerite de Navarre presents it as a zero-sum game: one sex loses what the other gains. Following *Nouvelle* 16, the story of a widow aggressively pursued by a gentleman until she tests him and gives in to his wishes, Géburon warns: “mes dames, si vous estes saiges, vous garderez de nous, comme le cerf, s’il avoit entendement, feroit de son chasseur. Car nostre gloire, nostre felicité et nostre contentement, c’est de vous veoir prises et de vous oster ce qui vous est plus cher que la vie” (262–63). The violent language of the hunt highlights the very real threat from men who see rejection as dishonor. Following *Nouvelle* 4, Hircan baldly states, “je me tiendrois pour deshonoré, si je ne venois à fin de mon intention” (127). Following a later tale, in an uncharacteristically bitter moment, Parlamente reproaches her husband: although men and women alike are tempted to sin, “vostre plaisir gist à deshonorer les femmes, et vostre honneur à tuer les hommes en guerre: qui sont deux pointz formellement contraires à la loy de

Dieu" (390). Here, she explicitly rejects the equation of sexual conquest with honor,⁶ insisting instead on a Christian ethics that contrasts aristocratic-heroic motivations with the reality of their consequences: pleasure and honor on the one hand, dishonor and death on the other.

To be sure, as Parlamente's words imply, this zero-sum conception of honor victimizes not only women, but also other men ("tuer les hommes"). Within the violent framework of aristocratic-heroic masculinity, men gain honor off one another as well, as the ruin of one makes the reputation of the other. However, the *Heptaméron* tales insist repeatedly on the asymmetrical risk faced by women: women lose honor, while men so often acquire it. To this end, the text opposes women's honor not only to its masculine counterpart, but also to love itself. For instance, the virtuous widow who loves the young *Sieur d'Avannes* sickens and dies, "ne povant porter la guerre que l'amour et l'honneur faisoient en son cuer" (384). Even the male *devisants* recognize these risks. Following *Nouvelle* 53, *Dagoucin* emphasizes the importance of secrecy "parquoy les fault aussy bien cacher quant l'amour est vertueuse, que si elle estoit au contraire, pour ne tomber au mauvais jugement de ceulx qui ne peuvent croire que ung homme puisse aymer une dame par honneur" (568). Parlamente concurs elsewhere, pointing out that "l'honneur d'une femme est aussy bien mys en dispute, pour aymer par vertu, comme par vice" (682).

Although surrounded by threats to their honor, the women of the *Heptaméron* are not cowed. As Madeleine Lazard notes, "Le devoir de chasteté commande tous les autres et impose la résistance" (Lazard 133). Female characters risk their lives to defend their honor, as do the Flemish Princess of *Nouvelle* 4 who fights off her attacker, and *Françoise*, the lower-born heroine of *Nouvelle* 42, who repeatedly refuses the advances of a prince in order to preserve her honor. Ullrich Langer notes that in these tales, "chastity is demonstrated by physical fortitude, not by passive suffering and submission to violence."⁷ In several tales, women express willingness to die for their honor: *Floride* claims to prefer her honor over her life, and a chambermaid propositioned by her master in *Nouvelle* 59 "aymeroit mieulx mourir que de faire rien contre Dieu et son honneur" (598). Moreover, several women die to preserve their honor or to avoid dishonor, as in *Nouvelles* 2, 23, 26, and 70. In these instances, the tales often use the language of martyrdom that emphasizes the *pathos* of their fortitude or suffering. *Dora Polachek* argues that "By making chastity the protagonist's choice, the female saint's life opens up a space for the kind of heroic action usually reserved for men."⁸ Through its imagery, the *Heptaméron's* chaste and enduring women rival its warriors for honor.

Regendering heroism: the *Heptaméron*'s parrhesiastic women

The *Heptaméron* by no means wishes to make martyrs of all its women. Instead, a number of tales describe women who seek violent retribution: the princess of *Nouvelle* 4 initially desires her attacker's death, and Longarine claims that, had her own husband been as unfaithful as the one in *Nouvelle* 37, "je croy que je l'eusse tué et me fusse tuée, car morir après telle vengeance m'eust esté chose plus agreable, que vivre loyaulment avec un desloyal" (461). In *Nouvelle* 58, a lady enlists the help of none other than Marguerite de Navarre in avenging herself on a wayward lover (594). Vengeance, for all its traditional associations with masculine honor, also motivates the *Heptaméron*'s women.

Two further examples of women's vengeance highlight the crossing of gender boundaries that results. In *Nouvelle* 23, a monk tricks a chaste, married woman by taking her husband's place in her bed. The narrator Oisille relates how, before her suicide, the lady entreats her husband: "la demoiselle, qui toute sa vye avoit aymé son honneur, entra en ung tel desespoir, que, oblyant toute humanité et nature de femme, le supplia à genoux la venger de ceste grande injure" (347). Although Oisille is critical, her attitude is not universal.⁹ Following *Nouvelle* 15, Simontault seems instead to praise a lady for taking a lover after years of neglect and infidelity from her husband, arguing that she "a oblyé, pour ung temps, qu'elle estoit femme; car ung homme n'en eust sceu faire plus belle vengeance" (256). Furthermore, like the desire for vengeance, defending their honor also makes women look like men in the *Heptaméron*. *Nouvelle* 2, the piteous tale of a muleteer's wife stabbed and raped by a groom, describes her refusal to submit even in agony: "tout ainsy que ung bon gendarme, quant il veoit son sang, est plus eschauffé à se venger de ses ennemys et acquerir honneur, ainsy son chaste cueur renforcea doublement à courir et fuyr des mains de ce malheureux" (105). The seemingly paradoxical simile turns her into a soldier: while attempting to flee, the muleteer's wife appears not only masculine, but martial. Acknowledging different methods—escape as opposed to violent aggression—the *Heptaméron* makes a woman's fight for her honor equal to a man's.

In addition to vengeance, familiar terrain for aristocratic-heroic masculinity, the *Heptaméron* also ascribes victory to its honor-driven women. Parlemente portrays Floride as "victorieuse de son cueur, de son corps, d'amour et de son amy" (156), prefiguring the conflict between Amadour's desire and Floride's honor that follows. Introducing *Nouvelle* 42's Françoise, Parlemente again chooses martial language to praise her and, with great rhetorical flourish, turns her into an exemplar:

Que dirons-nous icy, mes dames? Avons-nous le cueur si bas, que nous facions noz serviteurs nos maîtres, veu que ceste-cy n'a sceu estre vaincue ne d'amour ne de torment? Je vous prie que, à son exemple, nous demorions victorieuses de nous-mesmes, car c'est la plus louable victoire que nous puissions avoir. (498)

Battlefield heroism inscribes Parlamente's language with words like "cueur," "victorieuses," "vaincue," and "victoire" as she sets out a new kind of victory for women who protect their honor at all costs. It is a victory over self and, as she describes it, the greatest victory of all. Thus Parlamente, often taken to speak for Marguerite de Navarre herself, becomes the *Heptaméron's* advocate for feminine self-mastery as the ideal weapon in preserving one's honor. As Colette Winn argues, "la vertu de chasteté, vertu généralement reconnue comme la plus admirable, contraint la femme à une morale rigoureuse, une conduite stricte basée sur une parfaite maîtrise de soi."¹⁰ Parlamente's exhortations provide a model of the woman as stoic sage, which runs completely counter to sixteenth-century stereotypes of women as garrulous, appetite-driven, and uncontrolled.

Crucially, contrary to norms of feminine behavior in the period, the *Heptaméron* does not name silence as a feminine virtue. Although it criticizes or discourages *imprudent* speech, silence is not praised for its own sake. Instead, I would argue that the text repeatedly showcases important examples of risky speech by women confronting powerful adversaries in defending their honor. In so doing, they once again use methods traditionally associated with men—in this case, *parrhēsia*, bold or frank speech.¹¹ Floride, when she is confronted by Amadour's violent intentions, twice voices long reproaches in the name of honor and conscience under conditions of increasing danger (183–5; 189–90). The first is heavy with oratorical flourishes including rhetorical questions, apostrophe, and exclamations that highlight the importance of the perspective Floride advances: she speaks for the *Heptaméron* here. Insisting on the link between conscience and honor—that is, between private virtue and public reputation—she corrects Amadour, the prime exemplar of aristocratic-heroic masculinity that betrays its violent hypocrisy. In *Nouvelle* 15, an honorable but scorned wife seeks out *parfait amitié* after despairing of her unfaithful husband. On two separate occasions, the lady reproaches men and defends her virtue. The first, less risky address criticizes an admirer's cowardice when he turns away from her at the king's request. She admonishes his fearful demeanor, pointing instead to her own *frankness*: "Or adieu, Monseigneur, duquel la craincte ne merite la *franchise* de mon amitié!" (243, emphasis added), the central characteristic of *parrhēsia*. In the second encounter, when she defends herself before her husband, the text emphasizes truth and risk in

her address: “elle, qui avoit desja passé les premieres apprehensions de la mort, reprint cuer, se deliberant, avant que morir, de ne luy celler la verité” (247–48). Over three uninterrupted pages, she defends her honor and conscience, and explains her desire for vengeance. At the end, the text once again evokes *parrhēsia* in describing “ces propos pleins de verité, dictz d’un si beau visaige, avecq une grace tant assurée et audacieuse, qu’elle ne monstroit ne craindre ne meriter nulle pugnition” (250–51). Over the course of her speech, the lady’s fear becomes self-assurance as she embraces the role of speaking truth in the face of risk.

In subsequent examples of *parrhēsia* among the *Heptaméron*’s women, the disparity between their status and that of their addressees widens further. *Nouvelle 21*’s well-born Rolandine, neglected by her father and the queen her guardian, reaches the age of thirty without marrying. Taking matters into her own hands, she weds a bastard from a lower house, and is persecuted by the king, the queen, and her father, who imprisons her to break her resolve. Refusing to renounce her faithless husband despite pressure from all sides, she appears very much as a martyr: the tale emphasizes her piteous state and heroic endurance (320–21). She is not only a martyr, however, but also a *parrhēsiastēs*. She responds to the queen’s accusation that she has dishonored her family with a very long address “devant plusieurs personnes,” “d’un visaige aussi joyeux et assuré, que la Royne monstroit le sien troublé et courroucé,” proposing to confront the queen with the truth of her own actions (314). Over four pages (314–18), she justifies her position and defends her honor against the queen’s furious interruptions.¹² She acknowledges the exceptional nature of her speech, pointing to the truth and risk that define *parrhēsia*:

Ce n’est point à moy, Madame, à parler à vous, qui estes *ma maistresse et la plus grande princesse* de la chrestienté, *audacieusement* et sans la reverence que je vous dois; ce que je n’ay voulu ne pensé faire; mays, puy que je n’ay advocat qui parle pour moy, sinon *la verité*, laquelle moy seule je sçay, je suis tenue de la *declairer sans craincte* [...]. *Je ne crainctz* que creature mortelle entende comme je me suis conduite en l’affaire dont l’on me charge, puisque je sais que Dieu et mon honneur n’y sont en riens offensez. Et voylà qui me fait parler *sans craincte*, estant seure que celluy qui voyt mon cuer est avecq moy. (317, emphases mine)

After this remarkable speech, which addresses the reader alongside the angry queen, overtly religious vocabulary highlights Rolandine’s virtue and heroism. Eventually, Rolandine is rewarded with a well-born husband who recognizes her value, and on two occasions she is avenged by none other than God Himself, who kills her faithless first husband and also the brother who tries to strip her of her inheritance (322–23).

The very next tale, *Nouvelle* 22, provides another example of the female *parrhēsiastēs* in Marie Heroet, a nun who fends off blackmail attempts and punishments by a powerful, lecherous prior. Once again, the tale's religious imagery combines with that of frank speech, proposing another martyr-like figure who defends her honor boldly in the face of great risk. She responds to the prior's threats to excommunicate her "d'un visaige sans paour" (335), calling God as witness to her honor. In the end, she avenges herself through a network of women, including Marguerite de Navarre, to whom she manages to get word of her plight through her brother.¹³ After the prior's ignominious death, Marie becomes abbess herself, restored to even greater honor. Another of the *Heptaméron's* honor-driven women receives her vengeance through God and our author herself. *Nouvelle* 42 strikes similarly close to home, as the prince who relentlessly pursues the humble Françoise is often taken to be François I, brother to Marguerite. Despite her love for him, Françoise rejects his many advances, preferring death to dishonor. She reproaches the prince several times, and at length when he manages to trap her (493–95). Here, as the risk inherent in the disparity between her station and his is compounded by her isolation, she exclaims:

Non, Monseigneur, non; ce que vous serchez ne se peult faire, car, combien que je soye unger de terre au pris de vous, j'ay *mon honneur* si cher que j'*aymerois mieulx mourir*, que de l'avoir diminué, pour quelque plaisir que ce soit en ce monde. Et la *craincte* que j'ay de ceulx qui vous ont veu venir ceans, se doubans de ceste *verité*, me donne la *paour et tremblement* que j'ay. Et, puisqu'il vous plaist de me faire cest honneur de parler à moy, vous me pardonerez aussy, si je vous respond selon que *mon honneur me le commande*. (493, emphases mine)

Following Françoise's tale, the *devisantes* praise her as a new Lucretia.¹⁴ Saffredent, however, launches into a condemnation of hypocrisy among women who use honor to cover hard-hearted arrogance. Nonetheless, he concludes that true honor is a chaste heart, which loves out in the open (500). Longarine responds once again by affirming self-mastery as the highest ideal of feminine honor, with the martial language of victory.

These frank addresses by the *Heptaméron's* virtuous women engage the reader directly in the debate about honor that Marguerite de Navarre develops throughout her text. Despite contemporary feminine ideals of silence, patience, and resignation, these examples of women's *parrhēsia* offer a bold, assertive agency modeled on a mode of virtuous political speech that, from its origins, applied exclusively to men. As Colette Winn and others have shown, however, sometimes the *Heptaméron* prescribes silence.¹⁵ *Nouvelle* 4's

attempted rape of the Flemish princess portrays an active silencing by another female figure, the wise *dame d'honneur*. The tale's emphasis on the princess's strength and authority might therefore seem incongruous: during the attack, her physical strength appears equal to her male attacker's (121). When she realizes that he is trying to silence her, she redoubles her efforts and calls out to the older lady-in-waiting, scaring him off. Her immediate reaction is to seek his death by telling her brother the prince what he has attempted:

“Asseurez-vous que ce ne peult estre nul aultre que le seigneur de ceans, et que le matin je feray en sorte vers mon frere, que sa teste sera tesmoing de ma chasteté.” La dame d'honneur, la voiant ainsi courroucée, luy dist: “Ma dame, je suis très aise de l'amour que vous avez de vostre honneur, pour lequel augmenter vous ne voulez espargner la vie d'un qui l'a trop hazardée.” (122)

The princess's “great anger” and desire for bloody vengeance, followed by the lady-in-waiting's recognition that she is willing to take his life to defend her honor, mark hers as a traditionally aristocratic-heroic, *masculine* response. However, the lady-in-waiting convinces the princess to remain silent instead, arguing that any admission of the attack might damage her reputation.

Patricia Cholakian sees the older woman's advice as “a digest of all the arguments used to intimidate and silence rape victims. [...] Not only does it offer sound reasons for abandoning her resolution; it progressively erodes her sense of power.”¹⁶ However, the descriptions of the princess after she decides to keep her silence are not at all disempowered, but rather victorious. It is her attacker who loses his power instead:

Quant [...] il se retrouva devant sa victorieuse ennemye, ce ne fut sans rougir; et luy, qui estoit le plus audacieux de toute la court, fut sy estonné que souvent devant elle perdoit toute contenance. Parquoy fut toute assurée que son soupçon estoit vray; et peu à peu s'en estrangea, non pas si finement qu'il ne s'en apperceust très bien; mais il n'en osa faire semblant, de paour d'avoir encores pis; et garda cest amour en son cueur, avecq la patience de l'esloingnement qu'il avoit meritè. (126)

The tables have turned: whereas the princess is now the “victorious enemy,” “all assured” that her suspicions were correct, he instead blushes, no longer audacious but disconcerted and afraid. And, most tellingly, her attacker must accept her decision with *patience*, that traditional hallmark of women's honor. The princess and the *gentilhomme* have effectively exchanged expected gender roles. Consequently, the lady-in-waiting's advice can be read not as a stripping of agency, nor as a reminder of a woman's place, but rather as a criticism of the *masculine* aristocratic-heroic codes of honor, violent and

ungoverned, with which the princess initially responds. Instead, she chooses the self-mastery—with her silence as strategy—that the *Heptaméron* will foreground as central to women's honor throughout its tales.

Other men are also disempowered, inarticulate or discomfited before honor-driven women. After the virtuous-but-neglected young wife reproaches her *serviteur's* cowardice in *Nouvelle 15*, she, who began the conversation weeping at his abandonment, sends him away in tears instead (243). After she parrhesiastically defends her honor against her husband's accusations, he “se trouva tant surprins d'estonnement, qu'il ne sceut que luy respondre, sinon que l'honneur d'un homme et d'une femme n'estoient pas semblables” (251). This inarticulate, because-I-said-so response following her three-page soliloquy appears comically insufficient.

This husband is right, however, even though he cannot match her truth or her bold speech. The *Heptaméron* does indeed teach that a woman's honor is not the same as a man's, but it does not follow that hers should be weaker, less assertive or less well defended. Instead the tales criticize those elements of masculine honor—brutality, excess, and uncontrolled appetite—that define its vices. The core tenets of aristocratic heroism—a concern with reputation, virtue, self-mastery and with courage and audacity—belong as much to the tales' women as to its men. To none more so than the *Heptaméron's* author who, by mandating that her tales be true, lays claim to the same power of public speech allowed to men. In the end, her defense of women's honor against the risks she examines prove her no less bold nor frank than her truth-telling heroines.

Northwestern University

Notes

1. See Carla Freccero, “Rape's Disfiguring Figures: Marguerite de Navarre's *Heptameron*, Day 1:10,” in *Rape and Representation*, Lynn A. Higgins and Brenda R. Silver, eds. (New York: Columbia U P, 1991), 235; Madeleine Lazard, *Images littéraires de la femme à la Renaissance* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1985); Patricia Francis Cholakian, “Signs of the ‘Feminine’: The Unshaping of Narrative in Marguerite de Navarre's *Heptameron*, Novellas 2, 4, and 10,” in *Reconsidering the Renaissance*, Mario A. Di Cesare, ed. (Binghamton, NY: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1992), 238; Nicole Cazauran, “‘Honneste’, ‘honesteté’ et ‘honnêtement’ dans le langage de Marguerite de Navarre,” in *La catégorie de l'honneste dans la culture du XVIe siècle* (St-Étienne: Institut d'Études de la Renaissance et de l'Âge Classique, 1985), 163; Gary Ferguson, “Gendered Oppositions in Marguerite de Navarre's *Heptameron*: The Rhetoric of Seduction and Resistance in Narrative and Society,” in *Renaissance Women Writers: French Texts / American Contexts*, Anne R. Larsen and Colette H. Winn, eds. (Detroit: Wayne State U P, 1994), 143; Jean-Claude Carron, “Les noms de l'honneur féminin à la Renaissance: Le nom tu et le non dit,” *Poétique*, 67 (1986): 269.

2. Marguerite de Navarre, *L'Heptaméron*, Gisèle Mathieu-Castellani, ed. (Paris: Librairie Générale Française, 1999), 386.
3. Christine Martineau, in *L'homme de guerre au XVI^e siècle: Actes du Colloque de l'Association B.H.R., Cannes 1989* (Saint-Étienne: Publications de l'Université de Saint-Étienne, 1992), 316. See Freccero, "Rape's Disfiguring Figures," 232.
4. In *Nouvelle* 62, while telling the story of a rape, a young woman inadvertently identifies herself as the victim, thereby damaging her honor.
5. This attitude is shared at various points by Oisille and Ennasuite.
6. Laurel Hendrix notes "the paradox at the heart of the ideology of chastity, which grounds a woman's honor in the appearance of her sexual honor, while a man's honor is marked by his success in robbing a woman of her chastity, making a woman's honor the prize of conquest." Laurel Hendrix, "Reclaiming the Ornament of Wit: Laughter and the Double Standard of Honor in Marguerite de Navarre's *Heptameron*," *Thalia*, 18:1 (1998): 69.
7. Ullrich Langer, "Virtue of the Prince, Virtue of the Subject," in *Rethinking Virtue, Reforming Society: New Directions in Renaissance Ethics, c.1350–1650*, David A. Lines and Sabrina Ebbersmeyer, eds. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013), 316.
8. Dora E. Polachek, "Is It True or Is It Real? The Dilemma of Staging Rape in Marguerite de Navarre's *Heptaméron*," in *Violence in French and Francophone Literature and Film*, James Day, ed. (Amsterdam: Brill, 2008), 22.
9. Emily E. Thompson notes, "overall, the *devisants* find the desire for revenge legitimate and are highly sympathetic to characters who experience anger as a result of a loss of honor." Emily E. Thompson, "Playing with Fire: Narrating Angry Women and Men in the *Heptaméron*," *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 38:3 (2015): 167.
10. Colette H. Winn, "'La loi du non-parler' dans l'*Heptaméron* de Marguerite de Navarre," *Romance Quarterly*, 33: 2 (1986): 158.
11. *Parrhēsia* originated in Classical Athens as the democratic citizen's right to speak out in the Assembly and in courts of law. The two primary characteristics of *parrhēsia* are truth and risk. In Latin, the term became *licentia*; both the Greek and Latin were used in the sixteenth century, as for example in François Rabelais's *Gargantua* of 1534, which describes the unruly Parisians who "sont par nature et bons jureurs et bons jurists & quelque peu outrecuydés, [...] que sont dictz Parrhesiens en Grecisme, c'est-à-dire fiers en parler." François Rabelais, *Les cinq livres*, Jean Céard, Gérard Defaux, and Michel Simonin, eds. (Paris: Librairie générale française, 1994), 91.
12. In moments of parrhesiastic truth-telling, the *Heptaméron* contrasts its self-possessed heroines with their enraged, inarticulate antagonists: "La Roynne, voyant son visaige si constant et sa parole tant veritable, ne luy peut respondre par raison; et, en continuant de la reprendre et injurier par collere, se print à pleurer" (317, emphases added).
13. Mary B. McKinley notes, "The confession stories portray strong, maternal women rescuing vulnerable younger women from threatening paternal figures." Mary B. McKinley, "Telling Secrets: Sacramental Confession and Narrative Authority in the *Heptameron*," in *Critical Tales: New Studies of the Heptameron and Early Modern Culture*, John D. Lyons and Mary B. McKinley, eds. (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1993), 159.
14. See Carla Freccero, "Unwriting Lucretia: 'Heroic Virtue' in the *Heptaméron*," in *Heroic Virtue, Comic Infidelity: Reassessing Marguerite de Navarre's Heptaméron*, Dora E. Polachek, ed. (Amherst: Hestia Press, 1993), 77–89.
15. Winn, "'La loi du non-parler' dans l'*Heptaméron* de Marguerite de Navarre."
16. Patricia Francis Cholakian, *Rape and Writing in the Heptaméron of Marguerite de Navarre* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois U P, 1991), 27.