

ARTICLE

Ethos, Habit, and Class in Marguerite de Navarre's *Heptaméron*

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SUMMARY

Inspired by a conversation with Jean-Claude Carron following a panel at the 2015 KFLC, this study examines class and classism in Marguerite de Navarre's *Heptaméron* through the lens of habit and habitus in Aristotelian ethics. Playing a prominent role in ethical and theological writings of the evangelicals of Marguerite's generation, including Erasmus, Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples, and Rabelais, habit allows us to understand Marguerite's views on class with greater precision and affords us insights into the intersections between class and gender as well as the distinction between faith and works in Reformation-era soteriology.

KEYWORDS: Ethics, habit, custom, Marguerite de Navarre, Desiderius Erasmus, Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples, Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Pierre Bourdieu, *Heptaméron*, class

It might seem that this article and its author are out of place in a volume meant to honor Jean-Claude Carron. Ethics in Marguerite de Navarre is not a topic that lines up neatly with Jean-Claude's interests, and I was neither a student nor a close acquaintance of his. However, my peripheral status actually testifies to Jean-Claude's influence on the field, which went far beyond publications and supervised dissertations.¹ In fact, Jean-Claude serves as one of the best examples I know of how warmth and conviviality among colleagues can stimulate thought, a fact to which the genesis of the present study can attest.

Our first meeting came when François Rigolot invited him to Princeton to give a lecture and guest-teach his upper-level undergraduate seminar on the French Renaissance in the late 2000's when I was still in coursework for my doctorate, and the subsequent ones all came at conferences, usually the Sixteenth Century Society and Conference or the Renaissance Society of America. I have only the fondest memories of Jean-Claude and of how humble and welcoming he was to an unestablished *seiziémiste* such as myself. One memory stands out in particular: When I struck up a conversation with him during lunch at Skyline Chili at the SCSC in Cincinnati in 2012, it began with him wasting no time in reassuring me that I could use "tu" with him and quickly turned to talk of his dream retirement in Sonoma County surrounded by good food and wine. I often tended, and still do tend, to be awed by and hence reticent around eminent scholars, so while I have never mentioned it to him personally, I will say here how grateful I am that he put me at ease so readily.

It was at a different conference that Jean-Claude planted the seed for the present study, one which took a full eight years to germinate. At the 2015 KFLC, he was a participant in one of the panels in memory of Richard Regosin, who in life was a mainstay at that conference. The subject

of his talk was “Death and Desire in Marguerite de Navarre’s *Heptaméron*,” an obvious nod to Regosin’s work, but it was a remark he made during the ensuing discussion that had the most profound and lasting impact on me. Scholars of Marguerite tend to see the queen’s relationship with death in a favorable light: her longing for death and dissolution with the divine reflects the evangelical belief in the triumph of faith over the fear of death referred to *passim* in her works and expressed most elegantly by Clément Marot’s motto (“La mort ny mord”) and “Déploration de Florimond Robertet,” and therefore confirms her belief in a radical Pauline equality that transcends differences of gender and social class. Jeff Kendrick and I both said something along these lines, but Jean-Claude very gently reminded us that not all depictions of death in Marguerite’s works neatly mesh with this conception, a notable example being the death of Simontaut’s servants in the prologue of the *Heptaméron*. Resolved to ford the overflowing Gave, Simontaut mounts his horse and has his servants form a ring around him to break the current, but since their horses are less formidable than his own, they are all carried away, pulled under, and drowned along with their mounts, and Simontaut loses his own horse, barely managing to pull himself to safety on the other bank (Marguerite de Navarre, *Heptaméron* 6). When the other discussants learn that Simontaut has survived and joined Oisille at Notre-Dame-de-Sarrance, “[ils] eurent une joye inextimable, louans le Createur qui, en se contentant des serviteurs, avoit salvé les maistres et maistresses” (6) [“they were overjoyed beyond description. They praised their Creator that He had been satisfied to take the servants and save their masters and mistresses” (64)].² The servants’ deaths and the discussants’ indifference toward them might well be a sign of classism on Marguerite’s part that is both at odds with her Pauline Christianity and deeply distasteful to our modern sensibilities. As Jean-Claude put it, servants were not to be mourned because from an aristocratic point of view, they were seen as replaceable, an attitude that Ennasuite clearly seems to exhibit: “[...] pour perte des serviteurs ne se fault desesperer, car l’on en recouvre assez” (8) [“And as for losing servants, no need to despair about that – there are plenty of men ready to do service!” (66)].³ The working poor are literally and figuratively washed away, as if the sad fate they met in the service of their master were not worthy of even a moment’s thought (Cazauran 60).

As a member of what Richard Cooper would later come to call the “mafia margaritique,” I found myself forced to reckon with this observation: in my own work, was I seeing Marguerite as I wanted to see her or as she truly was? Jean-Claude is not the only scholar to have pointed out the queen’s apparent lack of concern for and generally dim vision of the lower classes, particularly those members of the Third Estate who, unlike merchants, professionals, and artisans, were forced to make a living through what is ungenerously and inaccurately deemed “unskilled labor,” including farmers, laborers, domestic servants, and peasants. Based on how few *nouvelles* of the *Heptaméron* feature members of the *petit peuple* in a starring role,⁴ one might get the sense that Marguerite scarcely paid them any attention at all, focusing instead on the nobility and to a lesser extent the bourgeoisie. For Nicole Cazauran, Nouvelle 5, which has a plucky ferrywoman as its heroine, is the lone instance in the collection where “pauvres gens” are taken seriously (45).

In recent years, however, more and more work has been done to challenge the image of a resolutely elitist Marguerite completely unconcerned with the plight of the lower classes. Dora Polachek has studied female alliances in the *Heptaméron*, including those which constitute examples of cooperation across the boundaries of social class, and Elizabeth Chesney Zegura devotes a chapter of her recent monograph on Marguerite to the ways in which her tales “draw our gaze to the plight and insights of the disadvantaged” (149). Far from sweeping the humblest members of sixteenth-century French society under the rug, Marguerite draws the reader’s

attention to them and the roles they play in her critiques of power and its abuses (Zegura 152–53).

It is in this context, and with gratitude toward Jean-Claude for forcing me to ask myself questions that have made me a better scholar, that I return to the problem of Marguerite’s views on class from an angle that aligns with my interest in Marguerite as a theological and ethical thinker. When we take class into consideration, what does it tell us about Marguerite’s conception of virtue? Does she really see her social inferiors as less virtuous than her fellow aristocrats, and if so, are they less virtuous by nature or due to the circumstances imposed upon them by their social milieu? To answer these questions, it is useful to turn to ethos as it was understood in the Aristotelian and Scholastic thought upon which Marguerite’s contemporaries drew in elaborating their own ethics.

Ethos and Habitus between Nature and Nurture

Aristotle defines excellence or virtue (ἀρετή) in Book 2 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*. For Aristotle, moral (ἠθικῆ)⁵ excellence is a product of ethos (ἔθος), meaning “custom” or “habit” (p. 1742, 1103a16–17).⁶ Ethos cannot override nature, but it can produce moral excellence that, while not incompatible with one’s nature, would not come about naturally: “Neither by nature, then, nor contrary to nature do excellences arise in us; rather, we are adapted by nature to receive them, and are made perfect by habit” (p. 1743, 1103a23–25). Consequently, moral excellence depends more upon the agent than upon the action itself: although excellence consists in just or temperate acts, acts cannot be just or temperate in and of themselves the same way that a sentence can be grammatically correct in and of itself. A sentence would still be grammatically correct even if someone with poor grammar happened to write it, but an act is only just or temperate when performed deliberately and in accordance with the agent’s “firm and unchangeable character” (p. 1746, 1105b1). Therefore, Aristotle defines excellence neither as a passion nor as a faculty, neither of which a person can choose to have, but as a state (ἔξις) that is developed through practice and becomes inherent (p. 1747, 1106a12).

In Latin translations of Aristotle, ἔθος is typically rendered as *consuetudo* and ἔξις is rendered as *habitus*; in his influential fourteenth-century French translation, Nicole Oresme renders them as “meurs” (which he glosses as “acoustumances” or “coustume”) and “habis,” respectively (f. 22r, f. 29r). In the *Summa Theologica*, Thomas Aquinas defines habit as “a disposition whereby someone is disposed, well or ill” (I-II, 49.2-3). This Scholastic understanding of habit as a disposition reflects its intermediary state: it is a practice that has become second nature and that predisposes us to future similar actions (Green 42). Accordingly, in his commentary on the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Jacques Lefèvre d’Étaples, the *tête pensante* of the Circle of Meaux that gathered under Marguerite’s protection in the early 1520’s, defines habitus as “dispositiones” (f. 49r) and as “acquisite qualitates” (f. 49v) [“acquired traits”] that are distinct from natural traits: “Nullus habitus nobis a natura insitus est” (f. a3v) [“No habitus is naturally inherent to us”].

Given how central habit is to the Aristotelian and Scholastic conception of ethics in general and social mores in particular, and given how the concept makes habituation and environmental conditioning even more of a deciding factor for behavior than nature, it should come as no surprise that it was coopted by the burgeoning fields of sociology and social history in the twentieth century. The Aristotelian notions of ethos and habitus find their way into Marcel Mauss’s account of bodily practices as well as Norbert Elias’s account of the “civilising process” in medieval

Western Europe, which he defines as the “psychogenesis of the adult habitus” in response to “the sociogenesis of our civilisation” (5). In a modern academic context, habitus is perhaps most closely associated with Pierre Bourdieu, who essentially takes an Aristotelian approach to structural sociology in an attempt to explain the behavior of social actors without having recourse either to mechanistic determinism – according to which all social actions are iterations of established norms, models, or roles that the sociologist must catalogue, as illustrated by the amusing example Bourdieu provides of an ethnologist who records 480 elementary units of behavior in 20 minutes of observing a woman in her kitchen – or to a subjective belief in free self-determination (178). Rather, he aims to uncover how environmental structures, such as the material conditions of existence associated with a certain social class, produce habitus, “systèmes de dispositions durables, structures structurées prédisposées à fonctionner comme structures structurantes” (175) [“systems of durable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures”]. What is striking is that Bourdieu, much like Aquinas and Lefèvre before him, defines habitus as a learned disposition that orients future actions, and like Aristotle, he connects it to ethos, “disposition générale et transposable qui, étant le produit de tout un apprentissage dominé par un type déterminé de régularités objectives, détermine les conduites ‘raisonnables’ ou ‘déraisonnables’ (les ‘folies’) pour tout agent soumis à ces régularités” (177) [“a general and transposable disposition that, as the product of an entire conditioning governed by objective consistencies, determines which forms of conduct are ‘reasonable’ or ‘unreasonable’ (‘follies’) for each agent subject to these consistencies”].

Bourdieu’s description of ethos as the product of training or conditioning (“apprentissage”) aligns with the importance accorded to habit in some of the better-known Renaissance educational treatises and literary depictions of education. In *De pueris instituendis*, Erasmus does not downplay the importance of inborn character (“natura”) to education, as some people have natural aversions to certain disciplines: “Sic natos non arbitror adversus Minervam compellendos” (411) [“I don’t think people who were born this way should be forced to study in spite of Minerva”].⁷ The same may be said of the kind of spiritual education Erasmus lays out in the *Enchiridion militis christiani*, in which he recommends against ignoring one’s natural inclinations (“Handbook” 68). Yet, if Erasmus acknowledges how powerful nature can be, he also states that education can overcome nature (*De pueris* 385). More precisely, he attributes ethos to three things: nature (“natura”), reason (“ratio”), which is tantamount to education, and practice (“exercitatio”): “Exercitationem dico usum ejus habitus quem natura insevrit, ratio provexit” (*De pueris* 401) [“By practice, I mean the use of the habitus that nature sows and reason carries forward”]. In Erasman pedagogy, habitus is where nature meets education and where theory becomes a practical ethos.⁸

Rabelais, a card-carrying Erasman if ever there was one, models Gargantua’s education on Erasmus’s *De pueris instituendis*, *De civilitate*, *De ratione studii*, and *De institutione principis christiani*, as well as on Guillaume Budé’s *L’Institution du Prince* and Juan-Luis Vives’s *De disciplinis*.⁹ As Nicolas Le Cadet points out, the French Lucian adds an original twist to the idea of liberal education expounded in these treatises by embodying them in Gargantua and Pantagruel, “heirs to a long line of cruel and fratricidal giants, and described as being real brats in their childhood” (283). In other words, Rabelais selects as his examples two characters whose very nature should be inimical to education and civility in order to underscore the power of ethos to overcome nature, and consequently, Gargantua’s education centers on the development of habits both good and bad. The bad habits he develops under the tutelage of the sophists Thubal Holofernes and Jobelin Bridé are washed away by a dose of hellebore administered by Maistre

Theodore at Ponocrates's behest: "et par ce medicament luy nettoya toute l'alteration et perverse habitude du cerveau" (ch. 33, p. 64) ["and by that medicament scoured out all the alteration and perverse habit of his brain" (Frame 55)]. Subsequently, Ponocrates develops new and better habits in Gargantua through continuous practice: "Ainsi fut gouverné Gargantua et continuoit ce procé de jour en jour, profitant comme entendez que peut faire un jeune homme selon son aage de bon sens, en tel exercice, ainsi continué" (ch. 34, p. 72) ["Thus was Gargantua governed, and he continued this procedure from day to day, profiting as you understand a young man may who has good sense, according to his age, in such practice thus continued" (Frame 61)].

Like Erasmus, however, Rabelais does not entirely dismiss the importance of nature to education, and if the Abbey of Thélème's only rule is "Fay ce que voudras" ["Do what you will"], it is because "gens liberaes, bien nez, bien instructz, conversans en compaignies honnestes ont par nature un instinct, et aguillon, qui tousjours les poulse à faictz vertueux, et retire de vice, lequel ilz nommoient honneur" (ch. 57, p. 149) ["people who are free, well born, well bred, moving in honorable social circles, have by nature an instinct and goad which always impels them to virtuous deeds and holds them back from vice, which they called honor" (Frame 126)]. It does not suffice to be "bien instructz" in order to develop the kind of habits that lead to moral excellence; one must also be "bien nez" and surrounded by "honneste" company. That is, one must be born noble and have the kind of upbringing and environment conducive to the development of a noble habitus. It is no accident, then, that Thélème is in fact an idealized vision of the French court to such an extent that the château of Chambord serves as its architectural model (Huchon, *Œuvres complètes* 1044); it is an anti-monastery (Le Cadet 292–93), not unlike the de facto church formed at Sarrance in the frame narrative of the *Heptaméron* by an "assemblée" (ἐκκλησία) of ten noblemen and noblewomen, all with connections to the royal family and the court (Duval 255, Ferguson and McKinley 331–33, Martineau-Génieys 24).

Habit and Women's Virtue in Nouvelle 5

Aside from their callous disregard for their servants' deaths, the discussants of the *Heptaméron*'s frame narrative seem to share Alcofrybas's opinion that moral excellence is the exclusive purview of their fellow aristocrats. They rarely speak of their inferiors, and when they do, they often portray them in an unflattering light that, in Zegura's words, "vilifies, minimizes, and objectifies the lower classes" (153), such as when Geburon observes in the discussion following Nouvelle 29 that criminals are all "pouvres gens et mecaniques" (279) ["poor people and artisans" (315)]. The handful of tales with "pouvres gens" as their protagonists are all short, comedic, and reminiscent of fabliaux, and at first glance, would seem to be nothing more than an opportunity for the aristocratic company to see how the other half lives and enjoy a laugh at their expense. Short and comedic though the tales may be, however, they provoke reflections among the discussants on the relationship between class and ethos and on whether moral excellence is determined by nature or by habit.

It is Geburon who narrates Nouvelle 5, the first tale of the collection to feature a *femme du peuple* as its protagonist, and he sets himself the goal of proving to the company that "tout le sens et la vertu des femmes n'est pas au cueur et en la teste des princesses" (42) ["it isn't only princesses who've got good sense in their heads and virtue in their heart" (97)]. The ferrywoman proves both virtuous, offering only "la responce qu'elle devoit" ["as was only right and proper, she refused to listen" (98)] to the pair of Franciscan friars who proposition her on a boat trip across the Sèvre

Niortaise, and sufficiently “sage et fine” [“sensible and shrewd” (98)] to trick them into marooning themselves on small islands in the middle of the river, which allows her to row to town and summon an angry mob to arrest them (42). In the same way that Oisille contrasts the “pouvre muletierre” [“poor mule-driver’s wife” (81)] of Nouvelle 2 with “nous, qui sommes de bonne maison” (25) [“we, who are all of good birth” (81)], Geburon contrasts the ferrywoman’s praiseworthy conduct with that of high-born women like those in the company:

Je vous pryé, Mesdames, pensez, sy ceste povvre bateliere a eu l’esprit de tromper deux sy malicieux hommes, que doibvent faire celles qui ont tant leu et veu de beaux exemples qu’il est impossible qu’elles ne soient femmes de bien, quant il n’y auroict que la honte des vertueuses dames qui ont passé devant leurs yeulx; en sorte que la vertu des femmes bien nourries se doit autant appeller coustume que vertu. Mais de celles qui ne sçavent rien, qui n’oyent quasy en tout l’an deux bons sermons, qui n’ont le loysir que de penser à gagner leur povvre vye, et qui, sy fort pressées, gardent tant songneusement leur chasteté, c’est là où se congnoist la vertu qui est nayfvement dans le cueur; car là où le sens et la force de l’homme est estimé moindre, c’est là où l’esprit de Dieu faict de plus grandes euvres. (44–45).

[Now consider this story carefully, Ladies. We have here a humble ferrywoman who had the sense to frustrate the evil intentions of two vicious men. What then ought we to expect from women who all their lives have seen nothing but good examples, read of nothing but good examples, and, in short, had examples of feminine virtue constantly paraded before them? If well-bred¹⁰ women are virtuous, is it not just as much a matter of custom as of virtue? But it’s quite another matter if you’re talking about women who have no education, who probably don’t hear two decent sermons in a year, who have time for nothing but thinking how to make a meagre living, and who, in spite of all this, diligently resist all pressures in order to preserve their chastity. It is in the heart of such women as these that one finds pure virtue, for in the hearts of those we regard as inferior in body and mind the spirit of God performs his greatest works (100).]

The contrast that Geburon draws hinges on habit: as a result of their education (“celles qui ont tant leu et veu de beaux exemples”) and upbringing (“bien nourries”), noblewomen should have a much easier time preserving their chastity than a “pouvre bateliere.” Presumably, the latter’s lack of access to education, limited exposure to edifying sermons (a chief concern of Marguerite and of the entire generation of evangelicals), and pressing need to scrape by any way she can should have made her disposed toward welcoming the friars’ advances, whereas women of nobler birth, like Rabelais’s Thélémites, are so habitually predisposed toward protecting their honor that it is practically impossible for them not to be good women. Marguerite’s ethics, encapsulated in Geburon’s aphorism that “la vertu des femmes bien nourries se doit autant appeler coustume que vertu,” diverge from Aristotelian ethics in their conception of virtue. For Aristotle and for authors who draw on the *Nicomachean Ethics*, virtue is a state created by habit or custom. For Marguerite, habit or custom can create a state of being, but this state cannot truly be considered virtuous even if it corresponds to the standards for moral excellence of a given society or social class.

As a result, praiseworthy conduct on the part of noblewomen is not tantamount to virtue, a point driven home by Longarine’s skeptical reaction to the tale: “Il me semble, Geburon, que ce n’est pas grant vertu de reffuser ung cordelier, mais que plus tost seroit chose impossible de les

aymer” (45) [“If you ask me, Geburon,’ observed Longarine, ‘there’s nothing very virtuous in rejecting the advances of a friar. I don’t know how anyone could possibly feel any affection at all for them” (100)]. In stating that refusing the advances of a friar is not an excellence, but an inevitability, Longarine is effectively agreeing with Geburon’s description of aristocratic women’s virtue as a habit, as he subtly reminds her in his rejoinder:

Longarine, ce luy respondit il, celles qui n’ont point acoustumé d’avoir de sy honnestes serviteurs que vous ne treuvent point facheux les cordeliers, car ilz sont hommes aussy beaux, aussy fortz et plus repousez que nous autres, qui sommes tous cassez du harnoy; et sy parlent comme anges, et sont importuns comme dyables, parquoy celles qui n’ont veu robes que de bureau sont bien vertueuses, quand elles eschappent de leurs mains. (45)

[“Longarine,” he replied, “women who are not so used as you are to having refined gentlemen serve them find friars far from unpleasant. They’re often just as good-looking as we are, just as well-built and less worn out, because they’ve not been knocked about in battle. What is more, they talk like angels and are as persistent as devils. That’s why I think that any woman who’s seen nothing better than the coarse cloth of monks’ habits should be considered extremely virtuous if she manages to escape their clutches” (100–1).]

At first glance, it seems that Geburon is comparing Longarine to the lowly ferrywoman and her ilk, who, unlike Longarine and other noblewomen, are not accustomed to noble lovers who dress in finery and obey a courtly code of conduct. Yet, Geburon’s repetition of the vocabulary of habit (“acoustumé”), as well as the ambiguity of the pronoun “celles,” which could denote either *femmes du peuple* or noblewomen with less discriminating tastes than Longarine, suggests that his goal is not only to prove that the ferrywoman’s actions were truly virtuous, but also to caution Longarine against misplaced faith in the virtue she believes to be her birthright. In fact, Geburon might even be implying that if Longarine herself had not grown accustomed to a certain kind of love life, she, too, might find friars appealing.¹¹

If Hircan, Simontaut, or Saffredent said this (and especially Saffredent, given that he is Longarine’s *serviteur*), we could take it with a grain of salt as yet another misogynistic witticism in the service of seduction, another coded attempt to convince certain ladies of the company that they should grant the *don de merci* to the speaker instead of persisting in the charade of honor and virtue (Frélick 331). However, Marguerite places this criticism in the mouth of Geburon, who has no clear amorous agenda and who, along with Dagoucin, is the male discussant likeliest to defend women and put the ladies on guard against the kind of blandishments employed by Hircan, Simontaut, and Saffredent (Cholakian 60). She also has Geburon ground his interpretation in the evangelical and Protestant tenet of *soli Deo gloria*, both in the narration and in the ensuing discussion. He holds the ferrywoman up as an example of how all good in human beings results not from their own efforts, but from divine grace: since her habits predisposed her to vice, her virtuous behavior must be a natural trait (“la vertu qui est nayfvement dans le cueur”) conferred upon her by God. Fittingly, the ferrywoman gives all credit for her escape from the friars’ clutches to God: “Et, en entrant au villaige, va appeller son mary et ceulx de la justice pour venir prendre ces deux loups enragez, dont, par la grace de Dieu, elle avoit eschappé les dentz” (43) [“As soon as she landed on the other side, she went into the village, fetched her husband and called out the officers of the law to go and round up these two ravenous wolves, from whose jaws she had just by the grace of God been delivered” (99)]. The ferrywoman thus serves as an example of the

Pauline inversion so dear to Marguerite in which God strengthens the weak and weakens the strong in order to make the work of grace manifest (Ferguson, “Mal vivre” 163), but we might wonder whether this inversion leaves the social hierarchy and the class biases that surround it intact.

From a certain standpoint, it does, as Geburon’s argument hinges upon the assumption that commoners, unlike aristocrats, could not possibly develop virtuous habits on their own. Needless to say, this is a view that tells us more about how the people were perceived by the nobility than about actual social mores among the people, and Patricia Cholakian is not wrong to claim that *Nouvelle 5* is “an elitist text, aimed at an educated and privileged minority,” one which does not truly account for the material realities of everyday life that might compel lower-class women to act dishonorably by aristocratic standards (62–63). At the same time, however, the *nouvelle* does more than simply hold up its heroine as a “sign of Everywoman” meant to shame the ladies of the company into not letting themselves be outdone by their social inferiors (Cholakian 61). It is a text that reflects the noble mindset and that is meant for a noble audience, but its radical separation of habit from virtue calls the social hierarchy and the aristocratic sense of superiority into question on a profound level. Nobles might pride themselves on their conduct and hold themselves in higher regard than the lower classes on account of it, but from the standpoint of Marguerite’s ethics, what they believe to be their own virtue is nothing more than the customs imparted to them by their education and social milieu, a “structure structurante” that orients their behavior, as Bourdieu would put it. From an evangelical perspective, the aristocratic ethos cannot be virtuous precisely because it is developed through human means, and to take pride in it is to make oneself vulnerable to the deadly sin of presumption, or *cuyder* as it is typically called in Marguerite’s idiolect.¹² In this way, *Nouvelle 5* serves as an example of how, as Philippe de Lajarte succinctly puts it, Marguerite’s Christian worldview ultimately prevails over aristocratic ideology in the *Heptaméron* (205).

Habit and Male Sexual Prowess in Nouvelle 29

The fact that Geburon calls the virtue of aristocratic women into question by way of comparison to a “pauvre bateliere” in *Nouvelle 5*, much like Oisille does in *Nouvelle 2* by way of comparison to a “pauvre muletierre,” serves as a reminder of how attitudes toward class and gender intersect in the *Heptaméron*. In a reading of *Nouvelle 42*, Gary Ferguson has shown how Françoise, a bourgeois woman (albeit one raised around the high nobility), acts in accordance with bourgeois morality and its characteristic principles, such as deferred enjoyment and future investment, in the virtuous resistance she offers to the persistent advances of a certain handsome young prince (a young François d’Angoulême). Françoise thus serves as an example of how, for Marguerite, female morality is more egalitarian with respect to social class than male morality, which has different standards for different classes (Ferguson, “Gendered Oppositions” 154–55). To choose but one example, a rape committed by a valet in *Nouvelle 2* or the various forms of sexual misconduct on the part of churchmen throughout the collection come as no surprise whatsoever to the discussants, whereas they are much likelier to defend or justify actions perpetrated by a nobleman, such as the gentleman’s attempted rape of the princess of Flanders in *Nouvelle 4*. To Ferguson’s observations, I would add that *Nouvelle 29*, one of the rare instances of a tale devoted entirely to the lower classes and one of the most overtly classist tales at first glance, addresses this double standard by revealing that refined tastes and conduct in love, one of the greatest points of pride for French noblemen in the Ancien Régime, is merely a product of habit. *Nouvelle 29* does to male aristocratic pride what *Nouvelle 5* does to female aristocratic pride, and it also does it by

way of contrast with the lowlier members of society.

In the tale, a peasant's promiscuous wife is nearly caught cavorting with the parish curate when her husband returns home early. The priest manages to hide in the attic directly above the trapdoor leading to it, and the wife gives her husband so much food and drink that he passes out next to the fire after a hard day's labor. Growing impatient, the priest leans on the trapdoor to see if the coast is clear; he then comes tumbling down at the peasant's feet along with a winnowing basket. The sleeper awakes, but the priest cleverly claims to be simply returning the basket and beats a hasty retreat, leaving the husband none the wiser that he has been cuckolded and only somewhat annoyed at how rudely the priest returned his basket to him.

The *nouvelle* is narrated by Nomerfide, who remains true to her self-professed tendency toward short, comedic tales (471). She offers up the tale as a response to Nouvelle 28, in which the clever Gascon merchant Bernard du Ha puts one over on Jean, a hapless secretary of the queen of Navarre (Marguerite herself), and frames her variation on the comedic motif of trickery around class:

Je ne m'esbahys point, sy amour donne, aux princes et aux gens nourriz en lieu d'honneur, les moyens de se saulver du danger, car ilz sont nourriz avecques tant de gens sçavans que je m'esmerveillerois beaucoup plus, s'ilz estoient ignorans de quelque chose. Mais l'invention d'amour se monstre plus clairement que moings il y a d'esprit aux subjectz. Et pour cella, vous veulx je compter ung tour que fist ung prebste apprins seulement d'amour, car de toutes choses estoit il sy ignorant que à peine savoit il lire sa messe. (277)

[It's not surprising to me, Ladies, that love should inspire princes and people brought up in noble circumstances with the means to escape from danger. After all, such people are brought up surrounded by learned people, and I'd be more surprised if there was anything they were ignorant of. No, the resourcefulness that comes from being in love shows all the more clearly when the person is lacking in native wit. To demonstrate this, I shall tell you a tale about a trick perpetrated by a priest – a priest whose only teacher was love, for the man was so ignorant in all other matters that he was scarcely capable of reading his masses (312–13).]

Nomerfide's observation that princes and others with honorable upbringings ("gens nourriz en lieu d'honneur") are well-equipped to deal with risks incurred in the pursuit of sex corresponds to earlier tales in the collection, such as Nouvelles 16 and 25. It also reveals the role played by habit in the discussants' understanding of behavior in social situations: resourcefulness and intelligence are second nature to the well-born, so much so that it would come as a surprise if one of them didn't know how to do what was necessary. Nomerfide's words echo Geburon's observation in the discussion following Nouvelle 5 that it is impossible for noblewomen not to be "femmes de bien." Contrariwise, it comes as a shock to see inventiveness and discretion in low-born individuals lacking in education like the parish priest who, in keeping with a comedic trope found in other short story collections like the *Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles* of Philippe de Vigneulles or the *Nouvelles Récréations et Joyeux Devis* of Bonaventure des Périers, barely knows any Latin at all despite it being required to perform masses.¹³

It is education, upbringing, and the habits they develop that distinguish nobles from their

inferiors in Nomerfide's moral. The only reason why the priest was able to act as cleverly as he did was because Love (or perhaps the Devil) acted through him in an inversion of God's grace allowing the ferrywoman to escape from the friars or the mule-keeper's wife to resist her attacker with heroic resolve: "Mesdames, le Maistre qu'il servoit le saulva pour ceste heure là, affin de plus longuement le posseder et tourmenter!" (279) ["So, Ladies, the master he served saved him on that occasion, but only so that he could possess and torment him the longer in the future" (315)]. In a similar vein, while Parlamente is not at all shocked to find wickedness among the low-born, she does register surprise that "l'amour les tourmente parmy le travail qu'ilz ont d'autres choses, et que en ung cueur vilain une passion sy gentille se puisse mectre" (279) ["love should trouble them when they have their energies taken up by so many other things. It's extraordinary that so noble a passion can find its way into such vulgar hearts!" (315)]. Her belief that her inferiors are incapable of love hinges partly on their nature — an emotion as noble as love does not belong in a "cueur vilain" — but principally on their living conditions ("le travail qu'ilz ont d'autres choses"), which echoes Geburon's observation that commoners like the ferrywoman "n'ont le loysir que de penser à gagner leur povere vye." Quite simply, the material conditions of their existence should not make them predisposed toward love, or at least love as a noblewoman like Parlamente understands it. Saffredent's ensuing explanation that the low-born do indeed know love also hinges upon the material realities of everyday life:

Car, tout ainsy que les povere gens n'ont pas les biens et les honneurs que nous avons, aussy ont ilz les commoditez de nature plus à leur ayse que nous n'avons. Ilz n'ont pas les viandes sy friandes, mais ilz ont meilleur appétit, et se nourrissent myeux de gros pain que nous de restorans. Ilz n'ont pas les lictz sy beaux, ne bien faitz que les nostres, mais ilz ont le sommeil meilleur que nous et le repoz plus grant. Ilz n'ont pas les dames painctes et parées dont nous ydolatrions, mais ilz ont la joyissance de leur plaisir plus souvent que nous, et sans craindre les parolles, synon des bestes et des oyseaulx qui les voyent. Brief, en ce que nous avons, ils deffailent, et, en ce que nous n'avons, ilz habondent. (279–80)

[True, poor folk don't have the wealth or the same marks of distinction that we do, but they do have freer access to the commodities of Nature. Their food may not be quite so delicate, but they have better appetites, and they get more nourishment on coarse bread than we do on our delicate diets. They don't have fine beds and linen like we do, but they have better sleep and deeper rest than we. They don't have fine ladies with their make-up and elegant clothes like the ones we idolize, but they have their pleasure more often than we do, and they don't need to worry about wagging tongues, except perhaps for the birds and animals who happen to see them. In short, everything that we have, they lack, and everything we lack, they have in abundance (315–16).]

One could accuse Saffredent of spinning a convenient fantasy about the simple life and the guiltless pleasure it affords that aligns with the kind of seductive rhetoric he employs elsewhere in the frame narrative.¹⁴ Nevertheless, his conception of class hinges upon habit rather than upon inborn nature: if peasants love differently, it is because they live differently.

Saffredent's observation that the kind of love seen in the tale is not "celle qui fait porter le harnois" (279) ["the kind that brings trials and tribulations" (315)] is one in a series of expressions of sexual anxiety on the part of aristocratic men, as Jeff Persels has shown. Much like Geburon contrasts friars with "nous autres, qui sommes tous cassez du harnois" in his reply to

Longarine following Nouvelle 5, Saffredent holds up military service (represented metonymically by the “harnois,” or suit of armor) as the defining criterion of the noble warrior ethos and of courtly love service: if noblemen willingly expose themselves to the dangers and hardships of war, it is not only out of a sense of duty to king and country, but out of a desire to please and honor their ladyloves. And yet, Saffredent’s obvious pride in this heroic virtue is tinged with anxiety that noblewomen might find lower-class lovers more attractive than him and his fellow noblemen (Persels 95–97). It is an attempt to exclude the low-born from aspiration to courtly love that has its sources in Andreas Cappellanus’s *De amore*, but one which reveals that conduct in love is a matter of custom rather than of virtue. Noblemen only distinguish themselves in love by force of habit, and in fact, Nomerfide’s narration suggests that many of them are indistinguishable from the lower classes with respect to sexual mores. The priest’s fornication becomes the object of their opprobrium, but the only reason the peasant’s wife takes the priest as a lover in the first place is because she has exhausted all the better options: “Et, quant les gentilzhommes et gens d’apparence luy failloient, elle retourna à son dernier recours, qui estoit l’eglise” (277) [“When she ran out of men of gentle birth and other worthy individuals, she turned to her last resource – the Church” (314)]. The phenomenon of noblemen and noblewomen choosing sexual partners beneath their station is not unique to this *nouvelle*, either, as it is a prominent plot point in Nouvelles 20 and 37. The male discussants might be inclined to deride the priest in the same way that Longarine and Nomerfide are nonplussed by the ferrywoman’s ability to resist the allure of friars, but it is only because they cannot bring themselves to recognize that the only thing separating them from him is habit.

Habit and the Practice of Piety in Nouvelle 65

If the discussants remain profoundly classist despite their insights, it is because class distinctions, like gender distinctions, are an inevitable part of the postlapsarian world for Marguerite. She reveals a radical Pauline equality occluded by the accretions of habits associated with different social classes, acknowledging that this radical equality can only come about in Heaven. By way of conclusion, I would also like to suggest that for Marguerite, habit is not just something that humans mistake for true virtue and therefore an obstacle to faith. As Lefèvre makes clear in his commentary on 1 Timothy 4, habit and practice can play a key role in salvation: “Qui his doctrinis immanet, qui in his se exercet, ad pietatem se exercet, quae ad omnia valet, et ad propriam et ad aliorum salutem et ad praesentem et ad futuram vitam” (f. 208r) [“Anyone who abides by these teachings and practices them practices piety, which is good for everything: one’s own salvation and that of others, and our present and future lives”]. Just such an example figures in Nouvelle 65, narrated by Geburon. It is a *nouvelle* that I have discussed extensively in the context of Reformation-era controversy over forms of popular devotion, arguing that Marguerite aligns with Erasmus and Lefèvre in her understanding of ceremonies (aspects of Catholic devotion without explicit biblical precedent that Protestants deem idolatrous) as indifferent matters, or *adiaphora*, that the faithful should be free to practice out of sincere faith grounded in evangelical tenets (Francis, “*Adiaphora and Intention*” and “*Pèlerinages*”). What I have not discussed thus far, however, is the centrality of class to the tale and its lesson regarding attitudes toward popular devotion.

Geburon frames the tale as one of foolish popular superstition in which a poor woman “fist le contraire de ce qu’elle vouloit” (463) [“ended up with something she hadn’t intended” (497)]. This, of course, consists of trying to place a lit votive candle on the forehead of a sleeping soldier

in the church of Saint-Jean in Lyon, whom she has mistaken for one of the statues of soldiers guarding the church's rendition of the Holy Sepulcher. When the "statue" screams in pain, she cries out that a miracle has occurred. This "sottise d'une femme" ["one woman's stupidity" (498)], as Geburon puts it, greatly amuses onlookers, with the exception of the church's priests, who are hoping to cash in on the phony miracle and the pilgrimages and donations it would inevitably attract (464).

Much like in Nouvelle 5, Geburon holds the old lady up as an example of how what appears to be virtue is often anything but: "Si chacun les congnoissoit telles qu'elles sont, leurs sotties ne seroient pas estimées sainttété, ne leurs malices verité" (464) ["If everyone recognized their stupidity, they would not be thought so saintly, nor would their miracles be taken for the truth" (498)]. He drives home this message in his narration, referring to the old lady as "une bonne vieille," "la bonne dame," and "la bonne femme," playing on the polysemy of "bon homme/bonne femme," which could mean either "paysan/paysanne" [peasant/peasant woman] or "homme/femme de bien" [good man/good woman] (Greimas and Keane, "bon," p. 68). For Geburon, what might seem to be the behavior of a good and pious woman is in fact the bad habit of a foolish and unenlightened peasant who has not been made wise to the superfluity of ceremonies and the ecclesiastical abuses that surround them; his description of her as saying "ses devotions" with votive candle in hand implies that this is a regular and indeed habitual practice on her part (464). Hircan, Saffredent, and Dagoucin echo this sentiment, with the latter dismissing ceremonies as pabulum for "pouvres sottés" (465) ["poor stupid women" (499)].

Oisille is the only discussant to come to the old woman's defense, arguing that the good intentions she likely had are more important than the nature of the devotional practice itself and comparing her to the poor widow of Luke 21:1–4 whose gift of her last two mites pleases Christ more than the lavish gifts of the rich: "Dieu ne regarde point la valeur du present, mais le cuer qui le presente" (464) ["God does not look to the value of the present," said Oisille, "but to the heart that presents it" (499)]. Whereas the male discussants argue that ceremonies are not a virtue, but a vice, Oisille argues that while they are not a virtue in and of themselves, they constitute a practice that can spring from a nature made good by faith. Her defense resonates with the distinction between inner and outer man (*homo interior/exterior*) that is key to the soteriology of both nonschismatic reformers like Erasmus and Lefèvre and schismatic reformers like Luther.

While Erasmus is highly critical of ceremonies in the *Enchiridion* and elsewhere, as they are part of outer man and therefore of the flesh, he does not unilaterally condemn "corporales cerimonias Christianorum et studia simplicium" (*Enchiridion* 198) ["external ceremonies of Christians and the devotions of the simple-minded" ("Handbook" 73–74)], instead seeing them as a means of "[...] gradually accustoming ourselves" ["si sensim assuescamus" (*Enchiridion* 182)] to seek spiritual goods rather than worldly ones ("Handbook" 66). In *On the Freedom of a Christian*, Luther equates faith with the inner man and works with the outer man, but stresses that works are an essential means of practicing faith in a postlapsarian world where it is impossible to be purely spiritual:

Quanquam homo (ut dixi) intus secundum spiritum per fidem abunde satis iustificetur, habens quicquid habere debet, nisi quod hanc ipsam fidem et opulentiam oportet de die in diem augescere usque in futuram vitam, tamen manet in hac vita mortali super terram, in qua necesse est, ut corpus suum proprium regat et cum hominibus conversetur. Hic iam

incipiunt opera: hic non est ociandum: hic certes curandum, ut corpus ieiuniis, vigiliis, laboribus aliisque disciplinis moderatis exerceatur et spiritui subdatur ut homini interiori et fidei obediat et conformis sit, nec ei rebellet aut ipsum impediat, sicut est ingenium eius, si coercitus non fuerit. (*De libertate* 19)

[Although through faith a man is sufficiently justified internally, in regard to the soul, and has everything that he should have (though this faith and sufficiency always ought to increase until the next life), nevertheless he still remains on earth during this physical life and must rule his own body and interact with people. Here now works begin. He must not be idle; indeed, his body must be disciplined and trained with fasts, vigils, labors, and with every reasonable correction, such that it becomes obedient and in conformity to the internal man and to faith, rather than that it hinder or resist them, as it its way when it is not constrained (“Freedom” 31)].

Habitual devotions like fasts and vigils might be purely external and unable to justify in and of themselves, but faith and the inner man depend upon them to survive in this world. It is the same for Marguerite: virtuous behavior may be a mere function of habit, but it can serve as a *pis aller*, an acceptable, albeit imperfect means of living according to faith.

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Notes

¹ This is to say nothing of how useful some of Jean-Claude's work has been for my own research and teaching. As I and other contributors to this volume can attest, *François Rabelais: Critical Assessments* is a landmark in the secondary literature on Rabelais, and when I teach Théodore de Bèze's *Abraham Sacrifiant* in my graduate seminar on theater and polemics in the French Renaissance, I assign his invaluable study, "*Abraham sacrifiant* de Théodore de Bèze: Exil et propaganda évangéliques au XVI^e siècle."

² All quotations of the *Heptaméron* in the original Middle French are from Renja Salminen's edition. All bracketed English translations are P. A. Chilton's. All other translations, except where otherwise indicated, are mine.

³ At the same time, this line might be less a reflection of Ennasuite's attitude toward her social inferiors than a play on the double meaning of "serviteur" as "servant" and "courtly lover"; paired with her observation that unlike Longarine, the other members of the company haven't lost their husbands, it may be read as a subtle nod to the tangled web of courtly love service relationships between the discussants.

⁴ Nouvelles 5, 29, 34, 52, and 65.

⁵ In this context, "moral" should be understood as referring to mores; to have "moral excellence" means to be well-mannered.

⁶ In references to Aristotle, the second set of numbers correspond to the page, column, and line numbers in Immanuel Bekker's standard reference edition of Aristotle's works.

⁷ Cf. *Adages*, "Invita Minerva" (I.i.42).

⁸ Jean-Claude Margolin points out that Erasmus's concept of habitus comes from Aristotle (532, n. 428). He also points out that habit is one of the driving forces behind Erasmian psychology and pedagogy (531, n. 424).

⁹ For more on Erasmus as a source for Rabelais's ideas on education, see Weinberg.

¹⁰ My correction: Chilton erroneously renders "bien nourries" as "well-fed."

¹¹ For Betty Davis, this exchange confirms that Geburon knows the details of Longarine's personal life and the identity of her *serviteurs*, and he "may even be an admirer of the young widow himself" (144). These claims are hypothetical at best; there are no clear signs that Geburon is aware of the relationship between Longarine and Saffredent, as the latter proves very resourceful at flirting with Longarine in a way that only she recognizes, and it is far-fetched to read Geburon's exchange with Longarine following Nouvelle 5 as flirtatious.

¹² According to the eleventh rule of Erasmus's *Enchiridion*, the faithful are faced with two dangers: succumbing to temptation and becoming proud if they overcome temptation ("Handbook" 106).

¹³ Nouvelle 4 of the *Cent Nouvelles Nouvelles* of Philippe de Vigneulles relates the misadventures of “ung bon simple prebtre lequel estoit assés riches des biens de fortune, mais despourveu estoit de toute clergie et moins que à ung prebtre n’aparenoit, car il ne sçavoit ne n’entendoit comme point de latin” (69) [“a good, simple priest who was rich in material goods, but poor in every kind of learning, more so than is fitting for a priest, for he scarcely knew or could understand any Latin at all”]. Having been instructed by his archpriest to prepare a meal that is “bonum et modicum” [“good and modest”] for the archbishop of Metz, the priest ends up butchering and serving his beloved donkey, whose name happens to be Modicum. Nouvelle 22 of the *Nouvelles Récréations* features a newly ordained priest, Messire Jehan, who substitutes “Jesus” for the many words he cannot make out in his reading of the Gospels during masses, prompting a visiting gentleman to observe that “l’evangile du jour’huy estoit fort devotieux. Il y avoit beaucoup de Jesus” (107) [“Today’s Gospel reading was very devout; Jesus’s name came up a lot”].

¹⁴ See, for example, his equation of women’s honor with hypocrisy and fiction in the discussion following Nouvelle 42 (358).