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“The Truth Will Out”: Blushing, Involuntary Confession and Self-knowledge in the *Heptaméron*¹

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Dans un texte envahi par les allusions aux confessions et aux désirs charnels, est-il possible de réconcilier le corps pris en flagrant délit de sensualité avec le désir de contrôle et de spiritualité? Cet article explore la signification du rougissement en tant que confession involontaire de la chair dans l'Heptaméron (1559) de Marguerite de Navarre. On explore d'une part l'idée du corps commettant un lapsus à l'aide des écrits augustinien impliquant les tensions entre le spirituel et le charnel. On utilise d'autre part, en tant qu'outil herméneutique, les lectures de Foucault sur la confession. À travers un processus de confession en trois étapes — sacramentelles et involontaires — on met en lumière et analyse attentivement la problématique des différentes conséquences du rougissement dans cette œuvre; certaines conduisant à une meilleure connaissance de soi-même, et d'autres conduisant à la catastrophe.

For the reader of the early modern body, the key to a hermeneutic investigation of a passage often hinges not on grotesque displays or obvious deviations from the norm, but on seemingly trivial gestures or bodily signs such as the blush. Behind the visceral expression of a sudden and spontaneous blush, for example, lies a history of complex signification and an accompanying set of textual, social, and carnal implications. Its literary manifestations in early modern literature push this bodily sign deeper: to the very core of shame and the movements of the disobedient flesh. Ultimately, the exteriorization of a blush, or any other physical confession of the flesh, signals a lack of self-control over the flesh and has far-reaching repercussions for the ways in which we read the early modern body. Many polemical writers of the early modern period created complex manuals for interpreting gestures, facial expressions, and tears, identifying these and others as symptomatic and recognizable behaviours. Such scientific classifications and attempts to diagnose somatics reflect the increasing focus on the body at the same time as they perpetuate and multiply the hermeneutic possibilities of discourse. So while philosophers such as Descartes argue that the body and the soul can be classified and placed into a hierarchy, with

an overarching goal of overcoming the passions,² they are simultaneously, and with dialogic ardour, advancing the production of self- and carnal knowledge.³

This paper will enhance current readings of the nascent interior and exterior boundaries of the early modern body, a discourse which reflects sixteenth- and seventeenth-century discursive production. Drawing on, problematizing, and extending on Michel Foucault's work on confession,⁴ the paper posits a three-step system that situates the blush within a closed system of self-knowledge. Moreover, I will contend that the relationship between the interior self and its manifestation on the body stems back to theological and philosophical discussions of original sin, commentaries which can be traced all the way back to Saint Augustine of Hippo (354–430).⁵ Scholars have often slighted the carnal and hermeneutic implications of such signs as blushing, instead preferring to make the link between bodily signs and the dissimulative early modern court culture.⁶ Courtly dissimulation is indeed an important context in which to place involuntary confessions.⁷ However, a profound study of somatic self-control must extend beyond the limits of a specific context, such as the early modern court, to the more elusive realm of truth-seeking from theological, social, and literary perspectives.

What kind of knowledge arises from a blush? At what stage of confession is knowledge produced? After looking at the “three steps” of confession, we can proceed with a greater sense of the epistemological and hermeneutic challenges involved in reading the flesh out of control: in a text integrally bound up with and illustrative of the alignments between the blush, involuntary confession, and self-knowledge. Marguerite de Navarre's *Heptaméron* (1559), a novella collection nearly bursting at the seams with voluntary and involuntary confessions,⁸ juxtaposes narrative slips such as the blush with spiritual and carnal elements within the frame story. Aside from the explicit use of Saint Augustine as a subtext for her work, my reading of blushes in the *Heptaméron* nuances the current reading of Marguerite de Navarre as devoted mystic writer.

The three steps of confession and Foucault's *Aveux de la chair*

Michel Foucault investigates the challenges of the spasmodic flesh in his *Histoire de la sexualité*. In the first volume, *La volonté de savoir* (1976), he describes the origins of mandatory sacramental confession in the thirteenth century⁹ as part of his broader exploration of power, knowledge, and the body in early modern France and beyond. As interest in the confessing body of the individual increased, so did attention to what Foucault calls *aveux de la chair* (27–28): fleshy, unspoken signs that can be read

on the body and reveal hidden desires.¹⁰ Elsewhere, Foucault addresses the blush specifically, positing that passionate shame initiates the blush in a confession. It is the blush, he continues, the sign of this involuntary movement in our thought process, that helps us to sort through and decipher the "mysteries of our consciousness" (*Government* 157). Blushing, he posits, serves as a sort of hermeneutic clue in the process of deciphering the code of our interior thoughts: "if one blushes in recounting them [thoughts], if even quite simply one hesitates to tell one's thoughts, that is proof that those thoughts are not good as they may appear" (*Hermeneutics* 178). Confessions of the flesh, then, as Foucault begins to describe them in *La volonté de savoir* and as we can glimpse from his lectures on *Aveux de la chair*, must be discerned in an interior process of sorting and in an exterior process of verbalization. While physical involuntary confessions of the flesh such as blushing are not institutionalized or enforced with the same sense of urgency involved in sacramental confession, the models upon which the two are built function similarly. In the case of sacramental confession, "on avoue," Foucault writes, "ou on est forcé d'avouer. Quand il n'est pas spontané, ou imposé par quelque impératif intérieur, l'avou est extorqué; on le débusque dans l'âme ou on l'arrache au corps" (*History* 79). Although Foucault's language here points to a kind of violence that we would not expect from a blush, I believe that the description stands up to involuntary confessions of the flesh. Both kinds of confession, the sacramental and the involuntary, operate from within what I call a three-step system. In sacramental confession: 1) the verbalization, or confession proper, of a secret desire takes place; 2) the confessor, with the help of his spiritual experience and confession manuals which were appearing prolifically during this time period, creates a narrative of interpretation, arriving at some kind of "reading" of the confession; 3) the penitent receives a formula for absolution that he or she (at least supposedly) internalizes and reflects upon in hopes of preventing a repetition of the sin.¹¹

The process of involuntary confession has several parallels to its sacramental counterpart; in the latter, however, the exchange of knowledge and interpretation operates within a closed system of the individual. First, an involuntary movement begins to spasm within as the result of some desire. It materializes, unsolicited, on the space of the body. This is the *performative* confession of the flesh. Second, in its very moment of appearance, the blusher gains carnal awareness of her desire. It is not until this point that the process of *interpretation* truly begins. The blusher attempts to prevent self-betrayal by dissimulating the blush or dismissing it as a spontaneous showing of virtue, or perhaps by mentally classifying the slip with the help of contemporary manuals.¹² Third, the process of interpretation or truth-seeking

continues, often leading to some kind of *self-knowledge* (in addition to the carnal knowledge that has already been acquired in the second step). The blusher has learned that her blush can teach her about those thoughts or desires that she is struggling to control. That is, in order to *know* exactly what she is trying to keep in check, she must blush. Involuntary confessions produce the only kind of self-knowledge that keeps carnal knowledge under control—but the knowledge emerges too late, for it fails to prevent the involuntary confession that has already taken place.

In both cases of confession a sign materializes that needs, and inevitably receives, some kind of interpretation, either interior or coming from exterior witnesses. The innovation of involuntary confessions of the flesh is that the interpretation comes from the self, not from the priest. The body and the soul must work together to glean some kind of self-knowledge (what that might look like, we will soon see), all while maintaining an exterior appearance of accordance with strict courtly codes and classifications. The individual relies on her own hermeneutic skills, but she is simultaneously condemned to produce endlessly that which her self-knowledge is trying to avoid. Instead of merely prompting the ability to dissimulate one's desires in a courtly setting, involuntary confessions create carnal and self-knowledge, the latter of which is desirable and new; but the inward-reaching self-knowledge is marred by the outward manifestation of carnal knowledge.

Valerie Allen suggests that “in the epistemological uncertainty of the confessional, one can never be sure that shame is not false. The manuals counsel that one go to confession often, just in case the last confession wasn't performed entirely in the nude, as it were.” She uses the Middle English definition of *blushing* to uncover the roots of postlapsarian shame:

Middle English *blishen* means *to shine brightly*, *to blush red*, and *to gaze upon*, suggesting strongly that blushing comes less from being looked at than from looking, that Adam and Eve's shame came from seeing the other's nakedness rather than from exposure of self; hence, that to blush means to know, to see.¹³

The recognition of one's own nakedness is hardly a new one; it hearkens back to original sin and the revelation of seeing oneself for the first time. In the fourteenth book of the *City of God*, Saint Augustine adds some carnal depth to the reasons why the early modern body and its precarious dance of volatility can be so problematic. He identifies the Fall of man as the key event that causes the flesh to become disobedient.¹⁴ The notion that involuntary confession is inevitable, then, can largely be traced back to Augustine's assumption that no matter how one tries, one cannot overcome the disobedience of the flesh. We could call it, quite literally, “matter over mind”—the passions of the flesh rise up from inside the body to trump

the mind's will to self-control. After the Fall, the flesh becomes a transparent showcase for the passions, betraying carnal desires and lusts. In the postlapsarian state, "the flesh is in such a condition that it simply cannot serve our will."¹⁵ But it is not because we are on public display that we blush. Nor is it because we are stringently trying to maintain our public image that we feel so ashamed of the occasional involuntary confession. It is much more the act of *looking at oneself* in the second and third stages of confession that brings about the carnal and self-knowledge. In involuntary confession, the individual is both the penitent and the confessor at once; she is open to the exchange between the exterior sign of the blush and the interior interpretation of it. To prevent self-betrayal from taking place, she has to gain some kind of self-knowledge. But in order to do this, she must blush. Hence arises a self-perpetuating, dialogic polemic between the will to attain self-control (i.e., not to betray ourselves in public) and the necessity of blushing in order to gain the self-knowledge necessary for successful dissimulation. Two examples from the *Heptaméron* will illuminate this paradox between self-knowledge and involuntary confession: the first will show the silent but devastating effects of a slip; the second, a violent explosion of carnal knowledge without resolution into self-knowledge.

Involuntary implosions in Novella 62

Revealing something that one means to keep a secret, a kind of verbal blush, as it were, operates as another form of self-betrayal. While the "slip" may not be commented upon directly, it triggers some kind of reaction, either internal or external. Its *modus operandi* corresponds to that of the three steps of confession we have already identified. Novella 62 of the *Heptaméron* exemplifies this kind of confession and the implications it can have for the narrator of the story. It begins with a description of the woman who will hear the tale: "y avait une dame de sang royal, accompagnée d'honneur, de vertu et de beauté, et qui savait bien dire un conte" (443).¹⁶ The storyteller narrates her tale in the third person about a rape which she inadvertently reveals to be her own when she slips into the first person at the end: "Jamais femme ne fut si étonnée que *moy*, quand je me trouvai toute nue!" (444)¹⁷ In line with both Allen's and Augustine's evaluations, Cornilliat and Langer argue that in this case it is not the rape itself, but the pronunciation of "*moy*" that reveals "that which is normally hidden and is shameful."¹⁸ The woman's internal recognition of her own utterance lies in the externally produced narration of her story, and her slip indeed is a form of self-betrayal.

The woman's narrative functions as a kind of performance that is not meant to be confessional, but that immediately becomes so when her secret slips out. She condemns herself by speaking the "moy," and the interpretations that inevitably follow have even wider implications, since her performance is, in fact, both public and private. In Renaissance culture, using one's own shameful experience to provoke laughter, especially when it reveals the loss of chastity and marital honour, would indeed have been a devastating betrayal of self. It is precisely this point that several of the *devisants* take up in their discussion of the woman's behaviour: "En bonne foi," dit Ennasuite; 'voilà la plus grande sottise dont j'ouïs jamais parler, qui faisait rire les autres à ses dépens'" (444).¹⁹ But is her honour the only thing this woman betrays by committing her slip? Or does the actual event of pronouncing herself "naked" penetrate her exterior shell, revealing a kind of unexpected carnal knowledge of the pleasure she experienced during her own rape? The reaction of the *devisants* not only adds credence to this possibility but further underscores severe consequences dealt to the narrator of the story as a result of the slip:

[Parlemente] "Il y aurait donc beaucoup de femmes de bien, qui sont estimées le contraire, car l'on en a assez vu qui ont longuement refusé celui où le coeur s'était adonné, les unes pour crainte de leur honneur, les autres pour plus ardemment se faire aimer et estimer." (445)²⁰

Interestingly, Augustine's perspective distills the important ambiguity here: that of the human will. What exactly *is* our will? Is it to dissimulate our desires? Or, on the other hand, is our will to be pure, not to have these desires of the flesh in the first place? In other words, does the narrator really feel regret and shame at what happened to her? Or does she wish to relive verbally the pleasure that she felt?

Foucault, too, in his later lectures, shows his fascination with this same tension that surrounds "the will": he comments extensively on Augustine's claim that in the prelapsarian world, man could move his sexual member at will. "He was not involuntarily excited," he says, but this control of the body ended with original sin. As Foucault describes it, Adam was punished because "he wanted to acquire an autonomous will, and lost the ontological support for that will. That then became mixed in an undifferentiated way with involuntary movements, and this weakening of Adam's will had a disastrous effect. His body, and parts of his body, stopped obeying his commands, revolted against him, and the sexual parts of his body were the first to rise up in this disobedience" (*Sexuality* 186). Involuntary movements of the body materialize on the flesh just as involuntary movements of the mind must be verbalized in confession.²¹ "When the emotion of the mind is united with the craving of the flesh, it convulses the whole man and (...) the vigilance of a man's

mind is almost entirely overwhelmed," Augustine writes.²² At the end of this novella, we are left to our own devices to decide on the state of the narrator's interior. But no matter what kinds of knowledge she might have gleaned from her confession, and regardless of whether or not the slip occurred because her emotions were "united" with her cravings of the flesh by telling the story, this particular lady is unable to talk her way out of the blow that will be dealt to her honour. In one so fond of telling stories, silence at the end of the novella says more than any verbal exclamation could: it effectually demonstrates an implosion of the third step of confession.

Disastrous self-knowledge in Novella 70

On the other end of the spectrum, the *Heptaméron's* 70th novella demonstrates an extreme example of spontaneous, passionate explosions that can arise from involuntary confessions. We will see that in this case the Augustinian question of "will" is not even remotely ambiguous; unlike Novella 62, where the consequences of the narrator's internally produced slip are dealt silently, here, the third step of involuntary confession bleeds out onto the exterior. Spontaneous blushing produces truth in this novella, and, as we will see, when the Duchess recognizes her carnal act, disastrous consequences ensue. Her moment of self-shattering interior reflection creates frenetic activity that destroys everything in its path. It also illuminates interior and exterior passions, and reconfigures a well-known story into a refined reading of the volatile early modern body. Keeping Foucault's interest in the blush as hermeneutic clue to the self in mind, let us focus on the radical spasms of confession that take place here in Novella 70.

After receiving Parlemente's blessing, Oisille re-tells the well-known medieval *conte* of the *Chasteleine de Vergi*. A not-so-virtuous Duchess falls in love with a gentleman in the household of the duke, and tries to express her love to him on several occasions. In hearing the object of her affection respond to her amorous innuendos in the manner that a "subservient gentleman" should, without any amorous implications, the Duchess blushes: "La Duchesse, rougissant [. . .], ses countenances étaient assez ardentes pour faire brûler une glace" (468).²³ Although the gentleman does not openly respond to the blush, its mere expression in public and the self-betrayal it implies become grounds for action.²⁴ The Duchess vows to take revenge upon him. She tells her husband that the gentleman tried to seduce her, and the Duke pursues the matter. He determines that the gentleman has a lover of his own, and reveals it to his wife on the condition that she promise not to tell. The enraged Duchess cannot keep a secret and, still bent on revenge, goes about informing the gentleman's lover

that she knows about the affair, an acknowledgement that leads the two lovers to commit suicide and the Duke to stab his wife to death.

The violence that comes about as a result of her words is what the young gentleman refers to at the end when he cries out to the Duke that “*ma langue et la vôtre*” were the instruments of destruction that led to two deaths and a murder. Instead, I argue that it is the Duchess’ involuntary confession and its three steps that set the spiral to catastrophe into motion. Instead of gaining self-knowledge, a much-needed alibi in attaining some kind of dissimulative redemption, the Duchess does not move past the second step of involuntary confession. She has blushed, and she becomes aware of the carnal desire that causes her to slip; but instead of re-interiorizing the external sign in a productive, reflective manner, she tries to take control physically of the external situation and, predictably, fails. The consequences in Novella 70 are as fatal as those in Novella 62 are silent. As a catalyst for disaster, the blush in this version of the story indicates a much higher level of complexity than the archetypal *ruses* in the medieval fabliaux, and it is the blush, in its disastrous implications and necessary appearance, that forms a new emphasis for this story. The volatile early modern body, impossible to control once ignited by the furies of carnal knowledge gone wrong, protrudes grotesquely from the wreckage of the novella.

In light of the fact that overcoming one’s desires seems impossible based on the volatile “will” that we have observed in both the 62nd and 70th novellas, it would seem that all that remains is the hope of creating a convincing performance. In an ideal situation, success might consist in gaining self-knowledge quickly enough in the third step of involuntary confession to avoid a complete self-betrayal, such as the one we saw in Novella 70. If we apply these principles to the Prologue and frame of the *Heptaméron*, another layer of narrative becomes problematized by this interplay between the flesh and the “godly,” often played out literally in various characters’ dialogues and interactions.

Confession in the Prologue and frame of the *Heptaméron*

Much of the tension we see between frame and narrative, between the polar characters of Oisille and Hircan, has to do not only with self- and carnal knowledge, but also with the “will” that accompanies any confession. Although in Augustine’s prelapsarian world, humans might have been capable of commanding their flesh to move at will, the submission of the body failed at the moment of the Fall. In the *Heptaméron*, the flesh cannot be controlled no matter how closely religious confession and other spiritual elements militate against involuntary confessions.

The same kind of truth-seeking exchange between the flesh and the 'godly' applies to the frame of the *Heptaméron*. Almost immediately in the Prologue, tension develops between religious confession and pleasure. Oisille, the group's spiritual leader, suggests reading Scripture all day to pass the time, while Hircan, seemingly the most outrageous character in his endorsement of physical pleasure, puts forth sex as an alternative. Later, he boldly suggests that self-control is powerless against the postlapsarian movements of the flesh:

Je sais que l'orgueil cherche plus la volupté entre les dames que ne fait la crainte ni l'amour de Dieu. Aussi que leurs robes sont si longues et bien tissées de dissimulation que l'on ne peut connaître ce qui est dessous (...) ainsi se glorifiant, de résister au vice de la loi de la Nature (...) mais quant à la chasteté de coeur, je crois qu'elle [Parlemente] et moi sommes enfants d'Adam et Eve: parquoi en bien nous mirant n'auront besoin de couvrir notre nudité de feuilles, mais plutôt confesser notre fragilité. (270–71)²⁵

Hircan's seemingly stark depiction of fallen humanity, while much protested by spiritual ladies in the group (such as Oisille), does quite realistically insist, in line with Augustine, that chastity has been weakened by original sin. He recognizes, at least at some level, the knowledge that comes from being naked in front of oneself. In a sense, he seems to underscore the importance of the hermeneutic "sifting" involved in the three steps of confession. Since our postlapsarian frailty insists that we must blush, we might as well look at ourselves in the process in order to recognize what it is that we must try to avoid.

The biblical context of shame and the way it is embedded within the *Heptaméron* calls attention to intertextual connections between spiritual and worldly connotations of the flesh. It seems impossible to separate the bodily manifestations of desire from the religious framework of their confessions.²⁶ This assertion resonates with Colette Winn's claim that to deny access completely to the body is to deny Christ and the sacrifice of the flesh that he offered humanity.²⁷ In the *Heptaméron* the binary parts—self-control and involuntary confession, Oisille and Hircan, religion and pleasure—move back and forth with a kind of energy that makes it hard to separate them at any given time.

The same holds true for the mixing that occurs on the metatextual level. The desire behind involuntary confessions in the novellas is similar to the pleasure which the *devisants* take in their story telling. The novellas themselves stand in opposition to the Scriptural readings that precede and follow the daily entertainment. And just as the main characters in some of the novellas seek the refuge and predictability of religion, the *devisants* voluntarily begin and end their day with official spiritual

activity. There is the sense that they seek to atone for the pleasure that they experience in their fictive confessions. At some level they, too, produce authenticity and experience the three steps of confession. By telling pleasure-laden tales, they are confessing to one another and producing some kind of carnal knowledge. The religious compensation and discussion that follow each of the tales demonstrate the *devisants'* collective striving toward self-knowledge and a performance of authentic internal reflection.

Three other important subtexts deserve attention here. First, in the Prologue, Parlamente insists that the stories they will tell be *true*, explicitly and deliberately establishing a contrast to Boccaccio's *Decameron* and adding a confessional element of truth-seeking to the tone of the narrative from the outset. Second, the *devisants* tell their pleasure tales with the Abbey as a backdrop, adding another element of the confessional to their novellas. Finally, and on a related note, the *devisants* remark on several occasions that a group of monks from the Abbey has been hiding in the bushes behind them, secretly listening to their tales. The monks serve as silent confessors in a sacramental setting. Marguerite explicitly states that the monks derive pleasure from listening to their tales, establishing a dialogic link between the participants in sacramental and involuntary confessions. The spirit and the flesh cannot be separated on any level of the text.

We will now look at two women who manifest similar kinds of involuntary confessions. How they "see themselves" in the postlapsarian sense, and to what extent they successfully perform the three steps of confession, vary widely.

Novella 19: constructing authenticity

In the nineteenth novella, internal and external boundaries repeatedly bleed into each other, ultimately creating self-knowledge—but the societal stakes are high. Paulina, a lady-in-waiting to a certain Marchioness, falls in love with a man in the service of the Marquis. But the Marchioness has resolved to find a more suitable match for Paulina, and the two realize the impossibility of their relationship. After a few years the young man decides to devote his life to God rather than be constantly tempted, and he visits Paulina to bid her farewell. Upon hearing the news, Paulina responds physically: "Pleurant avec une si grande véhémence que la parole, la voix et la force lui défaillirent, et se laissa tomber entre ses bras évanouie" (189).²⁸ Her beloved, shocked by her distress and surely in response to his own emotions, follows suit, and only the pity of some onlooking companions revives them both. Upon awakening, Paulina realizes what has happened: "Alors Pauline, qui avait désiré de dissimuler

son affection, fut honteuse quand elle s'aperçut qu'elle l'avait montrée si vehemente" (189).²⁹ It is important to note here that Paulina's shame does not stem from the fact that she loves and desires someone; but rather from her inability to disguise it. After her beloved runs off to join a monastery, she does not try to overcome her love for him. Instead, she focuses her energy on convincing everyone in her social circle that she does not hold any particular regard for this young man. Dissimulation is important here, especially from a social perspective, but Augustine's ambiguity resonates with Marguerite's explicit description of Paulina's attempts to dissimulate while leaving the door wide open for her to continue to experience the desires for her beloved that lead to further involuntary confessions.

Kendall Tarte underscores the performative aspect of carnal desire: "Authenticity is what can be *produced*, an effect of truth received by a duped audience."³⁰ Tarte's examination of sixteenth-century manuals on women's conduct raises similar ambiguities to the ones we have already identified in the Augustinian description of the will. She cites one particular manual that advises women to

... . meet the need to show her virtue with an immediate but subtle blush: when it is necessary to show her virtue, she will be prompt, but not audacious. With a quick reddening that suddenly and with virtuous confidence surprises those beautiful cheeks, she will show that there is in her a respectable heart, which is far from ignoble and abject shame."³¹

The fact that this particular book of conduct was written by a male calls into question its accuracy in judging female feelings and behaviours.³² Furthermore, it remains unclear whether the blushes of purported modesty are, in fact, authentic, or whether the blusher is attempting to *produce* authenticity, as seems to be in the case for Paulina. The performance of Paulina's confession lies entirely in her own hands. Indeed, her goal might be to convince her social circle that she has blushed according to decorum instead of in betrayal of the love she has always sought to disguise. Paulina understands the true reason for her involuntary confession, but she performs it in such a way that corresponds to the courtly code of dissimulation. From this perspective, it would be completely appropriate for a noblewoman to blush suddenly and with "virtuous confidence" if a young man made her a declaration of love.

Similarly, Paulina uses another performative maneuver in the case of her second involuntary confession. Five or six months after their separation, she finds herself praying at the chapel where her beloved has entered the order. When she catches sight of him, his features more lovely and distinguished than ever, she once again loses control of her countenance: "[Elle] fut si émue et troublée que, pour couvrir la cause de la couleur qui lui venait au visage, se prit à tousser"

(193).³³ Paulina again gains self-knowledge, in this case realizing that her carnal knowledge cannot be overcome by space, time, or station, and she quickly coughs to dissimulate her emotion. Again, she makes no move to overcome these feelings, and the feigned coughing fit validates her performance of the blush. Despite her narrow escape, Paulina's interior passion has slipped out onto the flesh one too many times, and she realizes that she must act in order to prevent more serious consequences. The novella ends with Paulina becoming a nun and the two becoming brother and sister in Christ. The tone at the end of the story indicates a happy ending for both, but its suddenness and suspicious lack of complexity lead us to believe that Paulina and the young man enter religious life because they realize that it will be impossible to suppress their involuntary confessions when exposed to society. By enclosing themselves within what can be viewed as the space of "official" confession, they avoid a social catastrophe which, we can assume, was otherwise inevitable.

Much more than simply a symptomatic expression of passion, Paulina's repeated involuntary confessions lead her to reconsider her level of self-control. Furthermore, she realizes that once her blush has been "publicized," as it were, the various interpretations of it that might follow are beyond her control.³⁴ On an epistemological level, Paulina does not recognize the depth of the emotions she seeks to hide until she has repeatedly blushed. Self-betrayal leads to self-knowledge, and Paulina realizes not only that her honour is endangered by her involuntary confession, but also that she cannot overcome the weakness of her flesh. Despite the *devisants'* conclusion that she and her beloved could be happy siblings in Christ, her move to the convent signals sensitivity to the implications of the confessing flesh. She has used the self-knowledge of the third step of confession to learn that she will never be able to overcome the first two steps, and she retreats to the safe space of sacramental confession.

Self-knowledge and self-mutilation in Novella 10

In the tenth novella, on the other hand, we will see a highly dysfunctional case of involuntary confession. Again, we encounter a young couple, Amador and Florida, both of whom are destined to marry others. However, long before any attachments are formed, Amador decides, after studying her intently with his eyes, that he will love Florida: "Et après l'avoir longuement regardée, se délibéra de l'aimer" (95).³⁵ Despite the discrepancy in their social rank and her young age, Amador's attachment continues to grow, and he marries a good friend of Florida's to gain easy access to

his true love. In one conversation, he is so fixated on Florida's beauty that he almost faints (97); in the next paragraph he gropes for words when addressed by the lady of his fantasies. His semi-confessions astound Florida, less because she guesses their origin than because they are simply out of character. There is no mention of suspicion. Because he is a man, it is his prerogative to stare and lose his power of speech in society without further repercussions.³⁶

The general trajectory of the novella continues until Amador reveals his true feelings to Florida and she makes her own confession of the flesh: "La jeune dame, oyant un propos non accoutumé, commença à changer de couleur et baisser les yeux comme femme étonnée" (103).³⁷ Florida's involuntary confession reveals to herself the nature of her own feelings, and her attitude towards Amador begins to shift. However reluctantly, love begins to manifest itself: "Elle commença en son cœur à sentir quelque chose plus qu'elle n'avait accoutumé [...] et commença l'amour, poussée de son contraire, à montrer sa très grande force" (104–105, 106).³⁸ The moment of the confession marks the beginning of a transformation that leads Florida to realize her desire, much like Foucault's conviction that the confessing subject only becomes aware of the sin during and after the act of confession (*History of Sexuality* 216). The first step of confession, i.e., the act of the blush itself, is a necessary and unavoidable act that creates carnal knowledge. Florida becomes aware of her desire for Amador and must, at the same time as she acknowledges it, create an authentic dissimulation of her confessional experience. She does this by convincing herself that Amador's love for her is honourable. This banter of the flesh goes back and forth a few times within her closed system of confession before reaching a climax. Florida, unlike Paulina, cannot gain self-control of her situation because she deceives herself into believing her own performance. She believes that she can in fact separate her interior from her exterior and learn to overcome the movements of her disobedient flesh. Such a highly complex and yet seemingly automatic process suggests that the passions of the flesh in their barest, most exposed form, are hermeneutically more difficult in this sixteenth-century text than a typical reading of the early modern body and its signs would suggest.

Florida's last-resort attempt to save her honour comes at the point of no return. When Amador tries to rape her, she mutilates her face in such a way that her persistent suitor, repulsed by her deformity, will no longer be subjected to movements of desire. Surely her survival instinct does not diminish her actual passion for Amador, for when she hears of his death, she immediately flees to a convent (152). The physical transformation of her flesh is no longer temporary, like a blush, but a permanent scar from which self- and carnal knowledge trickle forth. The interior feelings and

desires become permanently externalized, thus blurring the boundaries between interior and exterior representations of the passions.

Conclusions

We have seen that the production of knowledge in the postlapsarian body is tenuous and unpredictable in early modern literature, subject to the fluid words and thoughts of the receiver and the blusher. In confessions of the flesh, the game consists of being able to balance carnal knowledge of the inevitably slipping, self-betraying body, against the capacity to produce an authentic double reading of the self.

One reading lies in the dissimulative performance of authenticity, the ability to find a match for one's slip in the code of appropriate conduct. A successful blusher plays along with systems of dissimulative classification whenever she realizes she is in danger of exposing her secret feelings to the external world as a result of her slip. A convincing performance lies in being symptomized and codified in a book of facial gestures or courtly manuals of virtue. The danger of the performance, however, arises when women such as Florida believe their own confessions and leap over the most important step of involuntary confession. They forget that their own closed system of interior/exterior has been irretrievably scarred by original sin, and they will inevitably return to the first step of involuntary confession, just as Christians were obligated to return annually to sacramental confession. Augustine and Foucault both emphasize, albeit from different cultural and theoretical standpoints, the spasmodic, disobedient nature of the flesh.

While it would undoubtedly be too early to speak of a split subjectivity or psychological interiority in these early modern texts, involuntary confessions such as blushing produce problematic self-knowledge that results in various kinds of dissimulations, some more successful than others. When we apply our post-*Princesse de Clèves*, post-sentimental education lens to these early modern involuntary confessions, our perception of the boundary between interior and exterior becomes at once more blurry and more complex than a first glance might suggest. These examples from the *Heptaméron* add a unique dimension to the way we read the history of the body, and they encourage us, too, to seek further understanding of their inner workings within courtly, medical, and religious contexts.

Notes

1. Marguerite de Navarre, *L'Heptaméron* (Paris: Flammarion, 1982). All citations, and page numbers noted in parentheses in the main body of my paper, will be from this edition. English translations, provided in the endnotes, are from *The Heptameron*, trans. P.A. Chilton (Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1984).
2. In his *Passions de l'âme* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique, 1955), René Descartes identifies six passions that he believes combine to make all other passions: admiration, love, hatred, desire, joy and sadness. He gives a scientific description of how the body might move on its own behalf, in other words, without the appropriation of the soul. This kind of classification is typical of the time; significantly, Descartes goes on to state that with the help of reason, man can overcome the movements of the body that stem from emotion. Most important for my argument is his description of desire: "La passion du désir est une agitation de l'âme, causé par les esprits, qui la dispose à vouloir pour l'avenir les choses qu'elle se représente ester convenables [...] En fin je remarque cela de particulier dans le désir, qu'il agite le coeur plus violemment qu'aucune des autres passions, & fournit au cerveau plus d'esprits; lesquels passans de là dans les muscles, rendent tous les sens plus aigus, & toutes les parties du corps plus mobiles" (pp. 127–28, 138). Even if Descartes may be trying here to classify the body and the symptoms that move it scientifically, as was a popular enterprise in the seventeenth-century, and even if his final conclusion is that we must try to overcome these movements, the philosopher gives special weight to the role that desire plays in relation to the passions. On the German side, G.W. Leibnitz goes to great lengths to incorporate the representation of the body and the mind into the plurality demanded by new scientific inquiries. In his *Essais de Théodicé sur la bonté de Dieu, la liberté de l'homme et l'origine du mal* (1710,) trans. E.M. Huggard (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1985) he distinguishes himself from Descartes by arguing for a mutual dependence between the body and the soul: "We must say that the soul depends in some way upon the body and upon the impressions of the senses [...] One may however give a true and philosophic sense to this *mutual dependence* which we suppose between the soul and the body [...] For in so far as the soul has perfection and distinct thoughts, God has accommodated the body to the soul, and has arranged beforehand that the body is impelled to execute its orders. And in so far as the soul is imperfect and as its perceptions are confused, God has accommodated the soul to the body, in such sort that the soul is swayed by the passions arising out of corporeal representations. This produces the same effect and the same appearance as if the one depended immediately upon the other, and by the agency of a physical influence" (pp. 158–159).
3. For my argument, self-knowledge is both an interior awareness of the flesh and simultaneously an experience *in* the flesh. In other words, gaining self- and carnal knowledge involves the experience of involuntary confessions and the subsequent awareness that they have taken place.

4. See volume one of Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976). Quotations from this work will hereafter be cited in parentheses in the main text. For more details about the confessions of the flesh, see some of Foucault's late lectures, in which he discusses his ideas for his unfinished fourth volume in the series. All lectures are in *Religion and Culture*, ed. Jeremy Carrette (New York: Routledge, 1999) and include the essays "On the government of the living," pp.154–157 (hereafter cited as *Government*); "About the beginning of the hermeneutics of the self," pp. 158–181 (hereafter cited as *Hermeneutics*), "Sexuality and Solitude," pp.182–187 (hereafter cited as *Sexuality*) and "The battle for chastity," pp. 188–198 (hereafter cited as *Chastity*).
5. St. Augustine, *The City of God against the Pagans*, trans. R.W. Dyson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
6. François Cornilliat and Ullrich Langer argue that success at court hinges on the ability to entertain and to control one's emotions at all costs: "Telling Secrets: *Heptameron* 62," in *Critical Tales: New Studies of the Heptameron and Early Modern Culture*, ed. John D. Lyons and Mary B. McKinley (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1993), p. 126.
7. This principle, steeped in ideas of court culture and etiquette, stems from Baldassarre Castiglione's 1528 *The Art of the Courtier*, trans. George Bull (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1967). His text outlines ideal behaviour for aspiring members of the nobility. According to Castiglione, a successful courtier learns to avoid affectation in every way possible as though it were some very rough and dangerous reef [...] to make whatever is done or said appear to be without effort (p. 32). He furthermore warns against letting passions shine through the eyes: "if the eyes are not carefully controlled, they frequently reveal amorous desires to someone to whom one would least wish to do so [...] Therefore one who has not lost the bridle of reason will govern himself cautiously and take account of time and place, and, when necessary, abstain from gazing too intently, however sweet that may be; for when a love is made public it is too hard a thing" (p. 199).
8. Novellas 1, 10, 19, 22, 24, 25, 26, 41, 43, 62 and 70 all include some kind of confession, either religious or narrative. Here, I will focus mainly on Novellas 10, 19, 62, and 70.
9. The Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 mandated annual confession for all Christians. Foucault argues in this first volume of the *History of Sexuality* that for the first time in Christian society, the emphasis falls on the individual and on the solicitation of details about pleasures and desires (p. 26).
10. Foucault's planned fourth volume of the *History of Sexuality* promised to engage with "the experience of the flesh in the early centuries of Christianity and the role played by hermeneutics and the purifying process of deciphering desire." See Jeremy Carrette, introduction to *Religion and Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 44. Not coincidentally, it was to be titled *Les Aveux de la chair*. Unfortunately, the book remained unpublished at his death in 1984. Some of Foucault's later lectures hint at the angle of this fourth volume: he not only examines the fourteenth book of St. Augus-

tine's *City of God*, he also sheds light on the problems of interiority and exteriority, of problematic bodies and hidden desires, thus pulling them all into the philosophical and modern realm of interpretation.

11. Foucault describes this process as a kind of performative power exchange between confessor and penitent (*History* 13). Power travels from the penitent, who holds the narrative of secret acts or desires, to the confessor. Once they have been verbalized, the confessor has the power to interpret and impose some kind of punishment. The performance, however, rests almost entirely in the mouth of the penitent. Even if she might not know the "meaning" of her sin, she does know that her role is to verbalize and externalize her desires and actions with as many details as possible. She has the power to decide what details she will verbalize.
12. Lucie Desjardins, whose book discusses the representation of the passions in the seventeenth century, identifies the late sixteenth century as a time when first attempts to interpret the body scientifically were cropping up. Manuals describing the passions according to their signs, attempting to express them in a typology of symptoms, appeared throughout Europe: *Le corps parlant: savoirs et représentation des passions au XVII^e siècle* (Sainte-Foy, Québec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 2001), p. 83.

Examples of these codified manuals include John Bulwer's 1644 *Chronologia: Or, the Naturall Language of the Hand* and Marin Cureau's *L'art de connoistre les homes* (1663). Richard Alewyn gives an account of the interpretation of the body in social dance in Germany, claiming that each gesture could be interpreted by a perceptive audience. For this account, see Cornelia Niedermeier, *Gedanken-Kleider: die Allegorisierung des Körpers in Gesellschaft und Theater des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Wien: Braumüller, 2000), p. 123. The most famous and most influential of these manuals is certainly Richard Burton's 1632 *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, ed. Nicolas K. Kiessling (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990). Here, the author documents and categorizes all kinds of bodily functions and signs and symptomatically assigns them to different physiological origins. About the blush, he has the following to say: "Blushing is a passion proper to men [read: mankind] alone, and is not only caused for some shame and ignominy, or that they are guilty unto themselves of some foul fact committed, but from fear; and a conceit of our defects (pp. 431–32). Burton touches on this notion that the blush signals some hidden desire or deed that emerges on the face, but he continues to codify blushing according to physical reasons: he identifies some of them as fear, anger, melancholy, and the imagination: "Some will laugh, weep, sigh, groan, blush, tremble, sweat at such things as are suggested to them by their imagination" (p. 257). These attempts to show the passions exerting themselves on the body underscore the link between *passion* and *emotion*, whose etymological roots go back to the Latin *movere*, or *to move out from*. But although the manuals listed above are interested in assigning values to the symptoms of the flesh, they do not in fact push them to a truly hermeneutic level. Confessions of the flesh are, in fact, confessions that extend beyond classification, beyond words.

13. See Valerie Allen, "Waxing Red: Shame and the Body, Shame and the Soul," in *The Representation of Women's Emotions in Medieval and Early Modern Culture*, ed. Lisa Perfetti (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2005), pp. 191–210, 205.
14. In Valerie Allen's words, "in the Fall, sense appetite breaks free of the authority of rational appetite." She also reiterates that Augustinian shame is related to movements of the blood, as philosophers such as Descartes discuss in their scientific writings, but that instead of being purely physiological, involuntary movements mirror the "imperviousness of the flesh to the will and words" (pp. 195–96).
15. Augustine, pp. 14–15.
16. There was [...] a certain lady of royal blood, endowed with honour, virtue and beauty, who was well-known for her ability to tell a good story" (p. 485).
17. "No woman has ever been as embarrassed as I was, when I found myself completely naked!" (p. 486, emphasis mine).
18. Cornilliat and Langer, p. 127.
19. "'Upon my honor,' said Ennasuite, 'of all the fools I've ever heard of, she was the biggest, to make others laugh at her own expense!'" (p. 486).
20. [Parlemente]: "'We've all seen women who have rejected the advances of men to whom they have in reality already abandoned their hearts. Sometimes they reject them in order to protect their honor, sometimes to make themselves all the more ardently loved and admired.'" (p. 487)
21. Recent scholarship, notably that of Nicholas Paige in *Being Interior: Autobiography and the Contradictions of Modernity in Seventeenth-Century France* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), rightfully draws attention to the challenges of ascribing our contemporary notions of psychological interiority and exteriority onto Augustine's *Confessions*. Augustine's conception of the "inner man," he writes, comes from Saint Paul, but is only vaguely related to our modern notions of psychological interiority (Augustine rather differentiates the spirit from the sinful body). Paige uses the Augustinian *Confessions* as proof that the opacity of the human interior we see Augustine address and expose does hint at some of the tropes we use in the hermeneutics of selfhood today, but that these terms were imposed on the text much later, in the seventeenth century, under the mentality of autobiography. What we read when we come to Augustine, Paige argues, is a seventeenth-century version of Augustine, an Augustine who has been filtered and slightly changed by each century of readers. "The Augustine of the seventeenth century actually found something [within himself]—yes, something sinful, but also a hidden brightness that moored his identity and demanded to be exposed" (p. 63). While I do agree that it can be problematic to superimpose notions of interiority as we understand them today onto such an early text, the text has evolved through these time periods. The ways that it was read by writers in the early modern period suggests that they were particularly receptive to the connection between the passions and the body, between the flesh and the spirit. If these contradictions are not present in Augustine's actual text, it can

nonetheless be said that authors who write with an Augustinian subtext implicate this tension and add new layers to it.

22. Augustine, pp. 14, 16.
23. "The heat of a passion hot enough to melt the hardest ice was written on her face [...] the Duchess blushed deeply" (pp. 514, 515).
24. As Brian Cummings points out, and as I have observed from the beginning of this paper, there is something very natural and human about the blush. Although gestures and facial expressions might be grouped into classes of symptoms, shame makes up a category of its own. It announces both a "scandalous confession and yet also a balancing re-assertion of modesty, a self-defeating openness to fault which nonetheless triumphs by gaining simultaneous credit for moral honesty. Nothing is more impossible than the calculated blush, as it were the crocodile blush. Blushing is an intense form of self-attention, but the blusher may not even be aware of blushing and certainly cannot control it." See "Animal Passions and Human Sciences: Shame, Blushing and Nakedness in Early Modern Europe and the New World," in *At the Borders of the Human: Beasts, Bodies and Natural Philosophy in the Early Modern Period*, ed. Valerie Fudge (New York: Palgrave, 2002), p. 32.
25. "Where women are concerned it's pride that ousts desire much more than fear, or love of God, and also that those long skirts they wear are nothing more than a fabric woven from lies and deception, preventing us knowing what's hidden beneath! [...] Thus, glorying in their resistance to the law of Nature [...] as far as chastity of the heart is concerned, I believe that she [Parlemente] and I both are children of Adam and Eve. So if we look at ourselves properly, we shall have no need to cover our nakedness, but rather to confess our frailty." (305)
26. Mary McKinley, who perceptively discusses Rabelais's dedicatory epigram for Marguerite de Navarre in the *Tiers Livre*, argues that "Rabelais adopte le rôle que prendra plus tard Hircain vis-à-vis d'Oysille: il rappelle à la reine que se retirer dans des exercices spirituels au point de négliger le corps n'est pas une attitude salutaire pour une communauté." See "Rabelais, Marguerite de Navarre et la Dédicace du *Tiers Livre*: Voyages Mystiques et Visions Terrestres," *Romanic Review* 94 (2003), p. 182.
27. Colette Winn, "'Trop en corps': Figures du corps transgresif dans l'oeuvre de Marguerite de Navarre," in *International Colloquium Celebrating the 500th Anniversary of the Birth of Marguerite de Navarre*, ed. Régine Reynolds-Cornell (Birmingham, AL: Summa, 1995), p. 93.
28. "So violent were her tears, that her voice, her faculty of speech and all her strength left her, and she fell into a faint in his arms." (222)
29. "When Paulina realized that she had revealed the strength of her feelings, she was overcome with shame, for she had always sought to disguise her love" (p. 222).
30. Kendall Tarte, *Writing Places: Sixteenth-Century City Culture and the Des Roches Salon* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2007), p. 176.

31. Tarte, p. 55. Valerie Allen also notes that in devotional literature of the medieval and early modern periods, blushing and tears serve as acts of redemption that follow shame "as one heartbeat follows another," in Allen, p. 197.
32. Giovanni Michele Bruto's *Institutione di una fanciulla nata nobilmente*. 1555. Quoted in Tarte.
33. "She was so overcome with emotion that she made herself cough in order to cover up the colour that had risen to her cheeks" (p. 226).
34. Paige, p. 144.
35. "For a long while he gazed at her. His mind was made up. He would love her" (p. 123).
36. I believe that male characters in the *Heptaméron's* novellas seem to have accepted the fact that their flesh is corrupted because of original sin. That is, while they, too, are susceptible to involuntary confessions, they act on them instead of reacting to them. We need only reexamine the male character's hasty flight to religious life in Novella 19 or Amador's military participation in faraway lands in Novella 10 to establish that above all else, *activity* surrounds male involuntary confessions. Action seemingly allows men to forget or ignore the potential implications of any slip. Unfortunately, I do not have the space here to explore the difference more fully between male and female confessions of the flesh.
37. "The young Lady Florida changed colour at this speech, the like of which she had never heard before. Then she lowered her gaze, like a mature woman, her modesty shocked" (p. 130).
38. "Deep within her heart she began to feel stirrings that she had never felt before [...] love, having been thwarted, was aroused now, and began to demonstrate its power" (pp. 133, 134).