

THE BEAUTIFUL WOMAN IN MEDIEVAL IBERIA:
RHETORIC, COSMETICS, AND EVOLUTION

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Doctor of Philosophy

by
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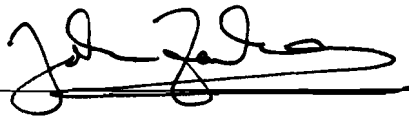
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THE BEAUTIFUL WOMAN IN MEDIEVAL IBERIA:
LITERATURE, COSMETICS, AND EVOLUTION

Presented by Claudio Da Soller

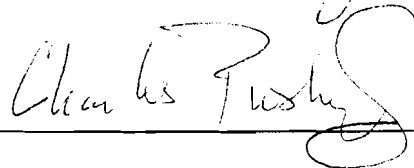
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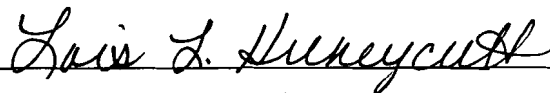
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Allen Thiher







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ABSTRACT

Literary portraits of the beautiful woman in medieval Iberia tend to emphasize several physical features, such as long, blond hair, or light-colored and hairless skin. This study examines the specific features of the beautiful woman in several major works and genres from medieval Iberia. It also traces the rhetorical sources of these portraits to the Classical and medieval Latin traditions, whose influence is evident in other early vernacular literatures of Europe. It then analyzes several medieval cosmetic treatises in Latin and in vernacular languages that attest to medieval women's beautifying practices, such as the use of hair-dyes, depilatories, and skin-whitening creams.

The comparison of the literary and cosmetic evidence shows a canonical view of feminine beauty that encompasses different cultural areas in medieval Iberia. This view is also consistent with ancient as well as with twenty-first century conceptions of beauty. The findings suggest that the ideal of feminine beauty in medieval Iberia is not unique, but rather a manifestation of near-universal male preferences shaped by sexual selection in the course of human evolution.

CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

This dissertation concerns the ideal of feminine beauty in medieval Iberian society. It first analyzes three categories of data: (1) the literary portrayal of the beautiful woman in Spanish medieval literature; (2) the rhetorical sources of this imagery in Classical and medieval Latin and its presence in other vernacular literatures; and (3) the beautifying practices of medieval Iberian women as described in cosmetic treatises. It then compares the specific attributes of feminine beauty contained in these sources with evidence from recent evolutionary-based studies on female physical attractiveness. It concludes that the medieval rhetorical portrayal of feminine beauty is a manifestation of universal male preferences rooted in evolutionary mechanisms of sexual selection.

The beautiful woman in medieval Spanish literature

One of the major themes of Spanish literary texts from the eleventh to the fifteenth century is that of the “muger hermosa” (beautiful woman). We find it in the earliest examples of Spanish literature, such as in the Hispano-Arabic *kharja*, a poetic form where the male voice speaks about the beauty of his beloved, or in the *villancicos*, love poems where the female voice describes herself as beautiful, or in the chivalric romances and courtly love poems. But what did it mean to say that a woman was physically “beautiful”? In many of these texts the woman is often simply described as beautiful (“hermosa,” “bella,” or “garrida”) but the specific physical attributes of her beauty are not mentioned, leaving the reader to conjure up an image (according to the dictum that beauty is in the mind/eye of the beholder).

Throughout the literature of the period, however, we also find several detailed descriptions of the physical features of the beautiful woman. One of the best known example is found in the fourteenth-century *Libro de buen amor*. In this work, the character of “Don Amor” lists the attributes of the beautiful woman: neither tall nor short; well-proportioned; with a small head; blond hair; without henna; long, high, arched and separated eyebrows; narrow cheeks; big, prominent, colorful and bright eyes, not deep; long and light eyelashes; small ears; long neck; straight nose; small, even, sharp and white teeth, slightly apart; red gums; narrow red lips; small mouth; white, hairless and clear face; small shoulders; slender arms; small breasts; moist armpits; small legs; long torso; “widish” hips, and small and arched feet (Ruiz 431-435). This is one of the best-known descriptions of feminine beauty in medieval Spanish literature, and the passage even appeared in public advertisements designed to encourage reading in subway cars in Madrid in 2003.

Literary research since the late nineteenth century has shown the relationship between this description of feminine beauty and a medieval rhetorical canon. Most texts, however, describe the beautiful woman in much less detail. Some focus on a small number of attributes, as in the following *villancico* that emphasizes white skin and blond hair: “Morenica me llaman, madre, / desde el día en que nací / y al galán que me ronda la puerta / blanca y rubia le parecí” (Swarthy they call me / mother, since the day I was born / but to the beau who hangs around my door / I seemed white and blond) (Sánchez Romeralo 438). Many poems mention only one element, often the eyes: “Ojos morenos, de bonica color, / sois tan graciosos / que matáis d’amor” (Oh black eyes, beautiful color, you are so attractive that you kill with love) (Sánchez Romeralo 123).

The authors of some of these works are known to be men. Though most of the works are anonymous, it is reasonable to presume they too were written by men. Therefore, the description of female beauty (as well as of male beauty) is made almost always from a male perspective. The one exception in this pattern seems to be a series of *kharajāt* written by women in al-Andalus, who also emphasize the beauty of their male lovers: “¡Mamá, qué amigo! / bajo la guedejita rubita / el cuello blanco / y la boquita rojita” (Rubiera Mata 53). We do not know, however, whether these women poets were freely creating their own verses or following an accepted schema of male homosexual poetry.

Chapter Two examines a broad sample of works across genres in medieval Spanish literature, from the eleventh to the fifteenth century, with two objectives: (1) identify the specific attribute that are associated with feminine beauty, and (2) determine the extent to which they are present in different works. This will also include analyzing two indirect sources of descriptions of beauty. One is the theme of the “ugly woman” as the antithesis of the beautiful woman. She is often an old woman, or a heavily made-up woman, in whom the author describes in detail specific features associated with female ugliness (from rotting teeth or bad breath to hairiness). For example, in the *Corbacho* we find the following description, from the point of view of one woman denigrating another because she is envious of the other’s beauty: darker than a devil; skinny, looking like death; her hair pitch-black; a big head; a wide and short neck, like a bull; sagging and skinny breasts; a shapeless body; skinny legs, and deformed feet (Martínez de Toledo 136-137). Another indirect source is the physical description of men, in the sense that “masculine” features can be interpreted in opposition to “feminine” features, according to

the medieval understanding of sex difference. A detailed description of a man is found in the *Libro de buen amor*, where the narrator puts a flattering description of himself in the words of a bawd who is trying to persuade a girl of the man's worthiness: he has a good-size body; strong limbs; muscular; a large head; hairy; a thick neck, not too long; black hair; big ears; the eyebrows set apart, black as coal; erect posture; his step well-measured; his nose long; red gums; a powerful voice; a large mouth; average lips, thick rather than thin, red like coral; big shoulders; big wrists; small eyes; slightly dark-skinned; with a protruding chest; well-muscled arms; well-shaped legs; and large feet (Ruiz 1485-1488). The contrast with the portrait of the beautiful woman described in the same work is evident in almost every feature, from the size of the body to the color of the skin. In general, however, the physical description of men in medieval literature is uncommon, rarely going beyond vague references to a "handsome youth" ("mozo loçano" or "mozo garrido"), and showing more concern with the social status of the man in question according to his profession, from shepherd to soldier, knight or cleric.

The rhetorical tradition

Chapter Three reviews the descriptions of feminine beauty in Classical and medieval literatures in Latin as well as in other vernacular European languages. From Ovid to Cicero to Quintilian we find the basic rhetorical framework for the detailed portrayal of a person (usually a king). The earliest descriptions of a beautiful woman are found in Classical Latin authors such as Ovid, and later Claudian. By the early Middle Ages we find poems by Fortunatus and Maximianus. Maximianus, writing during the sixth century CE, describes Venus as having blond hair, white forehead, black eyebrows, bright eyes, rosy cheeks, milky-white neck, and delicate red feet (Spaltenstein 294-295).

This descriptive framework became much more elaborate in the later Middle Ages, as universities developed rhetorical manuals for students, such as those of Matthew of Vendôme or Geoffrey of Vinsauf. Matthew of Vendôme's *Ars versificatoria* contains a description of Helen of Troy which later became the basic model followed by many writers: her hair is golden, free-flowing; her forehead is white, like the Milky Way; her eyebrows are black, shaped like arches, and separated; the eyes are sparkling, like stars; her cheeks are rosy; her nose is straight, neither too flat nor too large; her lips are rosy and delicate; her teeth are straight, whiter than ivory; her neck is whiter than snow; her breasts are firm and small. In a second example from the same work, but in connection with Venus, we find a description that includes a few more features: her waist is narrow; her belly is luscious and round; her feet are small; her legs are straight and fleshy; her hand is without loose skin (Wright and Halliwell 263-264).

Similarly standardized portraits may also be found in the major vernacular literatures of medieval Europe, both in Romance languages (such as Provençal, Catalan, and Italian) and in Germanic languages like English and German. In the case of medieval Spain and its vernacular literature it is also important to consider the influence of Arabic literary tradition. For example there is a twelfth-century Castilian translation of an Arabic folk tale, *La historia de la doncella Teodor*, based on the story of the slave girl Tawaddud in the *Thousand and One Nights*. Here we find eighteen features that a beautiful woman should possess, arranged in a numbered scheme that assigns each of six attributes (three of size: long, small, wide, and three colors: white, black and red) to three parts of the body. She has three "long" features: torso, neck and fingers; three "small": mouth, nose and feet; three "wide": hips, shoulders and forehead; three "white": skin,

teeth and white of the eyes; three “black”: hair, eyebrows, and pupil of the eyes; and three “red”: cheeks, lips and gums (Mettmann 163). Some of these features, such as red gums, wide hips, or black eyes have been seen as typical of the Arabic tradition, and influential in the development of a unique Spanish “canon” of feminine beauty (López-Baralt 80-81; Marcos-Marín 32). Although the stylistic form of the portrait may change (in time or space) there is considerable agreement over the attributes of feminine beauty among the Latin, vernacular and Arabic traditions.

Standards of beauty according to cosmetic texts

One question that arises is whether this canon of beauty was only a common literary convention shared by different cultural traditions, or if it had a broader social significance. In other words, was the literary standard of feminine beauty reflected in Spanish society in terms of what men and women considered to be the physical attributes of a beautiful woman? One approach to the historical conception of beauty in medieval Spain emerges from studying the cosmetic practices of the time. Cosmetics occupied an ambiguous position in medieval society; though generally criticized in literature, they also figured in practical manuals on women’s health. Chapter Four discusses first the connection between medicine and cosmetics and then examines nine medieval treatises in Latin, Castilian, Catalan and Arabic on cosmetology and women’s health. The products and techniques used by Spanish women provide historical evidence of beautifying practices. Their recipes for creams, ointments, baths or hair removers are usually introduced by specific titles that state the purpose of the preparation, such as dyeing hair, whitening the skin, or making eye make-up, which are indications of the standards of beauty they were trying to achieve.

From the tenth-century Arabic treatise *al-Taṣrīf* to the fourteenth/fifteenth century Catalan *Flos del tresor de beutat* we find cosmetic recipes that address similar aesthetic issues. The largest group of recipes deals with skin care: cleansing the face; whitening the face; coloring the cheeks a soft red; whitening the neck and hands; removing facial and body hair; softening the skin; smoothing wrinkles; smoothing stretch marks, and firming the breasts. A second group of recipes deals with hair care: growing hair; strengthening damaged hair; preventing hair loss; preventing premature graying, and for dyeing the hair blond or black. A third group is concerned with the mouth, offering recipes for giving a healthy red color to gums and lips, cleaning and whitening the teeth, and eliminating bad breath. A final and smaller group of recipes is devoted to eye make-up. The ideal of feminine beauty promoted by these cosmetic recipes is remarkably consistent with the ideal of the literary portraits.

The view from evolutionary psychology

This shared view of women's beauty among different literary and cosmetic medical traditions suggests that it may represent a cross-cultural universal male preference for certain physical feminine attributes. Over the last two decades, research on physical attractiveness from the point of view of evolutionary psychology has highlighted a number of features considered critical to male judgments of women's beauty, and has linked them to evolutionary mechanisms of sexual selection (Symons, "Beauty" 87-88; Skamel 178-180). Chapter Five discusses evolutionary research on beauty, its application to literary works, and the ways in which it can contribute to an understanding of the literary ideal of feminine beauty in medieval Spain.

Many recent studies have shown that physically attractive people in contemporary societies are perceived, by virtue of their looks, to possess numerous desirable moral qualities, such as pleasant personalities, trustworthiness, and intelligence. In turn, these perceived qualities allow “beautiful” individuals greater access to jobs, higher salaries, more cooperation from others, and generally enjoy more satisfying interpersonal relationships (Fallon 128). In addition, beauty appears to be a more significant factor in male judgments of women than vice-versa, while “femininity” and “good character” are perceived by both men and women as being linked to beauty in a woman. A woman’s beauty, in other words, is the main index of her “mate value” from a man’s point of view (Symons, “Beauty” 81). But the specific features that constitute beauty are still a debated issue. The predominant view has been that the perception of who is regarded as beautiful/handsome varies from culture to culture, from historical period to historical period, and from individual to individual. It is, in other words, bound culturally, historically and individually by context. Contemporary ethnographic studies on physical attractiveness, however, show that there is broad agreement among world societies on a number of basic features that make a person beautiful (Buss, *Evolutionary* 144). What are these features in a woman? Research based on evolutionary theory has suggested that there are some universal preferences, the most common being long hair, large eyes, a small nose and mouth; others are lack of body hair, a slender figure characterized by moderate overall weight, and a certain curvaceousness created by a slim waist. Preferred skin and hair color are those that represent the lighter end of the spectrum within any given population (Buss, *Evolutionary* 143-145).

These features have been connected with a number of physiological changes in women's bodies related to youth, health and fertility, and therefore suggest that they are indicators of those three factors in men's eyes/minds, who find them attractive because they advertise reproductive potential. For example, facial proportions in women who are judged attractive are those that give a youthful (almost baby-like) appearance, such as big eyes, small nose and mouth, and smooth, white, and hairless skin. Changes in facial morphology caused by aging make the eyebrows descend and sag laterally (making the eyes look smaller), the continued growth of cartilaginous tissues leads to bigger ears and a longer and wider nose, and the loss of connective tissue makes the red zone of the lips thinner (Jones 83-85). Women tend to have lighter skin than men, though it darkens with age, especially after the onset of menopause, due to the physiological link between estrogen and melanin production. In addition, the lightest skin color is associated with the time of ovulation (Jones 98). Hormonal changes also influence body shape. Women after puberty tend to deposit fat on the hips, thighs and buttocks, creating a low ratio of waist to hip (the hourglass shape). Those with a low waist-to-hip ratio tend to start ovulating younger, are more fertile, and become pregnant without difficulty.

The features mentioned above appear to be consistent with the ideal of feminine beauty in Iberian medieval society. Specifically, literary descriptions and cosmetics texts mention many of the same desirable features: hairless skin, light color, high forehead, arched eyebrows, large eyes, small size of nose, ears, and mouth, red lips, blond hair, as well as slender body shape; all are physiological indicators of youth, health, and fertility. The emphasis on these features, therefore, does not appear to be simply a literary convention, or even a social norm typical of medieval Iberian society, but rather the

expression of evolutionary mechanisms of mate selection that exist universally in the human species. Yet this does not exclude that preference for some traits, such as a certain color of the eyes or of the hair, may be due to historically-bound cultural and status differences.

CHAPTER 2 - BEAUTY AND LITERATURE

The following discussion encompasses the eleventh to the fifteenth century. Some literary genres remain in vogue for more than a century and this division is mainly to provide an organizing principle.

Eleventh and twelfth centuries

The *kharajāt*

Among the earliest medieval Romance vernacular lyrics that have survived are the fragments of the Mozarabic *kharajāt* (*kharja* in the singular) from the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The *kharja* (literally “exit”) is the last stanza of the *muwashshaḥ* (*muwashshaḥāt* in the plural), a poetic form in Classical Arabic or Hebrew probably invented in the tenth century in al-Andalus (Frenk Alatorre 101). Unlike the main part of the poem, however, the *kharja* is in colloquial Arabic or Romance. Furthermore, unlike Classical Arabic poetry, many of the Andalusian *kharajāt* are written in a female voice. For example, the anonymous “Kharja N. 31” (Heger’s classification) is in colloquial Mozarabic written in Arabic script, and follows a *muwashshaḥ* in Classical Arabic (Heger provides García Gomez’s translation into modern Spanish). A young lady, whom a careless guardian has left alone with her lover, asks this lover to kiss her. The *kharja* includes two features associated with women’s beauty, “sarta de perlas” ‘a string of pearls’ (white, even teeth), and “boquita de cerezas” ‘cherry mouth’ (red lips):

muwashshaḥ

Vió los descuidos del guardador
una muchacha que se quedó a solas con el amado,
y dijo con voz maravillosa:

kharja

Si me quieres como bueno,
bésame entonces esta sarta de perlas:
boquita de cerezas. (Heger 134)

Fish-Compton has made a systematic comparison between a collection of *muwashshaḥāt* written completely in Classical Arabic and two other collections of bilingual *muwashshaḥāt* in which the *kharajāt* are in Mozarabic. The Classical Arabic *muwashshaḥāt* belong to the anthology by the Egyptian Ibn Ṣanā' al-Mulk (1155-1211), a work known as *Dār at-Ṭirāz* (“The House of Embroidery”). The bilingual poems are in a collection culled by García Gómez in 1965 from two Andalusian anthologies, one by Ibn al-Khaṭīb and the other by Ibn Bushrā, who compiled them in the fourteenth century (Fish Compton 59). Many of the same poems appear in all three anthologies.

There is a clear difference in the use of the female voice in the two types of *muwashshaḥāt*: only three out of the thirty-four solely Arabic poems introduce the female voice, whereas in the bilingual type the *kharja* is sung by a woman in thirty-four out of the thirty-eight poems (Fish Compton 77). The frequency and the sudden change from the masculine voice of the Arabic to the feminine voice of the Mozarabic *kharja* is only one of the elements that have generated a long-standing debate among scholars on the relationship between this poetics and Classical and vernacular Arabic traditions, on the one hand, and European love lyrics in Provençal, Italian, Galician-Portuguese, and German, on the other (Fish Compton 84; Frenk Alatorre 132-134; see Zwartjes for a recent survey).

About eighty percent of the *muwashshaḥāt* in the solely Arabic anthology are love lyrics, while all those in the bilingual anthologies concern the theme of love, and

offer several references to beauty (Fish Compton 45). It is sometimes impossible, however, to tell the gender of the beloved in the *muwashshaḥāt*, since the stock descriptions of male and female beauty are similar, and some of them treat of male homosexual love. In addition, masculine pronouns and verb forms were traditionally used in Arabic poetry even when referring to a female figure. Among the three anthologies only one poem specifically mentions a woman by name, though in some cases it is possible to infer that the description is of a woman thanks to the mention of a harem or a “guardian” (Fish Compton 67).

Besides the female voice, however, there are a number of other elements that, according to Fish Compton, are “essentially feminine” in the bilingual *kharajāt*: a young woman who asks her mother for advice (not found in Classical Arabic poetry, but present in colloquial North African poems); the presence of a guardian; the complaint about a rough or careless lover; some lewd sexual references (a theme expressed through a female voice in Classical Arabic literature); and comments about a cloistered life (88-92). Also, the theme of a woman as a gazelle or as a bird, typical of Arabic poetry, does not appear in the Mozarabic *kharajāt* (Fish Compton 102).

Male and female beauty in all the *muwashshaḥāt* is usually described with one or more of the following metaphors (many being well-established in Arabic poetry): the face is radiant like the moon or the sun; the eyes are lustrous; the teeth are white like pearls; the skin is white as jasmine or lilies; the mouth is a “delicate box” or a “piece of sweet fruit;” the torso is slender and willowy; the eyebrows are curved, like the Arabic letter “nun” (“n”); and, finally, the body is perfumed. On the other hand, when only the woman is described, the most common metaphors are those of a gazelle, a bird, or the

wind. She is young; her hair is black and luxuriant, sometimes with a lock that curves about the face (lock of myrtle); has a long neck (like a gazelle); her fingertips are compared to the jujube (a small and reddish date-like fruit); her cheeks are referred to as “candied fruits of the rose;” her breasts are rounded; the hips are plump and rounded, and she is beautifully adorned with anklets and earrings.

Rubiera Mata has provided a collection of *kharajāt* written by Andalusian women, and these offer an interesting comparison with those discussed above. Despite the alienation and seclusion of women in al-Andalus society, a small number of women enjoyed a certain freedom of movement, especially during the domination of the Berber dynasties in the eleventh to thirteenth centuries CE. Such freedom may be attributed to their lack of a dowry, brothers, or family wealth to inherit (8-9). While it was unusual for women to receive a basic education, some upper-class women did, even gaining access to further study if their families allowed it, usually in the home or in the mosque (under guardianship); their poems were preserved and passed on by their families (12).

The poems written by these cultured women poets present the beloved as having a face like the sun or the moon (bright), with cheeks like a rose, and a mouth sweeter than wine. A common animal metaphor for the man is the lion. The woman describes herself, or is described by her lover, with the metaphor of the gazelle, the midday sun, or the moon. The description of her body includes hair in curls; cheeks like roses; teary black eyes; lips like sweet water; teeth like pearls; breasts like round peaches; adorned with a pearl necklace. She is young and unmarried (often through the metaphor of a garden without a gardener). White skin is preferred, and the denigration of dark skin assumes sharper tones when the poetic voice is that of a woman jealous of her beloved who has

taken a black slave as a lover: Wāllada the Umayyad (eleventh century) describes herself as “la luna de los cielos” and the rival as a “sombrio planeta” (Rubiera Mata 104; all translations are by Rubiera Mata). A similar example is from the poetry of Ḥafṣa Bint al-Ḥāyât Ar-Rakūniyya (Granada, 1135-1191) who describes her rival as “negra como la noche” ‘dark as the night’, such that “no se ve la hermosura del rostro ... el rubor de las mejillas” ‘one cannot see the beauty of her face ... the rosy cheeks’:

¡Oh tú que eras el hombre más fino del mundo
antes que el destino te hiciera caer!
Estás enamorado de una negra como la noche,
donde se ocultan los encantos de la belleza;
donde no se ve la hermosura del rostro,
ni, desde luego, el rubor de la mejillas.
¡Díme tú que sabes tanto de amar a las formas bellas!
¿Quién puede amar un jardín que no tiene flores? (Rubiera Mata 144)

In the poetry of the cultured women (wholly composed in Classical Arabic), the love theme is typical of the Arabic poetry written by men: symptoms of lovesickness, the bucolic “locus amoenus” and the (narcissist) self-portraits that adopt the classic metaphor of the woman as a gazelle or a doe, with bewitching eyes, pink cheeks, and teeth as pearls.

Besides the love poems there are also a number of satires, which are composed on traditional male themes such as obscene allusions to male genitals (Rubiera Mata 32). One poem by Umm al-‘Ala’ Bint Yūsuf of Guadalajara (eleventh century) teases an insistent suitor for his old age (121-122).

At the other end of the social ladder, slave women (but not concubines) also had more freedom of action; they were exempt from wearing the veil and from being cloistered, and so had more contact with the male world, including access to the social circles where poetry was composed and discussed (Rubiera Mata 14). Slaves, men and

women, were often the lover protagonists of their master's love poems, and since they could not aspire to marriage they could more easily engage in the "love games" celebrated by poetry. Among the female slaves the "singers" (*qiyān*) had a special position as "cultured prostitutes" who could please men physically and aesthetically (like Greek *hetairas* or Japanese *geishas*), and whose services were richly rewarded, as in the story of the Doncella Teodor (discussed in the next chapter) (16). In particular, women slaves of Christian origin (*ṣaqāliba*) captured or bought in various places around the Mediterranean were considered the most talented (19).

Arabic society considered the *muwashshaḥ* an obscene genre, written by men for men, and often with a homosexual tone, a theme probably inherited from the Abbasid (or "modernist") movement of Classical Arabic poetry that began during the ninth century in Baghdad. The use of the feminine voice (pleading to her male lover) could therefore be a technique indicating a male's acceptance of submission to another (Rubiera Mata 22-23).

According to Rubiera Mata, three factors suggest that the *kharajāt* were created by European female slave singers and then transmitted to Arab poets: the different Romance languages employed in the *kharajāt*; the fact that the *muwashshaḥ* and its variant the *zajal* were both musical genres to which known songs in Romance could be adapted; and, given the character of these songs, only slave women could be permitted to perform them for a male audience (23-25). The main theme of these *kharajāt* sung in the female voice is the desire of the woman for her male lover, as opposed to the Arabic tradition, where it is the man who pretends to be driven crazy by desire. In these *kharajāt*, references to the male body are usually limited to the face, especially the mouth. The woman (the female voice) talks about her own body and her own needs. For

example, she exhorts her lover to kiss her and hug her (“bésame la boca, aprétame los pechos”), and make love to her (“junta ajorca y arracada”), while her husband is busy with other matters (“está ocupado”):

Amiguito, decídete,
ven a tomarme,
bésame la boca,
aprétame los pechos;
junta ajorca y arracada.
Mi marido está ocupado. (Rubiera Mata 44)

In Rubiera Mata’s selection of anonymous *kharajāt* probably composed by slave singers, we find descriptions of both the lover and the beloved throughout the fifty poems. Some descriptions apply to both men and women: like a bird; with a small red mouth (“como cúrcuma”); the teeth like pearls; the hair usually black; of bewitching eyes; a white neck, and a mouth of “sweet saliva.” Other descriptions apply strictly to men, like praise of their dark skin, and in one case his blond hair. The mention of blond men or women in Arabic poetry is highly unusual, though the medieval Arab chronicler Ibn Ḥazm stated that the Umayyad rulers preferred blond women (Rubiera Mata 26). The descriptions that apply specifically to women describe them as having hair with curls and braids; with loving eyes; “beautiful” breasts; a white neck, and various body ornaments (bodice; necklace and other jewels). The following example belongs to the “canciones de confidente” type, and laments the fact that her beloved will see her “cuello albo” (“white neck”) unadorned because the jewelry merchant does not want to lend her any “joyas” (“jewels”):

El vendedor de collares, mamá,
no quiere prestarme joyas.
El cuello albo verá mi señor,
no verá adornos. (Rubiera Mata 55)

In a “canción de cuna” (“cradle song”) the use of maternal language such as “niño mío” (“my child”) towards the male lover acquires an erotic meaning in the association of feeding (“desayunarás”) with the offer of her beauty and her breasts (“te daré mi hermosura y mi pecho”):

¿No vienes, niño mío, conmigo?
Hoy desayunarás,
te daré mi hermosura y mi pecho,
y no seré parca. (Rubiera Mata 71)

Hebrew Andalusian poetry of the eleventh century was also closely modeled on Arabic Abbasid poetry. The poems celebrate love for women as much as love for boys, which may be a custom associated with courtly wine drinking in Iraq and Persia before Islam, where boys were made to look like girls and girls like boys (Schippers 147). In a study of the four major Hebrew Andalusian poets, Schippers has outlined the most frequent themes in their love lyrics, also prescribed in two works called *Kitāb al-Tashbīhāt*, one by Ibn Abi ‘Aun and the other by Ibn al-Kattāni: black hair (like musk), in contrast with the radiant face (like the sun or moon), with the locks described as scorpions or snakes watching over the red roses of the cheeks; languid eyes, with pupils like lances, that tear to pieces the heart of the lover, or that ensnare and capture him; teeth as pearls or daisies; red, scarlet lips of cornelian; fragrant mouth, palate like honey, and saliva like wine (but also like white and cold hail); manna under the tongue; neck like a lily (or a gazelle or a roe); breasts are compared with pomegranates; the stature and shape is compared with a work of art in ivory, or with branches of balm and date-palms, and the naked arms like swords that pierce the lover’s heart; the body spreads a myrrh-like perfume (Schippers 152-154). The following examples are single verses extracted from various poems on love in Schippers’ study:

My right hand embraced the white moon, my lips kissed the warm sun (165).

The perfumed scent of our balms dwells in his clothes and from the words he speaks drip the pleasing of his sweetness (166).

She took as a prisoner with the pupil of her eye, a neck, and a face, that shone for those who looked at [her] (174).

They say: 'It is dark, let there be light' with the light of their face and the dark of her hair (178).

Her lips are honey, her nose is myrrh, because of her face she is a sun, and because of her hair she is dark clouds (178).

Her cheek is like a rose, with a hair lock like a snake to watch over it (179).

The beloved in these poems is often a slave from a different ethnic group: in Arabic poetry she/he may be of Indian, Turkish, Jewish, Christian or Black African origin, while in the Hebrew poems she/he may be Christian (with red or blond hair), or Arabic. The lover is physically consumed by his love, and his health suffers greatly (Schippers 153-154). The metaphor of the woman as garden is not only found in love lyrics, but also in Nature poems:

If you walk through the garden, then you will see that she is of silver covered with gold above the earth of the garden (192).

From day to day the colours of the plants change from the colour of pearls into the color of rubies and the colour of carbuncles (193).

The images and motifs of these Hebrew Andalusian love poems match closely those of Arabic Andalusian poems, and all the elements may also be found from pre-Islamic times onward (Schippers 317-320).

The epics

Twelfth-century epics, among the earliest literary works in vernacular Spanish, contain few if any specific references to feminine beauty beyond the attribute "beautiful."

Their main theme is the pursuit of honor and adventure rather than love. Women do not play a central role in the narrative, and the few portraits are more concerned with their ethical choices than their physical beauty (Sponsler 119). In the twelfth-century *Poema de mio Cid* the most detailed description of a person is that of the Cid himself in his clothes and armor, his shirt “tan blanca commo el sol” ‘as white as the sun’ (v. 3087). This expression for whiteness and brilliance also occurs in other instances related to the Cid’s clothing (his shirt, v. 3493, and his head covering, v. 3087) and the soldiers’ armor (v. 3074). There are, nonetheless, two allusions to feminine beauty, one to the “beautiful eyes” (“ojos vellidos”) of the Cid’s wife and daughters (v. 1612), and the other to the complexion of his daughters, “white as the sun” (“mis fijas tan blancas commo el sol,” v. 2333). Whiteness and brilliance are, in all these cases, clearly associated with purity and righteousness.

Thirteenth century

The *Libro de Alixandre* concerns the legendary life, rise to power, and tragic death of Alexander the Great, a theme that achieved great popularity in the Middle Ages. The work may be classified as a literary epic as well as a romance, and its main direct source is the twelfth-century Latin poem *Alexandreis* of Gautier de Châtillon, supplemented by the French poem *Roman d’Alexandre* and the Latin prose-work *Historia de preliis* (Deyermond 66-67). Its *cuaderna via* form is typical of thirteenth century learned poetry. The portrait of Thalestris, queen of the Amazons, constitutes a detailed description of the beautiful woman:

Avié muy buen cuerpo, era bien astilada,
correa de tres palmos la c[e]ñía doblada,
nunca fue en el mundo cara tan bien tajada,
non podrié por nul precio seer mejor poblada.

La fruent avié muy blanca, alegre e serena,
plus clara que la luna quando es duodena;
non avrié cerca d'ella nul precio la Filomena,
de la que diz Ovidio una grant cantilena.

Avié las sobercejas como listas de seda,
eguales, mas abiertas, de la nariz hereda;
fazíe[n] una sombriella tan mansa e tan queda
que non seríe comprada por nenguna moneda.

La beldat de los ojos era fiera nobleza,
pestañas mesturadas de comunal grandeza;
quando bien las abrié era fiera fadeza,
a christiano perfecto tolrié toda pereza.

Tant avié la nariz a razón afeitada
que non podri[é] Apelles reprenderla en nada;
los labros abenidos, la boca mesurada,
os dientes bien [e]guals, blancos como quajada.

Blanca era la dueña, de muy fresca color,
avié [í] grant entrega a un emperedor;
la rosa del espino que es tan genta flor
al matín el rucío non parece mejor.

De la su fermosura non quiero más contar,
temo fer [a] alguno de voluntad pecar;
los sus enseñamientos non los sabrié fablar
Orfeus el que fizo los árboles cantar. (Stanzas 1873-1979)

After describing the beautiful shape of the body (slender) and the slim waist (three palms), the portrait concentrates on the face: a forehead whiter than the moon (with an explicit reference to Ovid's description of Filomena's beauty); thin, separated and "equal" eyebrows; a straight, well-fashioned nose; eyelashes of a "common size"; the beauty of "bold nobility" in her eyes; the harmonious lips; the mouth just the right size ("mesurada"); even teeth, white like cheese curd ("quajada"). Her skin is white, of a fresh color, more beautiful than a rose covered by morning dew (see Dana Arthur Nelson's notes for manuscript variants, *Libro de Alixandre* 581-582). The portrait of the

queen makes no mention of her hair or of other body parts, though earlier in the chapter we find the traditional view of the Amazons lacking the right breast: “Fazen otra barata por mal non parescer: / queman la teta diestra, que non pueda crecer; / la otra, porque puede más cubierta seer, / por criar los infantes dexan la poblecer” (stanza 1869).

The *cantigas*

Galician-Portuguese love poems, *cantigas*, are a form of popular poetry that was directly influenced by the Provençal poetic tradition (Deyermond 10). The influence was the result of the development of one of the main axes of economic, social and cultural communication in medieval Europe, the pilgrimage route that led to Santiago de Compostela. Over a thousand Galician-Portuguese love poems have survived, compiled in three major collections: the *Cancioneiro de Ajuda*, the *Cancioneiro da Biblioteca Nacional* (previously called *Cancioneiro Colocci-Brancuti*, and the *Cancioneiro da Vaticana*.) They date from the fifteenth century, but most *cantigas* were composed between the late twelfth and early fourteenth centuries, and many authors' biographical information is provided by Nunes (*Cantigas de amor*) and Lanciani and Tavani (*Dicionário*). Of the 1693 *cantigas* in the *Cancioneiro da Biblioteca Nacional* (henceforth *Cancioneiro*) few mention specific attributes of beauty (the number in the following parenthetical references to the *Cancioneiro* identifies the poem's classification number). There are three major genres: *cantiga de amor*, *cantiga de amigo*, and *cantiga d'escarnho e maldizer*. The *cantigas de amor* are secular poems closely related to the Provençal tradition of courtly love, though simplified in form and not as sensual, more abstract in content and with much less description of the lady; they express the emotions of men, and the man is the only, or first, speaker (Deyermond 12-14). Physical beauty is,

nonetheless, an essential feature of the beloved and the *cantigas de amor* often describe her as “de ben parecer” (“good-looking”), “ben talhada” (“well-shaped”) or “fremosa” (“beautiful”), the latter also used as an attribute of the Virgin Mary (*Cancioneiro* 409). In the first stanza of a *cantiga* by João Airas de Santiago, one of the most prolific *cantiga* authors of the thirteenth century, the poetic voice praises the beauty of the lady, cause of his love and his suffering (“pero que moyro, querendo vos bien”):

Senhor fremosa, de bon parecer,
Pero que moyro, querendo uos ben,
Se uos digo que muyto mal mj ven
Por uos, non mj queredes ren dizer,
Pero no mundo non sey eu molher
Que tan ben dig o que dizer quer. (*Cancioneiro* 899)

A *cantiga de amor* by Pero da Ponte, active in mid-thirteenth century, opens the poem with a praise of the lady’s slender body (“corpo delgado”):

Senhor do corpo delgado,
En forte pont eu fuy nado,
Que nunca perdi coydado,
Nen afan, des que uos uj.
En fort pont eu fuj nado,
Senhor, por uos e por mj. (*Cancionero* 926)

A *cantiga* by Pero Larouco (late-thirteenth early-fourteenth century) mentions the beautiful “color” of the beloved, without any specific detail (*Cancioneiro* 575).

The second type, the *cantiga de amigo*, expresses the emotions of women, and the woman is the only, or first, speaker. More numerous than the *cantigas de amor*, many differ in form, using a parallelistic structure. As in the *cantigas de amor*, though, descriptions of the lady’s beauty are limited to a few features. There is occasional mention of the lady’s eyes, but only in the context of the power of her gaze to make a man fall in love, without describing them: “En grave dia vi os olhos seus” (“grave was

the day I saw her eyes”) for example (Nunes, *Cantigas d’amor* 462). A poem by Martin Codax (late thirteenth century) describes a woman dancing outside the church in Vigo, highlighting her beautiful and slender body (“corpo velido ... corpo delgado”):

En no sagrad e[n] Vigo,
Baylauh corpo velido
Amor ey;
En Uigo no sagrado,
Baylauh corpo delgado,
Amor ey. (*Cancioneiro* 1232)

Other types of *cantigas de amigo*, such as the *pastorela*, describe the lady washing her hair, a common theme. In a *cantiga* by Pero Meõgo (early thirteenth century) we find a few features of the locus amoenus, “uerdes eruas” (“green grass”), “uerdes prados” (“green fields”), and female and male deer (“ceruas” and “ceruos”). The lady who describes the scene is washing her hair, her locks (“cabelos,” “garcetas”):

En as uerdes eruas,
Vi anda las ceruas,
Meu amigo.

En os uerdes prados,
Vi os ceruos brauos,
Meu amigo.

E, con sabor d elhos,
Lauey meus cabelos,
Meu amigo.

E, con sabor d elhas
Lauey mhas garcetas,
Meu amigo. (*Cancioneiro* 1137)

Neither the *cantigas de amor* nor the *cantigas de amigo* ever mention any specific attribute of beauty (hair color and length, skin color, eye color, etc.). The third type of *cantiga*, the *cantiga d’escarnho e de maldizer*, is also based on the Provençal tradition and is similar in form to the *cantiga de amor*, but its content is satirical and often

obscene, indirectly (“d’escarnho”) or openly (“de mal dizer”) attacking a specific person (Liu 2-3). Unlike other cantigas, a few present (satirical) portraits of women. The following example is taken from the thirteenth-century poet Pero d’Armea:

Donzela, quenquer entenderia
que uos muy fremosa parescedes;
se assy he como uos dizedes,
no mundo uosso par non auia
aunque y uosso par ouuesse:
quen a meu cuu conçela posesse
de parescer ben uençer uos ya.

Uos andades dizend en concelho
que sobre todas parescedes ben,
e, con tod esto, non uos uei eu ren,
pero poedes branq en vermelho;
mays, sol que s o meu cuu de ssi pague,
et poser huu pouco d aluayade,
rreueer s a con uosco no espelho.

Donzela, uos sodes ben talhada,
se no talho erro non prendedes,
ou en essa saya que uos tragedes,
e pero sodes ben colorada,
que ao meu cuu posesse orelhas
et lhi ben figesse as sobancelhas,
de parescer non uos deuera nada. (*Cancioneiro* 1504)

The target of criticism in this poem is a young lady who uses too much make-up (white and red, “branq en vermelho”). The poet claims that he would look just as handsome if he put some make-up (“aluayade”) on his backside and painted ears and eyebrows on it.¹ A *cantiga d’escarnho* by (probably) Martin Soarez, active in mid-thirteenth century, also teases a lady by asking her if she wants to be portrayed in white and red (first stanza):

No mundo non me sei parella

¹ Pero d’Ambroa, contemporary of Pero d’Armea, wrote a satire in response to the above, pointing out that the desired look of the poet’s backside could be improved if he added a nose, lips, and mustache (*Cancioneiro* 1505).

mentre me for como me uay:
ca ia moiro por uos e, ay!
mia sennor, branca e vermella
queredes que uus retraya?
quando uus eu uj en saya,
mao dia me leuantey
que uus enton non uj fea. (*Cancioneiro* 1571)

Caldeyron, *jongleur* at the end of the twelfth century, offers a portrait of ugliness
in the following *cantiga*:

Huã donzela coitado
D amor por si me faz andar.
Et en sas feyturas falar
Quer eu como namorado:
Rostr agudo come foron,
Barua no queix e no granhon,
Et o uentre grand e inchado.

Çobrancelhas mesturadas,
Grandes et muy cabeludas,
Sobre lh os olhos meriudas,
Et as tetas pendoradas
Et mui grandes, per boa fe,
Ha hu palm e meio no pe
Et no cos tres polegadas.

A testa ten [en]rugada
Et os olhos encouados,
Dentes pintos come dados
Et a calor de passada:
Atal a fez Nostro Senhor,
Muy sen doyt e sem sabor,
Des y muyt abre forçada. (*Cancioneiro* 1523)

In this *cantiga* we have a description of the features that define the opposite of
beauty: a pointed face like a ferret, a beard, a big and swollen belly, thick and hairy
eyebrows that are joined, large and sagging breasts (a palm-and-a-half long and three
inches wide), wrinkled forehead, sunken and bleary eyes, and teeth blackened like dice,

the color of raisins. Ugly traits like a dark face, hairiness, and white hair, are mentioned in relation to old age in a *cantiga de maldizer* by King don Alfonso of León:

Non quer eu donzela fea
que a mha porta pea.

Non quer eu donzela fea
E negra come caruon,
.....

Non quer eu donzela fea.
E uelosa come cam,
.....

Non quer eu donzela fea
Que a brancos os cabelos,
.....

Non quer eu donzela fea,
Veelha de ma coor,
..... (*Cancioneiro* 421)

The reference to a slender body (“corpo delgado”), as in the example by Pero da Ponte (*Cancioneiro* 926) is also found in a *cantiga d’escarnho* by Fernam Rodrigiz de Calheyros (early thirteenth century). Although it is a satire of a man named Fernam Roiz Corpo-Delgado who was rejected by the woman to whom he proposed marriage, the poem is significant because the pun on the name draws a contrast between “auer corpo delgado” (having a slender body) and “seer mal talhada” (being badly shaped), and the poet expresses (sarcastic) amazement at the lady’s choice of ugliness over beauty:

Dunha donzela enssanhada
Soo eu marauilhado
De como foy razoada
Contra mj n outro dia,
Ca mj disse que queria
Seer ante mal talhada
Que auer corpo delgado. (*Cancioneiro* 1281)

Rhetorical descriptions of beauty and ugliness, therefore, appear only as sketchy parodies in the *cantigas d'escarnho e de maldizer* and do not appear at all in the other types of *cantigas* on love. The more detailed portrait of feminine beauty, in fact, is more typical of learned poetry, such as the *Razón de amor y los denuestos del agua y el vino*. This is a thirteenth-century lyrical poem close to the Latin debate poem tradition, but in the subject, tone and rhythm of the first section reveals a clear influence of the love narrative of the *cantigas de amigo* (Alvar, *Antigua poesía* 147; Deyermond 74). The literary debate about chastity and lust is introduced symbolically in the second section, where water and wine may be identified respectively as “pure love” and “sexual love,” in parallel with the erotic encounter between a troubadour and a young lady in the first section.

Cast in the classical rhetorical setting of a locus amoenus in the Spring, the first section makes a detailed description of a beautiful woman. The troubadour register is keyed when the young man says that he wishes to sing about courtly love (“e quis’ cantar de fin amor,” v. 55). As he is about to sing, he notices the arrival of a young woman, who is described thus:

Mas vi venir una doncela;
 pues naçí, non vi tan bella:
 blanca era e bermeia,
 cabelos cortos sobr’ell oreia,
 60 frunte blanca e loçana,
 cara fresca como maçana;
 naryz equal e dreyta,
 nunca viestes tan bien feyta;
 oios negros e ridientes,
 65 boca a razon e blancos dientes;
 labros vermeios, non muy delgados,
 por verdat bien mesurados;
 por la çentura delgada,
 bien estant e mesurada. (Alvar, *Antigua poesía* 151)

After treating of her beauty, the description moves to her white face and red cheeks (like an apple), short hair above the ears, white and “lively” forehead, a symmetrical and straight nose, black and radiant eyes, well-proportioned mouth, white teeth, red lips (not too thin, and well proportioned), slim waist, well-shaped and well-proportioned body. The reference to short hair is highly unusual, for long hair--whose length was often specified as reaching to the waist--was the typical feature, symbolizing both beauty and virginity.² References to the size of the lips and of the waist resemble those found in the “muger hermosa” of the *Libro de buen amor*, discussed later in this chapter.

The association of beauty with sexual love, but as a negative feature, is made in *Vida de Santa María Egipciaca*. The earliest known hagiographic account of St. Mary the Egyptian, who appears to have lived in the fifth century, was written in Greek in the seventh century, probably by Sophronius, the Patriarch of Jerusalem. In its original version (based on several sources) it was supposed to serve as an “exemplum,” illustrating how the monk Gozimás, in his quest for spiritual perfection, realizes his limitations when he meets Mary, an ex-prostitute who had repented in such a profound way that her last forty-six years were spent as an ascetic wandering in the Jordanian desert. There are several extant Latin translations, the earliest from the ninth century, which in turn led to translations in prose and verse in Anglo-Saxon, French, Italian, and Arabic in the following centuries (*Vida* 9-19; Walker vii-xiii). However, in some of the best known vernacular treatments of the story the emphasis of the exemplum shifts from the monk Gozimás to Mary the ascetic. Unlike the original story, where Mary herself

² Alvar paraphrases v. 59 as “los rubios cabellos le llegaban a las orejas,” introducing an element (long hair) that is not in the poem, but is part of the literary canon of beauty (Alvar, *Antigua poesía* 151).

gives an account of her life to the monk, these later vernacular versions offer a third-person biography of Mary's whole life, and Gozimás becomes a secondary, minor figure (Walker ix-xi).

Four surviving vernacular versions are known from the Iberian peninsula. Two are adaptations of the French *Vie de Sainte Marie l'Egyptienne*, which exists in verse as well as in prose: the thirteenth-century poem *Vida de Santa María Egipçiaca*, and the fourteenth-century prose version *Estoria de Santa María Egipçiaca*. The two remaining texts, more faithful to Latin sources, are not considered here.³

The poem *Vida de Santa María Egipçiaca* is a longer version of the story, and contains a description of a young, beautiful Mary, desired by all the men in Alexandria:

205 De la beltat de su figura,
como dize la escriptura,
ante que siga adelante,
direvos de su semblante:
de aquel tiempo que fue ella,
210 después no nació tan bella;
nin reina nin condessa
non viestes otra tal como essa.
Abié redondas las orejas,
blanquas como leche d'ovejas;
215 ojos negros, e sobreçejas;
alba frunte, fasta las çernejas.
La faz tenié colorada,
como la rosa cuando es granada;
boqua chica e por mesura
220 muy fermosa la catadura.
Su cuello e su petrina,
tal como la flor dell espina.
De sus tetiellas bien es sana
tales son como maçana.
225 Braços e cuerpo e tod' lo al
blanco es como cristal.
En buena forma fue tajada,

³ One is a mid-fifteenth century Spanish prose translation of the version contained in the Latin work *Legenda Aurea*; the other is a fourteenth-century Portuguese prose translation, the *Vida de Sancta María Egipcia* (Walker xii-xiii).

nin era gorda nin muy delgada;
nin era luenga nin era corta,
230 mas de mesura bona. (*Vida* 55-56)

The subsequent verses describe her beautiful, rich, and colorful clothes and shoes that match her beauty (vv. 233-244). In brief, Mary's beauty is defined by: blond hair; round, white ears; black eyebrows; black eyes, well separated; white forehead; red colored face; small, well proportioned mouth; white neck and chest; breasts like apples; white arms; white body; well-shaped, neither fat nor thin; and neither tall nor short. Her beauty gives her both the means to survive in Alexandria, and later to pay for passage on a ship going to the Holy Land. When supernatural forces prevent her from entering the temple she realizes it is because of her sins, and she begins to repent, while tearing at her hair and beating her chest: "d'amas manos tira a sus cabellos, / grandes feridas dio a sus pechos" (vv. 458-459). After her repentance and her wandering in the desert for forty years, Mary's appearance is radically changed. The beautiful clothes have been worn away, and her only covering is her hair that now reaches her feet:

720 Toda se mudó d'otra figura,
que non ha panyos nin vestidura.
Perdió las carnes e la color,
que eran blancas como la flor;
los sus cabellos, que eran rubios,
725 tornáronse blancos e suzios.
Las sus orejas, que eran albas,
mucho eran negras e pegadas.
Entenebridos abié los ojos;
abié perdidos los sus mencojos.
730 La boca era empeleçida,
e derredor muy denegrada.
La faz muy negra e arrugada
de frío viento e de la elada
La barbiella e el su grinyón
735 semeja cabo de tizón.
Tan negra era la su petrina,
como la pez e la resina.

En sus pechos non abía tetas,
 como yo cuido eran secas.
 740 Braços luengos e secos dedos,
 cuando los tiende semejan espetos.
 Las unyas eran convinientes,
 que las tajaba con los dientes.
 El vientre abié seco mucho,
 745 que non comié nengun conducho.
 Los pïedes eran quebraçados:
 en muchos logares eran plagados. (*Vida* 77-78)

This portrait closely parallels, in its length and the attributes mentioned, the description of the beautiful Mary, but new elements, such as the color of the hair, or the mention of fingernails, belly and feet are added. After forty years in the desert (and in her old age), the focus of the portrait is on the darkness of the features previously described as white or red, on her emaciated body, her cavernous eyes,⁴ and her white hair.

Among the ways the shorter prose version of the *Estoria* differs from the poem is an unorthodox portrait of Mary in her youth. Some of the differences can be related to the difference between the two genres, the poetic *Vida* using more lively and colorful language, with frequent repetitions stylistically typical of oral recitation intended for a mass public, while the prose *Estoria* seems to have been intended for a more cultivated public (Walker xxii-xxxviii). At the beginning of the *Estoria* Mary is described as beautiful in every feature: “mucho era fermosa a maravilla e muy bien tajada e muy fresca e muy pagadora de todas otras fechuras” (vv. 11-13), or “grant beldade ella avja” (v. 60). María agrees: “Yo so fermosa e menina” (vv. 85-86). All the young men were attracted to her: “Ella era muy fermosa--así commo vos dixen--e deseávanla mucho los

⁴ Alvar notes that the meaning of “mencojos” is uncertain. The term could be a form of “entreojos,” that is the separation between the eyes which was considered a sign of beauty, and that appears to decrease as the eyes become more deeply set in (*Vida* 264).

mançebos de la tierra” (vv. 45-47), or “toda la mançebía de la tierra era ençendida por su beldat, e todos eran cofondidos por ella” (vv. 129-130). There is, however, no specific portraiture description of her beauty as in the poem. The description of Mary’s devastated body after many years in the desert, on the other hand, closely resembles the poetic version:

E su carne, que era blanca commo nieve, finco toda negra e [como si fuese] carvon por la friura del jnbierno e por la calentura del verano, ssus cabellos tornaron blancos, ssu rostro torno anpollado e su boca quebrada e sus ojos fueron covados, e su pecho prieto e aspro que semejava cuero de caçon; e los braços e las manos e los dedos avja mas secos que podia ser, e las unnas avja luengas e el vientre traya caydo e sus pies eran rresquebrados e muchas llagas por ellos. (vv. 245-254)

Fourteenth century

Dated to the first decade of the fourteenth century, the *Libro del Cavallero Çifar* is the earliest chivalric romance in Spanish, and it narrates the fantastic adventures of the knight, his wife, and two sons as they roam far from their own land. Only a few of the women are qualified as beautiful, while we find many more attributes related to their character and morality (“buena,” “honrada,” “razonada,” etc.). Beautiful women are simply described as “fermosas.” All are members of the nobility, the accompanying term being mostly “dueñas,” followed by “doncellas,” “muger,” “fijas,” and “dama.” Çifar’s wife, Grima, is almost always introduced by the narrator as “la buena dueña,” although there are a few instances where a group of (evil) men comments on her beauty (“la fermosura de aquella dueña”), or King Menton’s messenger reports meeting one of the most beautiful women in the world (“una dueña ... de las mas fermosas del mundo” (*Libro del Cavallero Çifar* 29-30; all quotations are from Olsen’s edition). A pious man, King Mentón has remained chaste with his wife for more than a year, an example of true

love, though we are told that it surprises many people in the kingdom since the queen is “una de las mas fermosas damas endereçadas de todo el mundo” (51). Other references to feminine beauty occur in relation to Roboan, one of Çifar’s two sons. During his adventures in the Ynsolas Dotadas, Roboan marries the Empress Nobleza, not only beautiful but also wealthy and powerful (“muy rica, e muy poderosa, e la mas fermosa e la mas acostunbrada dueña que en el mundo naçio”); she is even more beautiful than her mother (la Señora del Paresçer) who had also been “una de las mas fermosas del mundo,” more beautiful than Queen Ginebra (133). Three chapters later, we find Roboan musing about his wife Nobleza, “la mas fermosa e de mejor donayre, e la mas enseñada e de mejor palabra, e la mas sosegada dueña de entendimjento, e la mas mesurada de mejor resçibjr, e la mas alegre e de mejor solaz muger que en el mundo fuese nasçida” (137).⁵ The lengthiest description of a woman’s attributes is made in a passage where Roboan flatters Gallarda, an “honorable and very beautiful widow,” but without mention of specific physical traits:

Señora, mucho devriedes gradesçer a Dios por quanta merçed e bien vos fizo, ca yo mucho gelo gradesco porque vos fizo una de las mas fermossas dueñas, de todo el mundo, e la mas loçana, e de coraçon, e de mejor donayre, e de mejor palabra, e de mejor paresçer, e de mejor resçibir, e la mas apuesta en todos los fechos. Ca bien semeja que Dios, quando vos fizo, que de muy vagar estava, ca tantas buenas condiçiones puso en vos de fermosura e de bondat, que bien creo que en muger deste mundo non las pudiese ombre fallar tales. (112)

The beauty of Gallarda is accompanied by her moral virtues, as is the case with Seringa (Roboan’s last wife), in whom God had wanted to join beauty with kindness and goodness (“Dios quisiera ayuntar su fermosura con apostura e bondat” [150]). Four other examples of beautiful women refer to minor characters in the work. One is found in a

⁵ The most beautiful and most graceful, most learned and well-spoken, most poised and intelligent, most proper and welcoming, most happy and amusing woman ever born into the world.

framed “exemplum” of untrue love, in the form of questions and answers between a good man and his beautiful and pleasant daughter, “una fija muy hermosa e cunplida de muy buena palabra e de buen rreçibir e plazible mucho de dezir e aun de oyr” (69). Another is found in connection with a story about a king of Ephesus and an (evil) vassal who wanted to punish the king’s daughter, the most beautiful in the kingdom (“ca la donzella era la mas hermosa de todo el rreyno”) by burning her (99). A third concerns a beautiful and noble damsel (“una doncella muy hermosa e fija dalgo”) who helps the hero Roboan put on a finely embroidered shirt during his adventures in the kingdom of Trigrida (127). The fourth takes place at the court of the Empress Nobleza, where we hear of a group of well-dressed, beautiful female singers holding flowers in their hands, “donzellas muy hermosas e bien vestidas con ramos floridos en las manos” (134). That Nobleza’s hair is golden is revealed when Roboan discovers some strands mixed with gold thread, and cannot distinguish between the two: “non semejavan sy non oro, de gujssa que non avje departimjento ninguno entrellos e el oro, salvo que eran mas primos e mas sotiles que los filos de oro” (137).

There are also those beautiful women who are either “fantastic” (according to the narrator) or who lack positive moral qualities. One appears near a magical lake, “una dueña muy hermosa,” and entices the Cavallero Atrevido to marriage and fatherhood by taking him to a magical underwater world. The passage that recounts their meeting makes the sole reference in the work to a feature of the body endowed with erotic content, the lady’s foot: “Ella alço el pie del agua e mostrogelo. E el cavallero semejole que nunca tan blanco njn tan fermoso njn tan bien fecho pie viera commo aquel” (“She raised her foot out of the water and showed it to him. It seemed to the knight that he had

never seen a foot as white or as beautiful or as well formed” [66-67]). The embittered knight later describes this same woman, la Señora de la Traición, as uglier and darker than any devil in Hell, and probably related to the devil (on her mother’s side): “Tornada en otra figura que bien, me semejo que en todos los ynfiernos non era mas feo njn mas negro diablo que ella era. E bien creo que de parte de su madre que es fija del diablo” (71). While still in the enchanted world, the knight is taken to a palace, where a banquet is offered for ten thousand knights on tables and crockery made of precious stones and gold, and sophisticated dishes brought by “unas doncellas las fermosas del mundo e muy noblemente vestidas” (68). While wandering the town the knight meets a woman “mucho mas fermosa que non su señora pero que era amada de muchos” and cannot help but fall in love with her, a mistake that causes his banishment and that of his son from the magical kingdom (68).

The title of “most beautiful in the world” is also used in connection with an encounter Roboan has with the devil, who has taken on the appearance of a beautiful woman in order to destroy Roboan’s relationship with his wife Nobleza:

Acaesçió que un día andando el enperador a monte, que lo vido el diablo apartado de su gente yendo tras un venado e parosele delante en figura de muger, la mas fermosa del mundo. E el emperador, quando la vjdo, retovo la rrienda al cavallo e parose e dixole: “Amiga, ¿quien vos troxo aqui tan fermosa e tan bien andante? Ca bien me semeja que nunca tan fermosa dueña viesse commo vos.” (134)⁶

The deception works, and a few days later the emperor again meets the disguised devil, more beautiful than the first time: “En figura de aquella dueña que la otra vegada

⁶ It happened one day, as the emperor was walking up a mountain, that the devil saw him separated from his men in pursuing a deer, and appeared in front of him in the form of a woman, the most beautiful in the world. The emperor, when he saw her, held the reins and stopped his horse, saying to her: “Who brought you here, my friend, so beautiful and so graceful? For it certainly seems to me that I have never seen a woman as beautiful as yourself.

vjniera, salvo que ssemejava al enperador que era mucho mas fermosa que la otra vegada” (135). At the third encounter, the devil/lady has become even more beautiful, “muy mas fermosa que las otras dos vezes” (137).

Regarding men’s beauty and ugliness, the Çifar recounts a story about the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar whom God punished by making him live like an animal, long-haired and with eagle-claws: “E fue enconado el su cuerpo del roçio del çielo fasta que sus cabellos crecieron en semejança de cabellos luengos, e las sus uñas fueron asy commo uñas de agujlas” (89). The Çifar himself is decribed at least twice as beautiful in arms: “Entre todos los otros e paresçie muy fermoso armado, ca era grande, e muy apuesto e muy valjente” (17). Another knight describes him as beautiful in his skills and actions: “Del dia que nasçi non vj a un cavallero tan fermoso armado njn que tan bien cavalgase un cavallo njn que tantos buenos fechos fiziese de sus armas” (48). There is also an apparition of Jesus Christ to Grima, Çifar’s wife, where Jesus is described as a beautiful white child (“un niño ... muy blanco y muy fermoso”) guiding her ship from atop a sail (29).

Several famous passages in *Don Quijote* refer to *Amadís de Gaula* as the “best” of the Spanish romances of chivalry. It was widely known from the early fourteenth through the sixteenth century, avidly read by Saint Teresa and Ignatius of Loyola in their youth, and considered worthy of respect by the humanist Juan de Valdés as well as Cervantes. In form, it shows the clear influence of the Arthurian cycle. The settings and some three hundred characters of the romance are almost all foreigners (Gaula = Wales; Vindilisora = Windsor; Briolanja = Brion l’Ange; Arcaláus = Arc á l’eau, etc.). The only exception is Brián de Monjaste, son of the king of Spain, who participates in one battle

with a thousand knights (Book IV). The success of this work spawned numerous sequels that were translated into all major European vernacular languages. The work is anonymous, and there is conflicting evidence regarding its possible Portuguese origin. The sole, but partial, manuscript dates from 1420, though it was modified and enlarged by Garci Rodríguez de Montalvo for the first printed edition of 1508 (Deyermond 159). This is the version consulted here.

Stylistically the work is characterized by action, knights wage constant battle (in almost every one of the seventy-six chapters), or engage in dramatic dialogue. Descriptions of landscape or people are brief, ready-made schematic backdrops for the action, such as a mountainous forest, a thick-walled castle with high towers, a wealthy palace, or a beautiful woman. As is the case in other chivalresque romances, we find two protagonists: a knight errant in search of fame, to be obtained by defeating a notorious knight, usually in defense of the honor of a beautiful damsel (or sometimes in defense of the helpless); and a damsel, also in search of fame, which means the widest possible recognition of her beauty (her supreme virtue) thanks to the exploits of her knight. Naturally, in this world of black and white, hero and heroine are physically attractive and morally virtuous, while their enemies are physical unattractive and morally bankrupt. Four main values/themes predominate: valor in battle for men, beauty for women, love for each other, and loyalty to friends and superiors (*Amadís* xiii-xv.)

A distinguishing feature of *Amadís* is its emphasis on the erotic, according to the canon of courtly love. The knight is spurred to strive for fame in battle, first by the hope of the love of a beautiful noblewoman, and subsequently by her promise of love; he is attracted by the physical beauty of the woman. The woman is, in turn, also attracted by

the physical beauty of the knight, but especially by his fame. For example, the first chapter of Book I presents the encounter of Amadís's parents, King Perión and Princess Elisenda. They are both beautiful, though he is also an accomplished knight, and it is love at first sight: "Como la infanta era muy hermosa, y el rey Perión también, y además se había divulgado por todas partes del mundo la fama de sus grandes hazañas, en cuanto se miraron se sintieron dominados por un gran amor" (*Amadís* 12; all quotations are from Rosenblat's edition). A similar account of love at first sight, with the same contrast between a woman's beauty, on the one hand, and man's valor, on the other, is found in the last chapter of Book IV ("Las bodas"). Galaor marries queen Briolanja, who was already beautiful as a young girl, and is now at the peak of perfection: "Cuando Galaor la había visto era muy moza, pero ahora estaba en la perfección de la edad y de la hermosura. Al mirarla, sintió por primera vez el verdadero amor, y ella, que conocía sus grandes hechos de armas y sus buenas maneras de caballero, puso en él el amor que siempre había sentido por Amadís" (315).

In terms of masculine beauty, all the heroes are described as "hermoso"; this adjective is generally accompanied by references to other qualities like strength, courage, fame or, like the knight Galaor, well-read in chivalric romances (41). A group of women looking at Amadís, who lies unconscious after a fight, comment on his beauty ("hermosura de caballero"), as well as being an outstanding youthful knight (66). When Amadís removes his armor, Briolanja and her mother are amazed at his beauty ("quedaron maravilladas de su hermosura"), while noting the knight's great feats despite his young age: "Siendo de edad tan tierna hubiese hecho cosas tan extrañas en armas" (74). Other examples include Galaor, also one of the most handsome knights in the

world and difficult to distinguish from his brother Amadís, and Amadís's son, six-year-old Esplandián, who appears to king Lisuarte as the most beautiful boy he has ever seen (235).

Though it may seem paradoxical, heroes are handsome even when covered in blood from battle wounds. In fact, it is of preeminent importance that valor in war accompanies masculine beauty: “Arbán... tenía cinco heridas en el rostro y en la garganta, y la cara llena de sangre, pero parecía más hermoso” (109). When Amadís is age twenty, Briolanja falls in love with him, seeing in him the most beautiful knight in the world, as the battle scars increased his attractiveness: “y las cicatrices de la cara aumentaban su hermosura” (118). Grasinda too is stunned by Amadís's superhuman beauty (“no creía que un ser humano pudiese llegar a tanto”) when he was seriously wounded (241).

Conversely, enemies are physically disproportionate, not-quite human. King Abies, for instance, was of huge proportions: “Llevaba un palmo de estatura a cualquier caballero, y sus brazos parecían de gigante” (38). One of the few detailed descriptions of such an individual, the evil Ardán Canileo el Temido, is the following:

Era de sangre de gigantes ... Sus miembros eran gruesos, las espaldas anchas, el pecho cuadrado y el rostro grande y romo, parecido al de un can, de donde le venía el nombre; tenía las narices aplastadas y anchas, y era de color encarnado, con unas pintas negras y espesas, de que tenía sembrado el rostro, las manos y el cuello. Tenía brava catadura, como de león, los labios gruesos y los cabellos y barba crespos.⁷ (185)

Dwarfs, in contrast, are associated with good luck, and the one who accompanies Amadís in one adventure is portrayed as a loyal friend.

⁷ He had giants' blood ... His limbs were big, his back was broad; he had a square chest and a large face with a snub nose, like a dog, whence his name; he had flat and large nostrils, and was of a fleshy color, with black and thick spots scattered on his face, hands, and neck. He had a fierce look, like a lion, with thick lips, and curly hair and beard.

The relationship between a knight's battle fame and a damsel's fame for beauty may even reach paradoxical levels. Angriote de Estraváus's beloved demands that he forces all knights to go the royal court and declare that she is more beautiful than their own ladies: "Por imposición de su dama, obligaba a todos los caballeros a presentarse en la corte del rey Lisuarte a declarar que la amiga de Angriote era más hermosa que la propia" (61). In the case of Grasinda, her brother challenged anyone who maintained she was not the most beautiful woman of Romania to combat. She asks an unwilling Amadís to do same at the court of king Lisuarte, where are also found "the most beautiful women in the world" (257).

In terms of feminine beauty, all the youthful noblewomen are described as "hermosa," "tan hermosa," "asaz hermosa," "muy hermosa," or "hermosa y lozana." In some cases reference is made to a woman's beautiful hair, or a beautiful woman's hair: "una doncella de hermosos cabellos" (30), and "una hermosa doncella peinaba sus cabellos" (48). The most beautiful in the world is the Danish-born Princess Oriana (Amadís's true love), without equals: "Llamada la Sin Par, porque en su tiempo no hubo ninguna que la igualase en hermosura" (24). At this stage, when Oriana and Amadís are first promised to each other, both are adolescents; she is ten years old and he is twelve years old, though he looked older ("aunque parecía mayor" [24]). A few years later, it seems to Amadís that she is the most beautiful woman in the world ("no había tal hermosura en ninguna mujer del mundo" [56]). Amadís nonetheless feels the same way upon meeting Briolanja when still a young girl: "Le pareció la más hermosa que había visto en sus días" (72).

As is the case with men, physical and moral ugliness in women is usually seen in disproportionate size. A beautiful and well-dressed woman, but of enormous size (“pero de enorme proporciones”) (185), turns out to be a deceitful messenger. The Christian-hating giant Andandona, elder sister of the giant Madarque, also had white hair and a devil’s face: “Tenía cabellos blancos y ... su tamaño era descomunal, y por la cara parecía un diablo” (204).

In addition, rich clothing and elaborate hairdoes usually play a major part in the description of beautiful women: “[Oriana] estaba vestida con unos paños de seda india, con flores de oro bordadas. Sus hermosos cabellos estaban sueltos, y los cubría una rica guirnalda.” (56). The same description applies to the noblewomen at court: “Llevaban guirnaldas en las cabezas y vestían ricos paños” (157).

The sole reference to skin color is made in a villancico composed by Amadís for the infanta Leonoreta when the little girl is allowed to play the part of the damsel asking Amadís for his services as knight (Book II, Chapter Nine). Amadís compares her to a beautiful rose, whiter than all other flowers:

Leonoreta, fin roseta,
blanca sobre toda flor,
fin roseta, no me meta
en tal cuita el vuestro amor. (156)

Amadís’s villancico is in fact a refrain from a Castilian rendition of a popular thirteenth-century Galician-Portuguese *cantiga de amor* by Joan Lobeyra, which exists in different versions (*Cancioneiro* 228, 229, and 230).⁸ A main difference between the original Galician-Portuguese and the Castilian version in *Amadís* is that in the original *cantiga* Leonoreta is “bella” rather than “blanca.” This substitution suggests that, as in

⁸ See *Cancioneiro* Vol. I, pp. 395-404 for a discussion of the issue.

similar examples discussed above, the two terms “white” and “beautiful” were easily interchangeable, not only semantically but also rhythmically. Amadís also praises the “lindos ojos y esos hermosos cabellos” of the nine-year old Princess Leonoreta (255).

Surpassing all others in beauty is Amadís’s true love, Oriana. Though references to her specific attributes are few, such as her “beautiful hands” (320), Oriana is the only one among many other beautiful women who passes the final test for lovers before her wedding. She must go through a magical arch that tests the lovers’ loyalty (“arco de los leales amadores y la cámara defendida”), which she does successfully thanks to her courage, determination and, above all, her beauty (“más que nada con su extremada belleza” [320]). It is her beauty that allows her to be Amadís’s companion without fear of competition (“sin temor de que viniese ninguna mujer, por hermosa que fuese” [320]). It must be added that, much earlier in the adventure, Oriana took the initiative in her first sexual encounter with Amadís. This happened “más por la gracia y comedimiento de Oriana que por la desenvoltura u osadía de Amadís” (105).

Perhaps the most famous work of the fourteenth century is Juan Ruiz’s *Libro de buen amor* (*LBA*) probably composed around 1343. It is a complex work, influenced by the techniques of many genres, including sermons (popular and learned), the fabliaux, courtly love lyrics, Latin drama, exempla, Goliardic poetry, and secular lyrics. The main structure is constituted by the autobiographical narrative of the Archpriest of Hita who recounts his amorous adventures. In stanza 430 the character Don Amor advises the Archpriest, who has suffered several setbacks in love, on how to choose a woman: “Si quisieras amar dueña o otra qualquier muger, / ... / ... / sabe primeramente la muger escoger” and proceeds to describe the physical attributes of ideal feminine beauty:

- 431 Cata muger fermosa, donosa e loçana,
que non sea luenga nin otrosí enana;
si podieres non quieras amar muger villana,
que de amor non sabe: es como baüsana.
- 432 Busca muger de talla, de cabeça pequena;
cabellos amarillos, non sean de alheña;
las çejas apartadas, luengas, altas, en peña;
angosta de cabellos: ésta es talla de dueña.
- 433 Ojos grandes, someros, pintados, reluzientes,
e de luengas pestañas, bien claras, paresçientes;
las orejas pequenas, delgadas; páral mientes
si ha el cuello alto: atal quieren las gentes.
- 434 La nariz afilada, los dientes menudillos,
eguales, e bien blancos, un poco apartadillos;
las enzivas bermejas; los dientes agudillos;
los labros de la boca bermejós, angostillos.
- 435 La su boca pequena, así de buena guisa;
la su faz sea blanca, sin pelos, clara e lisa.
Puna de aver muger que la vea sin camisa:
que la talla del cuerpo te dirá: esto aguisa.
-
- 444 Si dexier que la dueña non tiene onbros muy grandes,
nin los braços delgados, tú luego le demandes
si ha los pechos chicos; si dize ‘sí’, demandes
contra la fegura toda, porque más çierto andes.
- 445 Si diz que los sobacos tiene un poco mojados
e que ha chicas piernas e luengos los costados,
ancheta de caderas, pies chicos, sovacados,
tal muger non la fallan en todos los mercados.
-
- 448 Guár[da]te que non sea bellosa nin barbuda:
¡atal media pecada el huerco la saguda!
Si ha la mano chica, delgada, boz aguda,
atal muger, si puedes, de buen seso la muda.⁹ (Ruiz 114-119)

⁹ “Look for a woman who is pretty and witty and full of spirit, who is not very tall nor yet dwarfish; if possible, try not to fall in love with a low-born woman, for that kind knows nothing of love: she is like a straw scarecrow. Look for a woman with a good figure and with a small head; hair that is blonde but not

The passage involves some textual problems. The three extant manuscripts (S, T, and G) offer slightly different versions, some of which are significant. (1) Verse 432d: in Ms. G the first hemistich has “ancheta de caderas,” while Ms. S has “angosta de cabellos.” The G version may reflect a copyist’s error, since it does not fit with the rest of the stanza (which describes the face) and the phrase recurs later in verse 445c (as part of the description of the body). The S version may also have been a copyist’s error in writing “cabellos” instead of “tenriellas” (“mejillas”), or even “carriellos” (“barbilla”) (Ruiz 115, n. 432d; Alonso; Llorach 173). (2) Verse 434b: the phrase “dientes ... un poco apartadillos” is explained by literary critics like Lecoy and Cejador as a copyist’s error for “un poco apretadillos” (Alonso 405). (3) Verses 432a, 432c, and 435d: the meaning of the word “talla” has a variety of possible meanings, from well proportioned, to stature, size, waist, or social status--the same variety of meanings exists in the equivalent term in medieval French (Ruiz 115, n. 432a; Alonso 402; Alarcos-Llorach 173-174). (4) Verse 433b: the phrase “bien claras, paresçientes” in Ms. G, which appears to refer to the previous word “pestañas” in the same verse, is rendered as “claros y reyentes” in Ms. S, which would be a reference to the “ojos” of verse 432a, and not to the eyelashes (Ruiz 115, n. 433b; Alonso 408, n. 12).

from henna; whose eyebrows are spaced apart, long and arched in a peak; who is nice and plump in the buttocks: this is the figure of a lady; whose eyes are large, prominent, colorful, shining; and with long lashes that show good and clearly; with small, delicate ears; mark well is she has a long throat: that is the kind men want; with a finely chiseled nose; and nice small teeth that are even and good and white, a trifle separated; with red gums, good sharp teeth; her lips red and nicely fine-drawn; her mouth nice and small, just so, in a pleasing way; her face white, hairless, bright, and smooth. Try to get hold of some women who can see her without her blouse on, who will tell you the form of her body: arrange this... If she [the messenger] tells you that your chosen lady does not have long limbs, nor thin arms, ask her next if she has small breasts; and if she says ‘Yes,’ inquire about her whole figure, so that you can be more sure. If your messenger tells you that your beloved’s underarms are just a little damp, and that she has small legs and long flanks, is nice and wide in the hips, with small, arched feet, this is the kind of woman that is not found in every marketplace... Take care that your lady is not hairy or bearded; may Hell rid us of such a half-devil as that! If her hand is small, her voice and delicate and high, you should, if you possibly can, try to change her from her prudent ways” (Willis 121-124).

Despite these inconsistencies, the literary portrait of feminine beauty in the *LBA* is the most extensive and detailed of medieval Spanish literature.¹⁰ The characteristics of the ideal woman include the following: neither tall nor short; well-proportioned; small head; blond hair, without henna; separated eyebrows, long, high and arched; narrow cheeks (or chin); big, not deeply set, and bright eyes; long and light eyelashes; small ears; long neck; straight nose; small, even, sharp, and white teeth, close together (but perhaps slightly apart); red gums; small red lips; small mouth; white and clear cheeks; small shoulders; slender arms; small breasts; moist armpits; small legs; long torso; “widish” hips; small feet, arched. There are also three features she should not have: body hair, small hands, and a sharp voice (Ruiz 119, n. 448b; Willis’s translation of vv. 448c and 448d, above, offers a different meaning). It is clear that the narrator is describing an idealized image. After listening to the advice of Don Amor on proper social behavior, including how to relate respectfully to women, the Archpriest observes that he never found the woman described by Don Amor, and probably never will (at least in his “neighborhood”):

Yo, Johan Ruiz, el sobredicho açipreste deHita,
 pero que mi coraçón de trobar non se quita,
 nunca fallé tal dueña como a vós Amor pinta,
 nin creo que la falle en toda esta cohita. (575)

The characteristics of ideal beauty also emerge when we consider a description of ugliness. In the following passage the Archpriest recounts a meeting with a shepherdess (“serrana”) of huge proportions and great ugliness on the Guadarrama range. Not even Saint John the Evangelist saw such monstrous figure in the Apocalypse:

¹⁰ Stanza 653 describes briefly Doña Endrina: “¡Qué talle, qué donaire, qué alto cuello de garça! / ¡Qué cabellos, qué boquilla, qué color, qué buenandança! / Con saetas de amor fiere quando los sus ojos alça.”

- 1012 Avía la cabeça mucho grande, sin guisa,
cabellos chicos, negros, más que corneja lisa,
ojos fondos, bermejos, poco e mal devisa;
mayor es que de osa la patada do pisa;
- 1013 las orejas mayores que de añal burrico,
el su pescueço negro, ancho, velloso, chico;
las narizes muy gordas, luengas, de çarapico;
bevería en pocos días caudal de buhón rico.
- 1014 Su boca de alana e los rostros muy gordos,
dientes anchos e luengos, asnudos e moxmordos,
las sobreçejas anchas e más negras que tordos:
¡los que quieren casarse, aquí no sean sordos!
- 1015 Mayores que las mías tiene sus prietas barvas;
yo non vi en ella ál, mas si tú en ella escarvas,
creo que fallarás de las chufetas darvas,
valdríasete más trillar en las tus parvas.
- 1016 Mas, en verdat, sí, bien vi fasta la rodilla:
los huesos mucho grandes, la çanca non chiquilla,
de las cabras de fuego una grand manadilla;
sus tovillos mayores que de una añal novilla.
- 1017 Más ancha que mi mano tiene la su muñeca,
vellosa, pelos grandes, pero, non mucho seca;
boz gorda e gangosa, a todo omne enteca,
tardía, como ronca, desdonada e hueca.
- 1018 El su dedo chiquillo mayor es que mi pulgar:
piensa de los mayores si te podrías pagar;
si ella algund día te quisiese espulgar,
bien sentiría tu cabeça que son viga de lagar.
- 1019 Por el su garnacho tenía tetas colgadas,
dávante a la çinta pues que estaban dobladas,
ca estando senzillas darl'ién so las ijadas:
a todo son de çítola andarian sin ser mostradas.
- 1020 Costillas mucho grandes en su negro costado,
unas tres vezes contélas estando arredrado;
dígotte que non vi más nin te será más contado
ca moço mesturero non es bueno para mandado.¹¹ (Ruiz 250-252)

¹¹ “She had a head that was very big , out of all proportion, short hair as black as a sleek raven, sunken red

Essentially, the portrait of ugliness emphasizes the great size of each feature, from the ears to the feet, as well as the dark skin color and the hairiness of the body.

Consistent with the opposite of beauty, hair is described as short and black, the eyes are deep and red, the neck is large and short, and the voice deep and nasal.

The features that constitutes feminine beauty, besides being contrasted with its opposite (ugliness) are also conveyed indirectly by the description of masculine beauty.

The Archpriest's portrait appears towards the end of the work, where Trotaconventos (the bawd) tries to convince Doña Garoça (a nun) that the Archpriest is an excellent suitor:

1485 “Señora” diz la vieja, “yo·:l veo a menudo
el cuerpo ha bien largo, miembros grandes, trefudo;
la cabeça non chica, villosa, pescoçudo;
el cuello non muy luengo, cabelprieto, orejudo;

1486 las cejas apartadas, prietas como carbón;
el su andar enfiesto, bien como de pavón;
el paso sosegado e de buena razón;
la su nariz es luenga: esto le desconpón.

1487 Las ençívas bermejas e la fabla tunbal;
la boca non pequeña, labros al comunal,
más gordos que delgados, bermejós como coral;
las espaldas bien grandes, las muñecas atal.

eyes, she could see little and badly; the print where she plants her foot is bigger than a she-bear's. Her ears as big as a yearling donkey's; her neck hairy, dirty, thick, and short; her nose very long, it looks like a curlew's beak: in a couple of days she could suck up the content of well-filled pool [or 'the capital of a wealthy peddler']. Her mouth like a mastiff bitch's, her snout-shaped lips big and thick, her teeth wide, long, horse-like, all jumbled together, her eyebrows thick and blacker than thrushes: those who want to get married should not close their ears at this point. She has a sprouting beard of very black hairs; I saw no more of her, but if you dig into her I think you will find a few small sedge roots [also 'jokes'] from Arvas [?], although it would be better for you to go and thresh your own heap of grain. But in truth, I did see up to her knee: her shin bones very long, and her shank not tiny; a big herd of fire-burn scars [pun on *cabras*, also 'goats']; her ankles thicker than a yearling's cow. Her wrist is broader than my hand, furry, with long hairs, though not very dry; her voice thick and nasal, sickening to everybody, slow, hoarse-sounding, unpleasant, and hollow. Her little finger is larger than my thumb, imagine whether you would enjoy her bigger ones: if some day she decided to pick fleas out of your hair, your head would feel as if her fingers were wine-press beams. She had her breasts hanging down inside her blouse, they only reached her waist because they were doubled back, for if they had hung loose they would have touched below her flanks; they would jig to every tune on a citole [stringed instrument of zither class] without having to be taught how; enormous ribs in her filthy sides, I counted them some three times while standing at a distance. I tell you that I saw nothing more, nor will more be told to you, because a lad who tells on people is no good for carrying messages" (Willis 274-276).

- 1488 Los ojos ha pequeños, es un poquillo baço;
 los pechos delanteros, bien trefudo el braço;
 bien complidas las piernas; el pie, chico pedaço:
 señora, d'él non vi más, por su amor vos abraço.
- 1489 Es ligero, valiente, bien mançebo de días;
 sabe los instrumentos e todas juglerías;
 doñeador alegre, ¡par las çapatas mías!:
 tal omne como éste non es en todas erías.”¹² (Ruiz 380-382)

The main masculine features described in the passage do not fundamentally differ from the portrait of the “serrana” discussed above, except that no negative attribute is attached to the great size of his body. Even the fact that he is short is attenuated by the adjective “un poquillo” (a little). The description of his foot, a “small thing” (“chico pedaço”) is probably ironic for a large foot (Ruiz 1488c, note). Like the ugly woman, he is hairy, his eyes are small, and his voice is grave. But like the beautiful woman, his lips and gums are red.

One of the last chapters of the *LBA* treats of the positive qualities of small women (“De las propiedades que las dueñas chicas an”). The author employs various similes to show that small women are in fact much more pleasant, loving, beautiful, and loyal than other women, just like a small precious stone or a nugget of gold holds great value. None of the physical features present in the other portraits is mentioned, and the final stanza reveals the true reason for the praise of small women: by virtue of their small size, they are less evil. One should always choose the lesser evil, according to a principle

¹² “‘Lady,’ said the old woman, ‘I see him frequently: he has a body of quite a good size, with long limbs, and muscular; his head is not small; he is hairy, thick-necked; his throat is not very long; he is black-haired and big-eared; his eyebrows stand apart, black as coal; his walk erect, much like a peacock’s; his step tranquil and well-measured; his nose is long, this spoils his looks; his gums red; and his voice like a trumpet; his mouth not small; his lips average, rather thick than thin, red as coral; his shoulders good and big; his wrists the same; he has small eyes; he is a trifle dark-skinned; his chest protruding; his arm well-muscled; his legs well-turned; his foot a little thing; lady, I saw no more of him: for the sake of his love, I embrace you. He is swift of foot, strong, good and young; he is familiar with musical instruments and all the arts of minstrelsy; he is a merry suitor, I swear by my shoes! Such a man as I speak of is not to be found in every field’” (Willis 398-400).

attributed to Aristotle: “Siempre quis muger chica que grande nin mayor: / non es desaguizado del grand mal ser foidor, / del mal tomar lo menos, dízelo el sabidor, / por ende de las mugeres la mejor es la menor” (1617).

Ballads

The first printed collections of Spanish ballads (“romances”) appeared in the sixteenth century, though we know that they were well established in Castilian society by the fourteenth century. They probably derived their verse-form from the epics, as well as some of their subjects and their content, and took the place of the epics in popular taste (Deyermond 124-125; Smith 8-17). Two major themes are typical of the ballads, justice (including revenge), and a tragic sense of life (Smith 40). Descriptions of feminine beauty are usually rare and brief. One of the oldest examples is “Blancaniña,” and forms of it exist in most European languages (Smith 197). The very title stresses the whiteness and youth of the lady. A wandering knight approaches her, while her husband the Count is away hunting, and compliments her on the color of her skin, whiter than the sun: “Blanca sois, señora mía, / más que el rayo del sol” (Smith 197). Another example is from one of the variants of the story of King Rodrigo’s seduction of Count Julián’s daughter (episode which, according to legend, led to the Count’s revenge by enlisting Moslem troops and invading Spain in 711), which emphasizes her beautiful face and white hands: “Amores trata Rodrigo; / descubierto a su cuydado / a La Cava lo dezía, / de quien era enamorado. / Mirava su lindo rostro / mirava su rostro alindado / sus lindas y blancas manos / él se las está loando” (Wright 42).

The first recorded ballad, “La dama y el pastor” (1421), portrays a noble lady trying to seduce a young shepherd, who declines the proposal because of previous

commitments (he is married, with children, and has to take care of his sheep). In this version, the first verses are spoken by the lady, who describes herself as beautiful (“de bell parasser”) and barefoot on the grass (“los pes tingo en la verdura”), and entices the shepherd by offering her body, her breasts showing through her dress (“Tate escudero, este coerpo, este corpo a tu plaser: / las titilles agudilles qu’el brial queran fender”)¹³ (Díaz-Mas 332-333). A later variant, introduced by a narrator, provides a more extensive portrait, adding references to her slim waist, white skin, rosy cheeks, long neck, and hawk eyes:

Estáse la gentil dama
paseando en su vergel
los pies tenía descalzos
que era una maravilla ver;

.....

[The lady speaks to the shepherd]

“Vete con Dios, pastorcillo
no te sabes entender,
hermosura de mi cuerpo
yo te las hiciera ver:
delgadica en la cintura,
blanca soy como el papel,
la color tengo mezclada
como rosa en el rosel,
el cuello tengo de garza,
los ojos de un esparver,
las teticas agudicas
que el brial quieren romper;
pues lo que tengo encubierto
maravilla es de lo ver.” (Smith 201-202)

It is significant that this portrait of feminine beauty should occur in a ballad where the typical role of the seducing knight and the innocent shepherdess are inverted. The

¹³ The lady initially calls the shepherd “esquire,” a term that makes the character more courtly (Díaz-Mas 332, n. 3).

unwilling (even angry) shepherd might have appeared to the audience as invested with greater morality (Díaz-Mas 332, n. 3), or perhaps comical (Wright 150-151). Another portrait of beauty is found in the ballad “Misa de amor,” or “La bella en misa.” In this ballad, the arrival of a beautiful lady for mass confounds the abbot and the monks who, instead of saying “amen,” blurt out “amor.” The oldest variant is the following:

<p>En Sevilla está una hermita adonde todas las damas allá va la mi señõra, saya lleva sobre saya, en la su boca muy linda en la su cara muy blanca y en los sus ojuelos garzos A la entrada de la ermita, el abad que dice la misa monacillos que le ayudan por decir: ‘amén, amén’</p>	<p>cual dicen de San Simón, iban a hacer oración; sobre todas la mejor, mantillo de un tornasol, lleva un poco de dulzor, lleva un poco de color, lleva un poco de alcohol. Relumbrando como el sol, no la puede decir, non; no aciertan responder, non: decían: ‘amor, amor.’ (Díaz-Mas 339-340).</p>
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Only three features are described in this ballad, a sweet mouth, a white/rosy face, and blue eyes with a little eyeliner. María Rosa Lida de Malkiel has shown that this same ballad existed in several medieval Castilian and Catalan variants, which became more elaborate through time in description and plot, and continued to be sung up to the twentieth century in Spain, Argentina, and among Sephardic Jews (33-35). As regards beauty, the features added in the most comprehensive of the variants are: white forehead (“la su fuente, reluciente”), shining hair (“sus cabellos briles son”), curved eyebrows (“la su ceja, muy nacarada,” that is, “enarcada”), almond eyes (“los sus ojos almendras son”), straight nose (“la su nariz, pendolica”), pink cheeks (“la sus caras yules son”), round mouth (“la su boca, muy redonda”), pearl-white teeth (“sus dientes perlas son”), slender neck (“la su garganta, delgada”), breasts like pomegranates (“sus pechos nares son”), a slim body (“el su bel, muy delgado”), and tall like a cypress tree (“y su boy, selví boy”).

The Sephardic and Catalan variants, however, emphasize the lady's "natural" beauty in contrast to the "artificial" beauty of cosmetics of the above variant: "lleva un poco de alcohol" (37-38).

Sephardic ballads are difficult to date after 1492, but they maintain many original (peninsular) features, while losing their Christian character (Alvar, *Poesía tradicional* xv-xvi). For example, a Sephardic variant from the Balkans of "La misa de amor" (renamed "El baño de Melisenda") substitutes a musician for the abbot, but the feminine portrait remains very similar:

Ansí traía su cuerpo	como la nieve sin pisare;
las sus caras coreladas	como la leche y la sangre;
los sus cabellicos rubios	parecen sirma de labrare;
la su frente reluciente	parece espejo de mirares;
la su cejica enarcada,	arcos ya son de tirares;
las su nariz empendolada,	pendolica de notares;
los sus muxos corelados,	merjanicos de filares;
los su dientes chiquiticos,	perla d'enfilares. (Alvar, <i>Poesía Tradicional</i> 28)

A short Sephardic ballad from Tangier, "Noche de amores," focuses only on the color of her skin (white) and hair (blond), and her elegant neck:

Yo la vide a la su puerta	oro filando,
blanca, rubia y colorada,	cuello gallardo.
De repente la dijera	los mis cuidados,
la niña como eso oyera	abrió el palacio. (Alvar, <i>Poesía Tradicional</i> 102)

Manuel Alvar reports three variants of a "wedding" type ballad, from Salonika, Tangier, and Tetuán. The descriptions of the beautiful bride are very similar, though the ballads vary considerably in length and in form. The shortest of the three, from Tetuán, describes a young widow washing clothes. She asks God why he gave her so many beautiful attributes only to marry an old man (a king happens to hear her beautiful singing and decides to marry her):

me dates cabeyo rubio
me dates cara hermosa
me dates ojos hermosos
me dates sejita en arco
me dates narí cuiquita
me dates boca chiquita
me dates labios hermosos
me dates dientes menudos
me dates lengua hermosa
me dates barba tan linda
me dite gala hermosa
me dites pechos tan lindos
me dites hombros hermosos
me dites brazos hermosos
me dites tripa tan linda
me dites pie tan chiquito,
me dates marido viejo,
para subirse a la cama

para peinar y transar;
como rosa en el rosal;
como antojos de cristal;
como sinta del telar;
como dáttil datilar;
como aniyo de dorar;
como filos de coral;
como perlas de enfilar;
como dulce tragapán;
como taza de cristal;
como rosca del sobar;
como limón limonar;
como mesas de cristal;
como arbules de la mar;
como río de nadar;
sapatito de cordobán;
viejo era y de antigüedad;
no se puede menear.

(Alvar, *Poesía Tradicional* 174-175)

Of the sixteen features listed, ten are simply described as “lindo” or “hermoso;” but hair is blond, eyebrows are arched, and nose, mouth, teeth, and feet are small.

Among the earliest works of Catalan literature there are two fourteenth-century poems that contain descriptions of feminine beauty comparable to those discussed above. One is the *Clam d'amor*, and follows closely the Provençal tradition (as one may expect, given the ancient connections between southern France and Catalonia). The lady has golden hair; curved eyebrows; white forehead; cheeks of crystal and ruby blended; a well formed nose; a fresh mouth; teeth whiter than ivory; a well-chiseled chin; the throat as white as snow; firm, white and round breasts; straight arms; white and soft hands; long fingers with brilliant white nails; straight sides down to the hips, and a body that combines “thin” and “round” features. The second is a poem by the same author of the *Clam*, and has a very similar but longer description (Marcos-Marín 27).

Fifteenth century

The poem “Que fizo el Marqués de Santillana a sus fijas loando la su fermosura”

(ca. 1444 or 1445) portrays two young women in the guise of “serranas” (vv. 5-36):

De espinas traben los velos
e de oro las crespinas,
senbradas de perlas finas,
que le aprietan sus cabellos;
e las trufas bien posads,
a más, de oro arracadas,
rruvios, largos cabellos
segund doncellas d'estado.

Fruentes claras e luzientes,
las çejas en arco alçadas,
las narizes afiladas,
chica boca e blancos dientes,
ojos prietos e rientes,
las mexillas como rosas,
gargantas maravillosas,
altas, lindas al mi grado.

Carnoso, blanco e liso
cada cual en los sus pechos,
porque Dios todos sus fechos
dexó quando fer las quiso;
dos pumas de para[i]so
las [sus] tetas ygaladas,
en la su çinta delgadas
con aseado adonado.

Blancas manos e pulidas,
e los dedos no espigados,
a las juntas no afeados,
uñas de argent guarnidas,
rrubies e margaridas
çafires e diamantes,
axorcas ricas, sonantes,
todas de oro labrado. (Marqués de Santillana 61-62)

The poem continues with a description of rich clothing, following the rhetorical tradition. Canonical in the women's top-down description, the portrait is unusual in that

it is not about romantic love but, rather, written in praise of the beauty of the Marqués's two younger unmarried daughters, doña Mencia and doña María (Marqués de Santillana 60-61). This may be considered an exercise in rhetorical technique, and it is the only poem by Santillana that employs these images of beauty.

The most common theme of the *villancico*, erotic love, appears as the exclusive theme of most poems, and secondary in others, and voiced by the woman or the man, though the female voice is more common. Of the 589 *villancicos* in the anthology compiled by Sánchez Romeralo (*El villancico*), about one quarter contain references to women's beauty in general, in addition to specific terms such as skin color, youth, eyes, hair, mouth, waist and breasts. Only 3% of the poems make references to men's physical beauty. The vast majority of the poems describe only one or two features, due in part, perhaps, to the brevity of the verse-form. Nonetheless, I believe this is also owing to the possibility that the mention of one trait of beauty (such as "white skin") was sufficient to evoke all the other traits that were part of the "standard" of beauty of the time.

Many references to a woman's beauty (including a lamentation for its absence) lack further qualifications. Adjectives such as "bella," "hermosa," "galana," "garrida," "linda," "bonica/bonitilla," "flor de la villa" or "buena" are found in thirty-three *villancicos* (about 6%). For example: "Díceme mi madre que soy bonitilla; / sábelo Dios y la salserilla" (Sánchez Romeralo 459).¹⁴ Ugliness is mentioned twice, as in "no me llame fea" (293) and "quien tuviere hija fea / cómprela un majuelo" (456). Two mention facial beauty (117, 148), and two mention make-up, "albayalde" (392, 457). Other attributes of beauty mentioned are "delicada" (539) and "soy chequita" (81).

¹⁴ All quotations are from Sánchez Romeralo and the numbers in parenthesis correspond to his numbering system.

A common *villancico* subtheme is the “morenica” apology, that is to say, the feminine poetic voice minimizes the importance of her apparent defect (“swarthy color”) or justifies it (since it probably suggested Moorish blood). “Soy morenica” is sometimes found in a concessive clause and followed by an explanation that dark skin color is due to minding livestock and being exposed to sunlight. The poetic voice insists that despite appearances she is in fact of white skin:

Aunque soy morena,
yo blanca nací;
a guardar ganado,
mi color perdí.” (326)

The wording resembles that of the biblical Song of Solomon: “I am black, but comely ... I am black because the sun hath looked upon me” (1.5-6), suggesting the continuation of a literary motif, common perhaps to pastoral and agricultural societies. The sub-theme of the apologetic “morenica” (or “morena/morenilla”) who makes the best of her skin color is present in fourteen songs in Sánchez Romeralo’s collection (2.5%). On the other hand, there are also fourteen songs that unapologetically portray the “morenica” positively. For example:

Morenica, por qué no me vales,
que me matan a tus umbrales? (257)

The explicit mention of white skin as a desirable quality is found in only five poems, for example: “Que por vos, la mi señora, / la cara de plata, / correré yo mi caballo / a la trápala-trapa” (334). Emphasis on the “morenica” in popular poetry--in contrast to learned poetry’s emphasis on white skin and blond hair--may reflect a difference between the actual physical appearance of women of the urban aristocratic elite who lived mostly

indoors and that of peasant women who had to work outdoors: “Criéme en aldea; / híceme morena / si en villa me criara / más bonita fuera” (222).

One of the characteristics of beauty most often mentioned in the *villancicos* is long, clean, and well-groomed hair. In one case it is explicitly associated with virginity (116), a symbolism typical of the Middle Ages. Hair color is mentioned in only three songs, and it is blonde (33, 74, 197). Altogether, hair and hair care are mentioned in eighteen songs (3%). This is a typical example:

Puse mis cabellos
en la almoneda;
como no están peinados
no hay quien los quiera. (453)

Women’s eyes are described as being beautiful, bright, bewitching, enticing, eyes that kill, that conquer. Color is not often mentioned, but they are generally dark or black, as in:

Ojos morenos,
¿cuándo nos veremos?
Ojos morenos,
de bonita color,
sois tan graciosos
que matáis d’amor.
¿Cuándo nos veremos,
ojos morenos?” (123)

There are two reference to blue eyes--including “ojos de garza” (305), one to “ojos claros” (207), and one “green eyes” (5). One song mentions the beloved’s “almond” eyes (284). Overall, references to a woman’s eyes occur in some twenty songs (about 3%).

The waist is generally mentioned, though indirectly, in reference to the “cinta,” either in connection to the length of the hair (145), or to the “cinta,” “cinturón,” “faja” or

“cordoncillo” given to (or taken by) the male lover (six songs). For example: “Esta cinta es de amor toda; / quien me la dio, / ¿para qué me la toma?” (225). The breasts are mentioned in only two examples, once without attributes (464) and once as “pechos hermosos” in reference to a married woman (100). There is no mention of the mouth or the lips, except for generic references to kissing in eleven songs.

One of the most common characteristics of the woman described (or self-described) in the poems is youth. The terms used are “moza/s” (seven songs), “mozuela” (seven songs), “doncella” (218, 267), “hija” (163), and “hermana” (113). The highest frequency word used to indicate young age is “niña,” found in thirty-three songs (10%). For example: “Arribica, arribica de un verde sauce, / luchaba la niña con su adorante” (196). There is regret for old age --“vieja soy y moza fui” (437), which is also hurled as an insult (293), or mentioned in connection with death (402). In addition to these terms, diminutive forms such as “morenica,” “pastorcilla,” “molinica,” or “pajecillo” are also meant to convey youthfulness.

Few poems refer to male physical beauty. Some men are simply qualified as “galanes” (five songs), such as: “En andar menudito, / galán polido, / en andar menudito / os han conocido” (309). Some are characterized as “lozanos” or “garridos” (five songs), or “lindo amado/amigo” (45, 93). One is the color of the goshawk (535). In a few songs men are described as youths: “mozo” (60, 68, 272), “mochacho” (153), “doncel” (148). As is the case for women, the youthfulness of a man can also be inferred by the diminutive forms “pastorcico” or “pastorcillo,” or suggested by the term “estudiante,” although such examples are found in only twelve songs (2%).

Indirect descriptions of other desirable qualities are found in animal metaphors of women and men, or mention of occupation or social status. Among the stock animal metaphors for women are birds: “perdiz,” “pajarillo / pajarito / pajarico / pajecillo,” “pajecico de los airones,” “garza,” “pava,” or even “gallina.” For example: “Pajarillo que vas a la fuente, / bebe y vente” (312). There is no mention of “gazelle” or “deer” from the Arabic tradition.

The songs describe young women as engaged in typical rural occupations: “zagala/zagaleja” (seven songs), or “pastorcilla,” as in “Zagaleja, hola, dime dónde vas, / a ti digo, hola, que te perderás” (373). Next in frequency is “molinerá,” “hilanderá,” “panadera,” “aldeana,” “toquera,” “agujita,” “mangajona,” and “villana” --“yo no lo soy” (139). Some are “serrana/serranica” (eight songs). A few are “damas.” Other terms refer to their marital status: “casadita,” “viuda,” or “novia.” There are also poems concerning a “monja / monjita / freila.” One questions the integrity of a nun (460), while four others are about women who do not want to become nuns. In one song, being a nun is described as preferable to a bad marriage (173).

With regard to men, animal metaphors are often paired with those of women for contrast. Most are birds: “águila,” “halcón,” “pavón,” “gallo,” and even “capón.” Besides birds, the only other animal mentioned is the “toro/torico” (four songs), suggestive of great size and strength. Masculine occupations also reflect a predominantly rural society: “pastor / pastorcico / pastorcillo” (sixteen songs), as in “Aquel pastorcico, madre, / que no viene, / algo tiene en el campo / que le duele” (82). Other occupations include “panadero,” “molinico/molinero,” “zapatero,” “labrador,” “colmenero,” “barquero,” “cucharetero,” “mercader,” “pechero,” “viñadero,” “marinero,” “soldado,”

“escudero,” and “estudiante.” Other men are defined by their urban status: “villano” or “romero/romerico.” A few men are nobles, such as “conde,” “duque,” “alcalde,” “Don,” and “gentilhombre,” as well as “un pajesito del corregidor.” There are also members of the clergy: “abad” (three songs), “cura,” “padre reverendo,” and “fraile” (four songs). The vast majority of men are described as “caballeros,” in twenty-three songs (4%). For example: “Qué me queréis, caballero? / Casada soy; marido tengo” (39). Some men are merely “buen / gentil amigo.” One poem mentions “moricos de allende,” as enemies. Another poem pokes fun at a “pelado, que no lleva blanca ni cornado” (509). Few men are identified by first name. In general, therefore, men’s occupation and social status are more varied and are mentioned twice as often as those of women.

Juan del Encina (1469-1529) is considered the “father of the Castilian theatre,” having written the first dramatic works since the twelfth-century *Auto de los Reyes Magos*--a work apparently composed by a Gascon and based on a French model (Deyermond 208; Del Encina 12). The theme of refined shepherds engaged in debate about love, a feature that becomes widespread in the Renaissance, is present in most of his fourteen *Eglogas*. In Egloga XII one shepherd’s story of unrequited love ends in the taking of his own life. But before carrying out his plan the shepherd Fileno confides in two shepherd friends who try to bring him to his senses, while he insists on the evil nature of women and cites the *Corbacho*’s authority (discussed later in this chapter) in support of his argument:

De su [nacimiento] son todas dispuestas,
a yra, embidia; y aquella es más buena
que sabe mejor causar mayor pena
a los que siguen sus crudas requestas.
Y aunque de fuera se muestran onestas,
lo verdadero te diga el Corvacho;

que yo en tal lugar dezirlo me empacho,
que son cosas ciertas, mas muy desonestas. (Del Encina, XII vv. 305-312)

In Egloga XIV, however, Juan del Encina offers a description of feminine beauty.

Plácida has fled into the mountains after a lover's fight with Vitoriano, with the purpose of ending her life (though Venus resuscitates her). Meanwhile, Vitoriano finds counsel in his friend Suplicio, who introduces him to the beautiful Fulgencia. Nevertheless,

Vitoriano is unable to forget Plácida:

..... que mi fe
sin Plácida no reposa.

En mirar sus perfecciones
se despiden mis enojos,
he por buenas mis passiones.
¡O, qué rostro qué faciones,
qué garganta, boca y ojos!
¡Y qué pechos
tan perfetos, tan bien hechos,
que me ponen [mil] antojos.

¡O, qué glorioso mirar,
qué lindeza en el reyr,
qué gentil ayre en andar,
qué discreta en el hablar,
y cuán prima en el vestir!
¡Cuán [umana]
¡Cuán generosa y cuán llana!
¡No ay quien lo pueda dezir! (Del Encina, XIV 799-816)

In this rhetorical exercise of hyperbole the physical description of the beloved's face is minimal, with the mention of her throat, mouth, and eyes. Her breasts, in contrast, receive much more attention. But then the focus shifts to another category of qualities, her gaze, her laugh, her walk, or her humanity and generosity, introducing into the portrait a new Renaissance aesthetic.

Fernando de Roja's *La Celestina, o tragicomedia de Calisto y Melibea* (1499)

makes several references to the beauty of the female protagonist, Melibea. In the first act Calisto is assisted by his servant Sempronio, who attempts to cure his master of his love-sickness by appealing to the misogynist arguments of Solomon, Aristotle, and Seneca on women's evil traits of character. Undeterred, Calisto insists on describing Melibea in detail, and explaining why he fell in love when he met her in her garden the previous day:

Comienço por los cabellos. ¿Vees tú las madexas del oro delgado que hilan en Arabia? Más lindos son, y no resplandecen menos. Su longura hasta el postrero asiento de sus pies; después, crinados y atados con la delgada cuerda como ella se los pone, no ha más menester para convertir los hombres en piedras ... Los ojos, verdes, rasgados; las pestañas, luengas; las cejas, delgadas y alçadas; la nariz, mediana; la boca, pequeña; los dientes, menudos y blancos; los labrios, colorados y gros[s]ezuelos; el torno del rostro, poco más luengo que redondo; el pecho, alto; la redondeza y forma de las pequeñas tetas, ¿quién te las podrá figurar? ¡que se despereza el hombre cuando las mira!; la tez, lisa, lustrosa; el cuero suyo escurece la nieve; la color, mezclada, cual ella la escogió para sí ... Las manos pequeñas en mediana manera, de dulce carne acompañadas los dedos luengos; las uñas en ellas largas y coloradas, que parecen rubíes entre perlas. Aquella proporción que veer yo no pude, sin duda, por el bulto de fuera, juzgo incomparablemente ser mejor que la que París juzgó entre las tres deesas.¹⁵ (Rojas 230-232)

This is one of the most complete portrait of feminine beauty in Spanish medieval literature, and while it covers a large number of canonical features, it does so with a greater richness of language (Green, Otis 254-256). It also unusual in that it specifies

¹⁵ "I will begin with her hair. Have you ever seen that fine gold thread which they spin in Arabia? It's lovelier than that, and just as bright, and reaches to the very soles of her feet. But when it's parted, and tied with one of those fine ribbons, which is how she wears it, it is enough to turn men to stone ... Her eyes are large and green, her lashes long, her brow shapely and high, her nose delicate, her mouth small, her teeth little and white, her lips full and red, her face oval, her bosom high, and as for the full firmness of the little breasts -who could describe it? How it will rouse a man to see them! Her skin is smooth and lustrous; her complexion would make the snow look dark, and her colour could not be more pink and white if she had chosen it for herself ... Her hands are small, but not too small, and their flesh is smooth. Her fingers are long, and her nails pointed and so pink that they look like rubies set in pearls. And those parts that I have not seen are, to judge by their outward shape, incomparably more beautiful than those of the goddess whom Paris pronounced the most beautiful of the three" (Cohen 30).

that her face is long rather than round, and adds a reference to painted nails: “uñas ... largas y coloradas.”

Up to this point most of the examples discussed only rarely mention make-up. The *Corbacho*, or *Arcipreste de Talavera* (1438), as a criticism of women's cosmetic practices, affords a glimpse of the standards of feminine beauty. The author, Alfonso Martínez de Toledo, uses the techniques of the popular sermon in his satire against women. Given its misogynist character, it devotes little attention to women's beauty, except in relation to what it calls feminine “vices” (such as vanity and jealousy). In general, the point of view is that many men are attracted to women who are beautiful, rather than virtuous, and are thus induced to sin, such as fornication (*Corbacho* 97; all quotations are from Muela's edition). Beautiful women are responsible for scholars losing their head and their knowledge, as in the narrator's example of King David overcome by temptation upon seeing Bet Sheba enticingly combing her hair and adorning her body (78). The narrator denounces a perceived fundamental trait of all women, the desire to be looked at, desired, longed for, praised, and talked about (“mirada e deseada e sospirada, loada e del pueblo fablada”), to the point that a beautiful woman cannot live (“muere y se rebyenta”) if she does not receive men's attention (159).

The desire to be found attractive is, however, also manipulated by the man who lies by praising ugly women for their beauty (“nescias e locas, o muy avisadas, todo asý lo creen e non piensan que él miente en dos maneras: miente, que sabe byen él cierto que ello non es asý; e miente por engaño, jurando que es asý” [142]). Hence, we find the classic ambivalent male view of the attractive woman: she is highly desirable, but the very power of her attraction may lead men to be deceived as to her character. Beware,

the narrator says, of the “fermosas,¹⁶ blancas, rubyas, de maravillosas faciones” because they think they should be loved just for being beautiful, and are in fact full of serious character flaws (171). Women’s eyes appear to be particularly powerful (“más juegos sabe fazer la muger del ojo que non el enbaydor de manos”), able to deceive men, to make them fall in love, and even kill them (143).

But what are, specifically, those features that make a woman beautiful? In Part I, Chapter Eighteen (“Cómo es muy engañoso el amor de la muger”) one man boasts of the greater beauty of his woman compared to that of a rival, emphasizing the whiteness of her skin, and opposing beauty to small stature: “La tuya es mucho negra, la mía es muy blanca; la tuya es chiquilla, la mía es de feroso cuerpo; la tuya non es ferosa, la mía es loçana e lynda” (83). The narrator relates the portrait of the paradigmatically ugly woman in the words of a woman who, envious of another whose beauty many proclaim, attempts to convince her audience that her competitor is not what she seems (Part II, Chapter Two: “De cómo la muger es murmurante e detractora.”) Her “ugliness” has to do in part with character faults such as laziness (“perezosa”), but is mainly related to features that clothing and cosmetics can cover: “Suzia ... enana, biente de ytrópica ... mal tajada ... dientes podridos ... ¡Como perro muerto le fiede la boca!” (“Filthy... short, with a sagging belly... misshapen... with rotten teeth... Her breath stinks like a dead dog!”) (131). The accuser, on the other hand, describes herself as clean and pure as water, as well as a hard worker (131).

A passage in Part II, Chapter Four (“Cómo la muger es envidiosa de qualquiera más ferosa que ella”), about a woman envious of the beauty of another, iterates the same description of ugliness in more detail:

¹⁶ “Ferosa” acquires the meaning of “deceitful.”

E sy la otra es blanca e ella baça o negra, dize luego: ‘¡Bendita sea a la fe la tierra baça que lieva noble pan! Más vale grano de pimienta que libra de arroz.’ Pero sy la otra es baça e ella blanca, aquí es el donaire. Dize luego: ‘Fallan las gentes que Fulana es hermosa. ¡O Señor, y qué cosa es favor! Non la han visto desnuda como yo el otro día en el baño. Más negra es que un diablo; flaca, que non parece synón a la muerte; sus cabellos negros como la pes, la cabeça gruesa, el cuello gordo e corto como de toro, los pechos todos huesos, las tetas luengas como de cabra; toda uniza, equal; non tyene facción de cuerpo; las piernas muy delgadas parecen de cigüeña; los pies tyene galyndos.’¹⁷ (137)

The ugly woman is portrayed as dark, skinny, with pitch-black hair, a large head, a short and thick neck, sagging breasts, shapeless, with skinny legs, and deformed feet. In addition, she notes, this woman always shirks work and lacks useful skills, such as sewing (137). Other indirect examples of the ideal standard of women’s beauty are found in a group of invectives directed against old women who want to appear youthful:

Quando la vieja está byen arreada y byen pelada e llepada parece mona desosada. Míranse los pechos, y... ¿pechos? ¡Ya guaya, arquibanco de huesos, digo yo! Míranse las manos con tantas sortijas, e vanse los beços mordiendo por los tornar bermejós.¹⁸ (157)

The vanity of such women, when they pretend to inadvertently uncover a foot, or part of a leg for the benefit of the men who are present, or pick up something from the floor so as to show the shape of their buttocks, is condemned (157). The narrator also mentions their swarthy skin, rotten teeth, bad breath, and their wrinkled belly (199-200).

¹⁷ “And if the other is fair and she dark, she says: “By my faith, blessed is the black earth that yields the noble wheat! There’s more virtue in a grain of black pepper than in a whole pound of white rice! But if the other is dark and she fair, then she really lets herself go. She says: “They think What’s-her-name is beautiful! Lord, Lord, what a fine thing it is to have friends. But they haven’t seen her as I did the other day, naked in the bath. Why, she’s blacker than a devil, and so skinny that she looks like nothing so much as a skeleton! Her hair is as black as tar, her head huge, her neck short and thick as a bull’s, her bosom all bone! Her breasts dangle like a goat’s! She’s straight up and down-no figure at all, flat! Her legs are spindly as a stork’s, her feet lumpish” (Byrd Simpson 117).

¹⁸ “When an old woman is decked out in her finery and is well plucked and peeled, she looks like a boned monkey! She looks down at her breasts. Breasts, did I say? I call them rather bags of bones! She looks at her hands all covered with rings, and chews her lips to make them red” (Byrd Simpson 140).

The last part of the work (“Media parte”) Chapter Two contains a debate between Poverty and Fortune. In a story that the narrator attributes to Andalo de Nigro de Génoa (supposedly Boccaccio’s teacher), Poverty is described as an ugly and old woman, while Fortune is beautiful and young (but not an adolescent, as in most characterizations of beautiful women):

Dize que la Pobreza un día estava muy triste e como trabajada, pensativa, e muy dolorida e muy flaca, en solos los huesos en la pelleja, negra, fea, magra, e llena toda de sarna, los ojos somidos, los dientes regañando, su sarna rascando, la pelleja curtida e arrugada, muy espantable e fiera ... la Fortuna, muy poderosa, de hedad de treynta años, muy loçana e valiente, riendo e cantando e con mucha alegría, en somo de un cavallo muy grueso e fermoso, una guirnalda de flores en la cabeça, muy ceñida por el cuerpo e frescamente arreada segund la gala del mundo.¹⁹ (252)

Another example is the narrator’s negative view of the May-December marriage, criticizing the union between an old woman and a young man, and that between a young woman and an old man (“viejo guargajoso, pesado como plomo, abastado de vilezas”) (201). In both cases he asserts the relationship is bound to lead to the infidelity of the younger partner and the consequent abuse by the older one (199-201). But the moralist’s disgust also aims at relations between an old man and an old woman (203), homosexuality (233-234), pedophilia (234), and effeminate men (237).

Indirectly, it is also from the portrait of the woman in make-up (criticized by the narrator) that we learn a number of ideal features (Part II, Chapter Four):

Las cejas byen peladas, altas, puestas en arco; los ojos alcoholados; la fuente toda pelada y aun toda la cara -grandes e chicos pelos- con pelador de pes, trementina e azeyte [de mançanilla; los beços muy bermejos, non de lo] natural, synon pie de palomina grana, con el brasil

¹⁹ He says that one day Poverty felt very sad, troubled, pensive, hurt, and weak, only skin and bone, dark, ugly, thin, and full of scabies, sunken eyes, gnashing teeth, scratching her itch, her skin leathery and wrinkled, fearful and wild ... Fortune, very strong, thirty years of age, healthy and valiant, laughing and singing with much joy, riding a big and beautiful horse, a garland on her head, with close-fitting clothes and novel adornment according to the world’s fashion.

con alumbre mesclado; los dientes anosegados o fregados con manbre, yerva que llaman de Yndia; las uñas alheñadas, las uñas grandes e crecidas, más que más las de los merguellites, así como de blancheta, e aún las trae encañutadas en oro; la cara reluciente como de una espada con el agua.²⁰ (137)

“Artificial” beauty consists of plucked eyebrows, high and arched; darkened eyes; a hairless and shining white face and brow; red lips; white teeth, and long nails. As we have seen, the narrator considers the very practice of beautifying oneself a fundamental deception, a strategy for hiding one’s aesthetic flaws, and devotes several paragraphs to the description and the use of cosmetics under the chapter heading “De cómo las mugeres aman a dyestro e a syniestro por la gran cobdicia que tyenen” (Part II, Chapter Three). After a lengthy catalogue of garments and jewelry, the narrator offers a description of the cosmetic accessories in a woman’s possession:

Alfileles, espejo, alcofolera, peyne, esponja con la goma para asentar cabello, partidor de marfil, tenazuelas de plata para algund pelillo quitar sy se demostrare, espejo de alfinde para apurar el rostro, la saliva ayuna con el paño para lepar. Pero después de todo esto comiençan a entrar por los ungüentos; anpolletas, potezillos, salseruelas donde tyenen las aguas para afeytar, unas para estirar el cuero, otras destiladas para relumbrar.²¹ (133-134)

The cosmetic preparations and accessories mentioned throughout the chapter are depilatories to remove all hair from the skin, and to make face, hands, and breasts wrinkle-free, smooth, and light in color. The narrator also offers a detailed recipe for the composition of these beautifying preparations, purporting to demonstrate women’s

²⁰ “Her eyebrows well plucked, high and arched, her eyes darkened with kohl, her face peeled of its long and short hairs with a mixture of turpentine and oil of camomile; her lips a bright red, not naturally, of course, but stained with fumitory seed mixed with brazil wood and alum; her teeth ‘anosegados’ or scrubbed with ‘manbre,’ the herb they call Indian; her nails tinted with henna, longer than the claws of a hawk or falcon, so long that she has to wear gold braces on them; her face shining like a sword with all those washes I spoke of” (Byrd Simpson 118).

²¹ “Pins, a mirror, a powder box, a comb, a sponge and mucilage for laying hair, and ivory bodkin, a pair of silver tweezers for plucking out the little hairs when they appear, a magnifying mirror for making up her face, and a rag for cleaning with spittle. Besides this, she collects ointments, and flasks and pots and cruets where she keeps waters for her face, some to shrink the skin, filtered water to make it shine” (Byrd Simpson 114).

“secret,” a typical misogynist theme in late medieval works (Green, “Diseases of Women” 5-7). He insists that he is not the first to discuss these matters, and appeals to the authority of Boccaccio who wrote about them, though not as extensively (“aunque non tan largamente”) as did other writers (135). These are some examples of cosmetic recipes, similar to those discussed in the fourth chapter:

Con las reñonadas de ciervo fazen dellas xabón. Destilan el agua porcáñamo crudo e ceniza de sarmientos, la reñonada retida al fuego écha[n]la en ello quando faze muy rezió sol, meneándolo nueve días -al día una ora- fasta que se congela e se faze xabón que dizen napolitano. Mezclan en ello almisque e algalia, clavo de girofre, remojados dos días en agua de hazaar, o flor de azahar con ello mesclado, para untar las manos, que tornen blandas como seda. Aguas tyenen destiladas para estilar el cuero de los pechos e manos a las que se les fazen rugas... Fazen más, agua de blanco de huevos cochos, estilada con mirra, cánfora, angelotes, trementina con tres aguas, purificada e bien lavada que torna como la nieve blanca, rayzes de lirios blancos, bórax fino: de todo esto fazen agua destillada con que reluzen como espada.²² (134)

Another text that follows in the misogynist tradition of the period is the *Repetición de amores*, by Luis Ramírez de Lucena (ca. 1497). In contrast with the *Corbacho*, it is written in the form of a parody of a university lecture (a “repetición”), using a popular poem as the starting point for a cautionary “lesson” on love. The narrator describes his meeting with a lady (fifteen years old) much celebrated for her beauty:

El color de su cara era difícil poder divisar por el súbito mudamiento que la vergüenza natural le ponía, de suerte que a las veces como rosa y a las veces como un lirio el su gesto se mudaba. Aquesta era de tan tierna edad que aún los dieciseis años no complía; ella de muy buen

²² “She makes soap with the fat of deer kidneys, filtering the water through raw hemp and willow ash, and when the fat is rendered and the fire is burning, she throws the fat into the kettle while the sun is shining very hot, and stirs it for nine days, one hour a day, until the mixture congeals and turn into what they call Neapolitan soap. The she stirs into it musk and civet, cloves soaked for two days in orange blossom water, or she mixes orange blossom water into it, and this is what she uses for anointing her hands and making them as soft as silk. She also has filtered water for tightening the skin of her breasts and hands when wrinkles appear ... She makes, besides, a water of the whites of eggs and myrrh, camphor, angelores, turpentine purified through three waters until it is as white as snow, and lily root and fine borax, and out of all this she concocts a mixture that makes her face shine like a sword” (Byrd Simpson 114).

linaje, y de estatura más aplacible que todas las otras mujeres, los cabellos muy rutilantes y las orejas de muy gentil parecer; la frente alta y espaciosa sin rugas, las sobrecejas a manera de dos arcos con poquitos pelos negros por su debido espacio apartadas; los ojos de tanto resplandor parecían que empedían la vista como el sol; con las cuales cosas podía matar a quien quería y restituir la vida sin contrariedad. La nariz afilada y las mexillas como rosas con igual compás sin discrepantía, cosa de grandísima delectación en mirarlas y de besarlas muy cobdiciosas. La boca muy conveniente y los labios de color de coral muy aptísimos para morderlos. Los dientes chicos y en orden puestos que parecían de cristal, por los cuales la lengua, discurriendo, os pareciera la pronunciación della antes una dulce armonía que razones que acá todos comunmente hablamos. ¿Qué diré de la lindeza de su barba, o de la blancura de su garganta? Por cierto, no hay cosa en todo su cuerpo que no sea digna de loar.²³ (12)

A second portrait, more concise in its description but extending beyond the face and neck, comes towards the end of the text, and condemns women who use make-up:

Las quienes ... por muy lindas que la natura las haya criado y dado el color de su rostro como una rosa y la blancura como los lilios, los ojos negros y vergonzosos, los cabellos rubios y dorados, la boca suave, la nariz derecha, el cuello de marfil, levantado de los hombros, redondos y descargados los pechos con una doble dureza, elevamiento hermoso; los brazos tendidos, las manos delgadas, los dedos derechos, el cuerpo bien tallado y gracioso, el pie chiquillo, y cosa no les falte, siempre trabajan en cuanto pueden añadir por su industria otros más apostamientos, a fin de alcanzar de los hombres aquello que ellas querían!²⁴ (51-52)

The same chapter contains an attack on cosmetic ingredients (whose list is similar

²³ The color of her face was difficult to make out because of sudden changes due to her natural shyness, such that it varied at times from that of a rose to that of a lily. She was of such young age, not yet sixteen; she descended from a distinguished family, and was of taller than all the other women, with flowing hair and beautiful ears; the forehead was high and spacious, without wrinkles; the eyebrows like two black and thin arches appropriately separated; the eyes so bright that blinded like the sun, with which she could kill and resuscitate at will. The nose was straight, and the cheeks no different from roses, very enjoyable to look at, and irresistible to kiss. The mouth was perfect, with lips like coral, made to be nibbled. Her white, even teeth seemed made of crystal, so that the tongue produced a sweet harmony even when talking about common matters. What shall I say about the beauty of her chin, or the whiteness of her neck? There is certainly nothing in her body undeserving of praise.

²⁴ These women who ... no matter how beautiful Nature raised them, or gave their face the color of a rose and the whiteness of the lilies, black and shy eyes, blond and golden hair, a sweet mouth, a straight nose, a marble-like neck high above the shoulders, breasts rounded and doubly firm, beautifully raised; long arms, slender hands, straight fingers, a well-shaped and graceful body, small feet, and whatever they do not lack, they always strive to add more improvements by their industry, in order to get from men what they want!

the one in the *Corbacho* seen above)²⁵ and techniques for the hands, face, forehead, eyes, teeth, hair (black and blond dyes). It also condemns hairstyles, accessories, clothing, and the ways women carry themselves. As the *Corbacho*, it criticizes the manner in which some women, feigning inadvertence, show a foot or part of a leg (“muestran el pie con un poquillo de la pierna blanca”) (53).

Despite the occasional qualifications that all the faults of women described apply only to “bad” women, and should not be generalized, the general character of the *Corbacho* and *Repetición de amores* is clearly that women’s beauty is the cause of men’s sins. Make-up is especially targeted as an artificial--hence “unnatural” and “ungodly”--way to increase their power over men. Nonetheless, the conception of women’s beauty is essentially the same one found in contemporary literature, and emphasizes the same features (arched and separated eyebrows, white skin, etc.).

Cárcel de amor (1492), in contrast, contains a long section in praise of women’s moral virtues. This sentimental romance by Diego de San Pedro combines an allegorical framework (a “prison” of love) with elements from the chivalresque tradition, such as the conflict between love and honor at court. As the knight Leriano lets himself die because the princess Laureola cannot marry him, his friends try to change his mind. Tefeo attempts to do so by applying one of the techniques against lovesickness, attacking women for their “evils”: “viendo que su mal era de enamorada pasión, puesto que quien la causaua él ni nadie lo sabía, dixole infinitos males de las mugeres, y para fauorecer su habla truxo todas las razones que en disfamia dellas pudo pensar, creyendo por allí

²⁵ “Leche de burras y unguente argentado, unguente citrino, lanillas, mudas, blanduras, agua de solimán, agua de rasuras, aguas serenadas, aguas de pámpanos, de calabazas, aceite de mata de Venos, de trigo, de pepitas, de almendras amargas, dormideros, albayalde, solimán, alcanfor, bórrax, esclarimente, atincar, lanzarotes, angelotes, brasil, harina de habas, de altramuces, judivelos, haba de mar, garbanzos negros, neguilla, alcohol y atutia y color y grana de escarlata para adobar los labios” (Ramírez de Lucena 51).

restituylle la vida” (79). The narrator, however, does not go on to mention any of these evils, presumably well known by contemporary audiences through works such as the *Corbacho*. On the contrary, he reports in detail Leriano’s rebuttal to his friend in defense of women. Leriano first presents fifteen reasons against disparaging women, including their being creatures of God, Mary’s sisters, the weaker sex, and mothers. Only one of these reasons (the fourteenth) is concerned with beauty, though the “excellence” of women’s beauty is described as of greater value than any defect of which they are accused (83). Leriano then adds twenty reasons why men should feel obligated to women, mostly related to women’s “civilizing” effect on men, and offers historical examples of chaste and virtuous women (88-92).

Tables 1A and 1B summarize the attributes of beauty in the works and genres discussed in this chapter.

Table 1A

Attributes of Beauty in Major Works and Genres

	Andalusian poetry	Libro de Alixandre	Cantigas	Razón de amor	S. María Egipciaca	Çifar and Amadís
Head						
Face	white, radiant	well shaped		rosy	rosy	
Hair	long, black, curly		long	short (?)	blond	blond
Forehead	white	white, smooth	wrinkled	bright	white, high	
Eyebrows	arched	equally long, thin	thin, separated	black	black, separated	
Eyelashes		*				
Eyes	black, bright	noble, proud	*	black, bright	black	
Cheeks	rosy	rosy	rosy	rosy		
Ears					round, white	
Nose		well shaped		straight		
Mouth	sweet	well prop.		well prop.	small	
Gums						
Lips	red			red, not too thin	red, not too thin	
Teeth	white	white, even	white	white		
Chin						
Neck	white, long				white	
Shoulders						
Armpits						
Arms					white	
Hands						
Fingers	*					
Nails						
Breasts	small, round		small, firm		small, round	
Torso	slender					
Waist		slim		slim		
Hips	rounded					
Legs						
Feet				white		*
Skin	white, scented	white	white		white	white
Voice						
Body size and shape	slender	well shaped	slim, well proportioned	well proportioned	not too fat, thin, tall, or short	well proportioned

* The asterisk indicates that the part is mentioned only as “beautiful.”

Source: Compiled from the works discussed in the chapter.

Table 1 B

Attributes of Beauty in Major Works and Genres

	Libro de buen amor	Ballads	Marqués de Santillana	Villancico	La Celestina	Repetición de amores
Head	small					
Face	white, smooth				oval	
Hair	blond (natural)	blond	blond, long	blond, long	blond, long	blond
Forehead		bright	bright			high, smooth
Eyebrows	long, high, arched, separated	arched	high, arched		thin, high	black, arched, separated,
Eyelashes	long, bright				long	
Eyes	big, bright, colored	large, almond	black, bright	black, blue, green, large	green, almond	bright, black
Cheeks		rosy	rosy		rosy	rosy
Ears	round, small					*
Nose	straight	straight	straight		medium	straight
Mouth	small	round	small		small	*
Gums	red					
Lips	red, thin				red, full	red
Teeth	small, white, even, sharp	white			white, small	white, small
Chin						*
Neck/throat	long	long	long			white
Shoulders	small					high
Armpits	moist					
Arms	not thin					straight
Hands	neither thin nor small	white	white			
Fingers			smooth		long	straight
Nails			silvery		long, painted	
Breasts	small	small, firm, round	white, smooth	*	small, firm, round	small, firm
Torso	long					
Waist		slim	slim	*		
Hips	widish					
Legs	small					
Feet	small, arched	*				small
Skin	white, not hairy	white	white	white	white	
Voice	not sharp					sweet
Body size and shape	neither tall nor short	slender		*	well proportioned	well proportioned

* The asterisk indicates that the part is mentioned only as “beautiful.”

Source: Compiled from the works discussed in the chapter.

CHAPTER 3 - THE RHETORICAL TRADITION

Chapter Two reviewed the evidence for a literary canon of feminine beauty in medieval Iberia. The present chapter continues the discussion by examining the Spanish literary ideal of feminine beauty in its relation to the Latin, European vernacular, and Arabic rhetorical traditions of the Middle Ages.

The Latin rhetorical tradition

Literary descriptions of “the beautiful woman” abound in medieval texts throughout Europe, and constitute one of three major topoi of the “formal portrait” tradition, along with “the handsome youth” and “the ugly human being” (Specht 129). The literary portrayal of the human figure, however, is certainly not a medieval innovation, and the artistic representation--in any medium--of human beings is as ancient as our species. Restricting our perspective to Europe and the Mediterranean world we can find a few examples of literary descriptions of feminine beauty, though they offer few details. One ancient love lyric from Egypt (c. 1160 BCE) describes the beloved as “The one, beloved, unparalleled, / more beautiful than all the world- / look, she is like the Star-Goddess / before a beautiful year / of radiant virtue, of lucent skin” (Dronke, *Medieval Latin* 9). Other examples from ancient Egypt also stress the beloved’s divine quality, and man’s desire to complete surrender and service, such as being the one who washes the oil that remains in her dress, or be a ring in her finger (Dronke, *Medieval Latin* 10-11). Perhaps the best known example of the description of a beautiful woman is contained in the Song of Solomon. Its Latin version exerted a profound influence on the medieval love-lyric, and was often commented on during the twelfth century, becoming

part of the aesthetics of the Middle Ages (De Bruyne 1-2). In the Song of Solomon the bride describes herself (and is described by the bridegroom) as: black-skinned, “though” beautiful (1.5);¹ perfumed with spikenard (1.12); with eyes like doves (2.4); hair as a flock of goats (2.4); even and white teeth (like a flock of sheep that are even shorn and washed) (2.5); scarlet lips (2.3); comely voice (2.3); rosy temples (the color of pomegranate) (2.3); long neck (like the tower of David) (2.4); breasts like twin roes among lilies (2.5); lips that drop as honeycomb (2.11); honey and milk under the tongue (2.11). Later passages repeat some of these features, and add others: graceful feet (in sandals) (7.1); hips like jewels (7.1); navel like a round goblet (7.2); belly like a heap of wheat among lilies (7.2); breasts like young twin roes (7.3); long white neck (like a tower of ivory) (7.4); eyes like fish pools (7.4); nose like the tower of Lebanon (7.4); head like Mount Carmel (7.5); purple hair (7.5); and of stately shape, like a palm tree, with the breasts as clusters of grapes (7.6). Many of these features are associated with the garden metaphor, reminiscent of Andalusian poetry, as are the references to roes and the frequent mention of perfumes and sweet fruits and honey. The highly metaphorical description is, however, quite clear on attributes such as a dark skin color, scarlet lips, rosy cheeks, white teeth, and white and long neck. The hair’s “purple” color is probably meant to convey its shine.

Classical Latin authors such as Cicero (*De inventione*) and Quintilian, or the anonymous *Rhetorica ad Herennium*, created a basic rhetorical pattern for the description of a person, usually a man and often a king (Colby 90-92). Ovid’s poems, in contrast, contain numerous references to feminine beauty, though most of them mention only one

¹ The next verse explains that this color is the result of exposure to the sun (indicating her status as a peasant woman).

or two of the following: long hair, black and blond; white and hairless skin, without wrinkles; starry eyes; blushing cheeks; white neck; white teeth; soft and white arms and hands; small feet; slender figure; and elegant gait/swaying. These poems exerted a strong influence on the courtly love poetry of the Middle Ages (Dronke, *Medieval Latin* 163-164). Descriptions of feminine beauty in late Antiquity may be found in Latin learned verse of the type Dronke calls a “courtoisie” of commendation, or even of friendship, rather than romantic love (*Medieval Latin* 192). For example Claudian, writing at the end of the fourth century, praises the bride in an epithalamium written for the wedding of Honorius and Maria (the poetic voice is Venus’s):

Your face alone would have won you a kingdom. What beauty more fit for a sceptre? What countenance could better grace a court? Roses cannot rival your lips or snow your neck, violets are less lovely than your hair, flames less bright than your eyes. How delicately your dark eyebrows meet! How perfectly blended the rose of your cheeks--not too much red for the white. Your fingers excel Dawn’s, your shoulders those of Diana; you surpass even your own mother! (Dronke, *Medieval Latin* 193, n. 1)

The poem continues as an allegorical exhortation for the provinces’ loyalty to Rome, but nonetheless the basic attributes of feminine beauty are clearly present. The unusual feature is eyebrows that meet on the forehead. The original text reads “quam iuncti leviter sese discrimine confert / umbra supercilii,” which may also be translated as “with how fine a space between do your delicate eyebrows meet on your forehead” (Olson 126). Moreover, Olson maintains that there is no evidence for the traditional view that Romans considered eyebrows that meet in the middle of the forehead attractive (126, n. 44). About two centuries after Claudian we find a similar epithalamium in Spain written by Fortunatus (a Christian) for the wedding of the Visigothic Brunhilda to the Frankish Sigebert, made in the voice of Venus:

[Y]ou who shed light more radiantly than heaven's lamp, you have surpassed the light of gems by the light of your countenance, a newborn Venus endowed with the kingdom of beauty. No Nereid that swims in the Western Ocean, no nymph more beautiful--the streams themselves make their nymphs your subjects! Your milk-white face sparkles tinged with red, lilies mingled with roses; if gold and purple were allied, striving with you they'd never match your loveliness. Let sapphire, pearl, adamant, crystal, emerald, jasper count themselves defeated--Spain has brought forth a new gem, a beauty of worth, that could allure a king.
(Dronke, *Medieval Latin* 194, n. 1)

We see the affirmation of stock phrases such as starry and radiant eyes, or red and white cheeks, while the precious stones link the bride with the "Jerusalem caelestis" of the Apocalypse, setting a pattern that would be repeated in following centuries by Christian clerics who praised great women. Nevertheless, as Dronke notes, the stock phrases relating to facial beauty were also applied to the description of boys, and the imagery of light and radiance is found also in poems written to men (195).

Another learned Latin example from the sixth century is Maximianus's poem *Elegy I*. It is not a description of a particular beautiful woman, but it describes in general terms the ideal of feminine beauty. The beginning mentions height and size, followed by hair and facial features: neither tall nor short; neither fat nor skinny; rosy cheeks, not pale; golden hair; milky-white neck; black eyebrows; free/open/clear ("libera") forehead; bright eyes; and red and delicate lips (Spaltenstein 294-295). Among the examples provided by Dronke from twelfth-century Latin learned verse we find poems in which the lover blesses the objects that share the beloved's life, like her clothes or her rings (*Codex Salmansianus*), in a vein similar to ancient Egyptian love poems (Dronke, *Medieval Latin* 178). There are also examples in Latin learned verse of the flower and rose imagery associated with beauty and the Marian cult, such as a Carolingian Latin translation of the *Hymnos Akathistos*: "Had gifts of beauty beyond all mankind, / surpassing roses in your

red and lilies in your white” (Dronke, *Medieval Latin* 185). In the twelfth century Latin love-lyric written in the Iberian peninsula we find a mention of the beloved’s beauty in a poem from the monastery of Ripoll, associating physical with heavenly beauty (and virtue): “Bright star of women, flower and glory of all, rose of spring who seems more radiant than the lily ... your look and smile subjected me to love ... Your forehead and smooth throat and angelic face show mankind that you are heavenly, not earthly” (Dronke, *Medieval Latin* 286). Another song from the same manuscript proclaims that “The burning-bright orb of her eyes shows the radiance of angels and manifests that this girl is a heavenly one. Her nose, her teeth, her lips, her waist are formed so perfectly that they move mortals and gods to love” (Dronke 286). And in the song “Estas in exilium” (from *Carmina Burana*): “Her joyous brow like snow / the golden light of her eyes, / her hair’s red glow, / the hands surpassing lilies” (Dronke, *Medieval Latin* 298).

In the high Middle Ages the description of feminine beauty acquired greater formality and elaboration. All those schooled in the tradition of the “trivium” would have been familiar with the rhetorical manuals of the time which contained descriptions of women. Matthew of Vendôme’s *Ars versificatoria* (late-twelfth century) offers an example specifically designed for didactic purposes. In the section devoted to the rhetorical technique of “amplificatio” he provides rules drawn from Cicero and Horace for the description of persons (35). Regarding Helen of Troy he mentions the following features: golden and free-flowing hair; shoulders (no attribute); Milky Way-white forehead; black and separated eyebrows, like arches; sparkling eyes, like stars; rosy cheeks; straight nose, neither too flat or too large; rosy and delicate lips; straight teeth, whiter than ivory; white neck (whiter than snow); and firm and small breasts (Vendôme

43). Except for its reference to the shoulders in connection with the length of the hair, and its reference to breasts, the features described are facial. Vendôme also offers a more concise example, dedicated to Venus: white teeth, like ivory; white and clear forehead; white neck (like snow); bright eyes, like stars; rosy lips; narrow waist; luscious and round belly; small feet; straight and fleshy legs; and hands without loose skin (43-44). After beauty, Vendôme turns to ugliness in the description of Beroe: bold head; dirty forehead; bushy eyebrows; mangy neck; filthy, irregular, and floppy ears; bleary, slimy eyes; eyelids that trap flies; fetid, flat, and distorted nose; “drenched” upper lip (from a runny nose); deformed cheeks, rigid with wrinkles; drooping and pale lips, oozing Cerberian saliva; decayed, rotting teeth; pimples and sores on her neck; breasts like flabby bladders; skin and bones; her stomach swollen, with sores; hunchbacked; hairy; stiff knee-joints; legs infested with sores; gouty feet (44-45). Vendôme’s portrait of ugliness focuses on old age, sickness, and filth, aiming to arouse the disgust and aversion against the person described as physically repulsive, as well as indicate low social status, following a theme from the classical tradition that would become common to much European medieval literature (Specht 134-138). There are also early parodies of the “descriptio pulchritudinis” in two manuscripts from Germany (one from the mid-eleventh century and the other from the early twelfth), and in one from Oxford (the early-twelfth century) (Dronke, *The Medieval Poet* 61). The portrait made in the Oxford manuscript describes the hair as black, and there are a few additional features: the jaws are tawny, her arms, hands and fingers are white, “the honey of speech drips from her lips,” the feet are without bad odor, and an indirect reference is made to the genitalia (Dronke, *Medieval Latin* 450-452). Another example of the canonical portrait is found in a Munich

manuscript of the twelfth/thirteenth century, in which the poet employs the theme of the “reproachful beloved”: “Ecce, tua facie castigas me sine fine” (“your looks reprove me endlessly”) (Dronke, *Medieval Latin* 463-464).

Two other well-known didactic texts are Geoffrey of Vinsauf’s *Poetria Nova* and *Documentum de modo et arte dictandi et versificandi* (thirteenth century), each of which provides an example of how to use “amplificatio” in the description of a beautiful woman. In *Poetria nova* the beauty of a woman is elaborated: “circular” head; golden hair; lily-white and clear forehead; black eyebrows, like separated arches, with the Milky Way in between; straight and symmetrical nose; emerald eyes, like stars; neither red nor pale cheeks (but “both colors together”); small and elliptical mouth; turgid and fiery lips; snow-white and even teeth; a mouth that smells of frankincense; white chin (like polished marble); milky-white neck; white throat (like bright crystal); straight arms and shoulders, neither drooping nor raised; slender and long torso; delicate fingers, soft, thin, smooth, milk-white and long; snow-white breasts, small and round; nipples like gems; slender legs; and small feet (36-37). In the *Documentum*, Geoffrey of Vinsauf offers an abbreviated version of the above, dealing only with the face: circular head; golden hair; lily/Milky Way white forehead; black eyelashes; bright eyes, like radiant gems; nose of “moderate length;” silver and golden cheeks; fiery lips; and white teeth, like ivory (46). Also from the thirteenth century is the poem “Si linguis angelicis,” in which a thirteenth century Bolognese rhetorician describes his beloved: bright and clear face, shining and serene (“is she Helen,” says the poet, in reference to Vendôme’s portrait, “or the goddess Venus?”); golden hair; white neck; small breasts; perfumed; eyes like radiant stars; and ivory-white teeth (Dronke, *Medieval Latin* 320, stanza 14).

These descriptions are associated with the courtly love tradition, a literary genre characterized by the quasi-religious attitude of the suitor/protagonist towards the beloved and his feats of daring and self-abasement in her name. It often (but not always) occurs within an extramarital frame apparently incompatible with Christian dogma, where the male was to be dominant and coitus was permitted only within marriage (Walsh 4). *De amore*, written around 1183-1186 by Andreas Capellanus (probably a chaplain at the royal court of Champagne) is the best known codification and apology of this theoretical social norm of conduct. Well acquainted with the classical Latin authors that were part of the common twelfth-century stock, Capellanus's pretext for the work is to offer advice to a young friend Walter (Gualterus), in parallel with Seneca and Lucilius, and the structure of the book is inspired by Ovid's *Ars amatoria* and *Remedia amoris*. However, the addressee is obviously a composite, and the work is directed to a wide clerical public (Walsh 4). The final advice to Gualterus is to forsake all forms of secular love for the love of God. Drawing mainly from scriptural works, Capellanus points out that all evils are "naturally" present in all women.

But what is the role of physical beauty in Capellanus's conception(s) of love in the *De amore*, actual or pretended? In the first place, it is generated by a sensual stimulus: the sight of a woman's beauty is considered fundamental for inducing love in a man: "Love is an inborn suffering which results from the sight of, and uncontrolled thinking about, the beauty of the other sex" (Walsh I 1.1; all quotations from *De amore* are from Walsh's edition and translation, book, chapter [except Book III], and paragraph). The feeling of love "arises not from any action, but solely from the thought formed by the mind as a result of the thing seen. When he sees a girl ripe for love and

fashioned to his liking, he at once begins to desire her inwardly” (I 1.8-9). Indeed, Capellanus’s psychological theory provides that one must see beauty in order to feel love, something that is impossible for a blind man who “has not the faculty of sight to provide his mind with objects provoking uncontrolled thought” (I 5.6). An example of the power of gazing alone arises in the dialogue when a commoner addresses a noble lady:² “For the sight of your face so frightens my mind and confuses my heart that I become utterly forgetful even of my carefully rehearsed thoughts” (I 6.74). In a chapter that addresses the question of falling in love with nuns, the narrator confesses to having been in love with a nun, “drawn by her forceful beauty and enchained by her still sweeter eloquence” (I 8.4).

Book II of *De amore* also stresses the importance of gazing at each other’s body in order to excite love. In the chapter on “How love gained must be deepened” Capellanus suggests “making it an infrequent and difficult business for lovers to set eyes on each other,” as this increases their longing (II 2.1). Gazing at one’s lover can also be good, but it must be “secret and apprehensive” (II 2.5); eloquent speech is also good (II 2.6). The opposite, that is, being able to see one’s lover and converse at length, diminishes love (II 3.1). But if the woman pays “more attention than usual to her body’s adornment either her love for you is increasing, or she is preoccupied with another’s love” (II 5.5).

Whether a woman is beautiful or not, a man’s praise of her beauty is never wasted, since concern for one’s beauty is high among women. “Women, especially commoners and country women, almost all delight in praise of their persons, and readily believe in all circumstances whatever they construe as praise of themselves” (I 6.25). But

² The dialogues/debates are structured according to the different social status of the man and woman.

a man of higher nobility can also praise a noble lady in the following way: “for the whole world sings the praises of your beauty and sagacity” (I 6.323). And there is also a way for a man of the higher nobility (including clerics) to address a woman (widow) of the higher nobility in praise of her beauty: “So long as you are not heart-worn with age, youthful beauty seems to glow in your appearance and you are clearly virtuous” (I 6.44-45). In Book III, within a long list of “women’s vices” caused by their preoccupation with beauty, Capellanus we find jealousy for another woman’s beauty, including one’s own daughter, and the narrator asserts that “it is almost inconceivable that one woman should praise the moral character or beauty of another” (III 74). Conversely, “doddering hags as well as young girls strain every nerve to praise their own beauty” (III 94).

A dialogue between commoners conveys Capellanus’s view on the power of love in relation to beauty: “Even if you think that you are not beautiful ... to a lover love makes even an ugly woman appear most beautiful” (I 6.31-32). Similarly, there is a statement of a nobleman to a common woman: “Love makes a low-born, ugly woman appear noble and beautiful to a lover” (I 6.180). It may be significant that in both cases the interlocutor is a common woman, her low status precludes the presumption of her being associated with beauty. Love supposedly “constrains all alike to serve in his army... No exception is made of beauty, family, or sex or blood (I 6.71); these words, however, are spoken in self-interest by a commoner to a noble lady, downplaying his own lowly origins to gain her consideration.

The emphasis placed on the importance of women’s beauty for provoking love notwithstanding, in Capellanus’s work there are few specific references to beautiful women, and none that specify what features make a woman beautiful. An instance

belonging to the realm of the fantastic occurs in the final part of Book II, where the “rules of love” are presented within the frame of an Arthurian romance. A magical figure in the heart of a wood, “a girl endowed with wondrous beauty, seated on a caparisoned horse and binding her hair,” discloses the rules of love to a British knight (II 8.2). Another example refers to a tale that a nobleman tells to a noblewoman: he meets a procession of three groups of women, the last one including women of outstanding beauty “clothed in the foulest garments,” an “army of the dead,” because in life they refused the love of a man (I 6.235-245).

Capellanus otherwise insists on the primacy of virtue when choosing a woman, condemning the excessive use of make-up to enhance one’s beauty. He warns Gualterus against “the empty beauty of women,” and to be especially wary of women “painted too heavily with the colors of the rainbow” for such women are likely to lack virtues of character (I 6.9-10). In another dialogue, a common woman comments on how “a colour of complexion which is natural is judged more worthy of honour than that which is applied,” though it should be remembered that it is a common woman entertaining an offer of services made by a noble man, and is, therefore, emphasizing the value of (her) “natural” beauty (I 6.171). In the chapter “On love obtained by money” the narrator also warns against being tricked by “the deceptively trim appearance of a female, nor by the noble birth of a debased woman” (I 9.12). There is, finally, a dialogue between a man and a woman of the higher nobility on the relative importance of the “lower part” as opposed to “upper part” of the body. The lady contends that if a woman “were found to be completely useless for sexual intercourse” she would be rejected by all men, even though she possessed outstanding beauty (I 6.538).

Although a handsome appearance is one of several ways in which men can “win” the love of a lady, Capellanus primarily stresses honesty of character, and criticizes men who pay too much attention to bodily adornment (I 6.1-8). In a dialogue treating how inappropriate love is for clerics, a woman of the higher nobility states that one reason is that love “demands for the body adornment which is pleasing and handsome” and not appropriate for a cleric (I 6.490). In Book II, it is argued that in order to maintain love the man must remain attractive to his partner, “cultivating his appearance but in a modest way, because excessive attention to his person is a source of disgust to all, leading to natural contempt for his appearance” (II 1.6-7). In the dialogue between a commoner and woman of the higher nobility, nevertheless, the woman points out that the man lacks certain characteristics, saying that “knights should be naturally endowed with slim long calves and neat feet whose length exceeds their width as if molded by a craftsman, but I observe that your calves are on the contrary podgy, bulging, round and stunted, and your feet are as broad as long, and gigantic to boot” (I 6.140). In any case, a man should not be deprived of a woman’s love because of some disfigurement occasioned in battle, since it is an inevitable result of the daring of men, which “usually arouses women’s love” (I 7.36).

Several sources of influence can be detected in *De amore*. There is the Latin tradition of secular lyrics, such as *Carmina Burana*, as well as the learned tradition of Latin debate poems, based on Ovid’s *Ars amatoria* and *Remedia amoris*. But there are also the vernacular influences of the Provençal *tenzons* (poetic debates on love) and *fin’amors* poetry, which includes elements such as “cortezia” in the art and practice of

love, “mezura” (disciplined equilibrium), “pretz e valor” (ambition for renown), generosity, and “jovens” (noble gladness of youth) (Walsh 8-12).

European vernacular traditions

The emerging vernacular languages of Europe also contain many descriptions of feminine beauty. The ninth-century Irish prose epic *The Destruction of Dá Derga's Hostel* describes King Echoaid's beloved while she is about to wash her hair (which is a burnished red-gold): “white as snow” upper arms, “tender and even;” cheeks “red as the foxglove;” eyebrows as “dark as the back of a stag-beetle;” teeth “like a shower of pearls;” eyes as blue as the hyacinth; lips as “red as Parthian scarlet.” The description continues with her shoulders, fingers, arms, flank, thighs, knees, shins, heels, and feet, to then return to her face, with her smooth eyebrows, regal eyes, and cheeks “now flushed with purple red as a calf's blood, now bright with the lustre of snow” (Dronke, *The Medieval Poet* 60).

In the French poetic tradition, the anonymous epic poem *Roman de Thèbes* (twelfth century) contains a passage describing the daughters of King Adrastus, Argia and Deïphilé: neither too big or too small; very long, blond hair; open, high and white forehead; sparkling eyes; straight and well-shaped nose, neither too small or too large; “straight” mouth; small, white and even teeth; clear and “colored” cheeks; well-formed and long chin; and slender and soft body. The poet then rhetorically declines further description of all the other gifts with which Nature endowed the two princesses (Constans 50-51).

In a study of portraits in twelfth century French literature Colby identifies twenty-two descriptions of beautiful women. In order to summarize her generalizations

regarding all the features mentioned, the following list presents the most common parts with their attributes (the ordering of the parts, as in the examples above, is in a descending order, but does not follow a strict scheme): long, blond hair, sometimes braided and parted; white forehead, bright, high, wide, and open; dark eyebrows (brown or black), delicate, and separated (not arched); big, sparkling eyes (without a specific color);³ rosy and “bright” cheeks; well formed nose, not too large nor too small; small mouth; “somewhat” full lips, in various shades of red; white teeth, small, and close together; long and white neck/throat; smoothly and gently curved shoulders;⁴ long and straight arms; long, white fingers; small, firm, and white breasts; small waist; moderately full hips, gently curving; slender shape; and white, soft, and smooth skin (Colby 30-69).

A study by Curry on the Middle English ideal of personal beauty exhaustively surveys works from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries, devoting a chapter to each feature: golden hair; broad forehead, high, smooth, and white; curved and high eyebrows, separated (color is seldom mentioned); bright, large and round eyes (perhaps light-blue);⁵ neither too large nor too small a nose, slender, straight and high; small and well proportioned mouth; small, soft, and red lips; pleasant breath (like fragrance of nectar); white and even teeth; red gums (like a rose); soft and clear voice; white chin, with a dimple; cheeks that are not too lean, clear of blemishes, white blushing with red; white, round, and slender neck; overall well proportioned, slender, and “tallish;” slightly sloping shoulders; small, round, and white breasts; small waist; small and rounded belly; not too

³ Colby states that the medieval French term “vair,” often translated into English as “light-blue” or “blue-grey,” actually means “sparkling” regardless of color (41-42).

⁴ The meaning of the term “bas” appears to be mutually exclusive of “thin,” but not equivalent to “fat,” broad,” or “thick” (Colby 61-62).

⁵ “Vair,” see note (3). Curry also discusses this point (52-55).

broad or round hips; small arms, plump and long; white hands, with long and slender fingers; shapely legs, smooth, soft, and white; and small feet.

Other medieval English examples are discussed by Brewer with reference to Chaucer (thirteenth century) and to the *Harley Lyrics* (early fourteenth century). Brewer summarizes the portrait of the “Fair Maid of Ribblesdale” thus: bright, white forehead; hair “should be bound;” large and grey eyes; sweet breath; white and red (rosy) cheeks; white teeth (like whalebone); long and white neck (like a swan’s); white skin, like paper; red lips; long arms (an “ell” long, or 45 inches); small and round breasts, like two apples of paradise;⁶ slender waist; white sides, soft as silk (Brewer 260-261). Similar descriptions, or variations, may be found in “Blow Northerne Wynd,” though the color of hair and eyes is not mentioned, or in the poem “Alysoun,” where the hair is blond, the eyebrows are dark, the neck is white, and the waist is slim, plus the unusual feature of black eyes (261-262). Chaucer’s description of Blanche in *The Book of the Duchess*, whose source is Machaut’s *Jugement dou Roy de Behaingne*, omits some of the typical features, while mentioning others like golden hair, broad hips, straight and flat back, soft speech, “long” (slender) body and--perhaps unprecedented--“red fingernails.” There are other examples of Chaucer’s use of the conventions, such as in the description of Criseyde in *Troilus* (inspired by Boccaccio’s *Il Filostrato*), or Alyson in *The Miller’s Tale* (263-266). Similar examples may also be found in later English literature, such as in Lydgate, Dunbar, Wyatt, Sydney, Spenser, and Shakespeare (269).

There are several examples from thirteenth-century Italy. An interesting variation was written by Brunetto Latini in the *Tesoretto* (1262-1263) during his stay in Provence, and shortly after his stay in Toledo as Florence’s ambassador (the poem is dedicated to

⁶ Dronke suggests the association with “paradisus voluptatis” (*Medieval Latin* 123).

the Castilian King Alfonso X). The poet describes Nature as a beautiful lady he meets when lost in the wilderness, and from whom he receives instruction about virtue and love (the framework for Dante's *Divine Comedy*):

Sì ch'io credea che'l crino
Fosse d'un oro fino,
Partito senza trezze:
E l'altre gran bellezze
Ch'al volto son congiunte
Sotto la bianca fronte,
Li belli occhi e le ciglia,
E le labbra vermiglia,
E lo naso affilato,
E lo dente argentato;
La gola biancicante,
E l'altre biltà tante
Composte e assettate,
E 'n loco suo ordinate. (D'Ancona and Bacci 92-93)

Here we find blond hair, white forehead, red lips, straight nose, white (silver) teeth, and white throat, as well as an emphasis on proper arrangement and proportion. Later Italian poets like Cavalcanti, Cino Da Pistoia, and Dante, representatives of the “dolce stil novo” of the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, wrote a large number of poems celebrating women and women's beauty, but their use of the canonical images of beauty was sparse and always secondary to the emphasis on the angelic qualities of the beloved. Similarly, many poems from Petrarch's *Canzoniere* (ca. 1336) mention golden hair, rosy cheeks, pearly-white teeth, or white and slender hands and feet, but few poems describe more than one or two features. The physical portrait of ugliness, on the other hand, is present in much Italian comic poetry and prose, reflecting the misogynist tradition (as in Boccaccio's *Decameron* and *Corbaccio*), but also appearing as a rhetorical exercise on the opposite of the literary canon of beauty (Bettella ii-19).

The combination of blond hair, white forehead, black eyebrows, and red cheeks is also found in the German literature of the same period (Curry 49). The radiant whiteness of the skin is mentioned in the songs of Heinrich von Morungen (twelfth century): “Alas, shall her body never again / stream its light through the night for me? / body whiter than snow, / formed so perfectly; / it deceived my eyes: / I thought that it must be / the bright moon’s radiance. Then the day came” (Dronke, *Medieval Latin* 136). Cosmetics are mentioned in a Passion Play in the *Codex Buranus* (early thirteenth century). In the Passion Play, which contains many verses in German, the Magdalen sings while she buys cosmetics from the Mercator: “Merchant, give me the rouge for my cheeks, that I may compel young men, even despite themselves, to love ... Come then, you girls who love, let us see his wares. Let us buy these colours that give beauty and grace. He who loves me must be free of cares” (Dronke, *Medieval Latin* 35-37). Red lips are mentioned in the association of the beloved with the rose: “Rose, rose, blossom of rose, /... / Bright-eyed one, you of the red lips” (Dronke, *Medieval Latin* 191).

With regard to Scandinavian literature, Jochens writes that the medieval family sagas in Old Norse offer only very few portraits of women, beauty being elaborated in more detail in the description of men, and associated with physical strength and rich clothing (4). Jochens states that the virtual absence of the female body in literature is probably due to the cold climate, which required multiple layers of clothing that masked the body shape (21-22). Nevertheless, women’s hair is always described as “blond, long, and straight” (13), and black hair and dark skin is associated with ugliness (19). There are also a few references to women’s “slender ankles” as erotic motifs (28, n. 70).

The most common rhetorical schema of the medieval description of a person is summarized by Faral. He contends that the description “obeys strict laws” and consists of three parts, the head (“physionomie”), followed by the rest of the body in descending order, and finally the clothing (80). A divine/natural order is usually invoked, as expressed by Bernard Silvestris (twelfth century): “Physis ... hominem format et a capite incipiens membratim operando opus suum in pedibus consummat”⁷ (qtd. in Faral, 80-81). Faral catalogues eighteen elements that constitute the description, nine pertain to the head and nine to the rest of the body. They are without specific attributes of color, size, softness, etc.:

- | | |
|--|-------------------|
| 1. Hair | 10. Neck and nape |
| 2. Forehead | 11. Shoulders |
| 3. Eyebrows and the space between them | 12. Arms |
| 4. Eyes | 13. Hands |
| 5. Cheeks and their color | 14. Chest/Breasts |
| 6. Nose | 15. Waist |
| 7. Mouth | 16. Belly |
| 8. Teeth | 17. Legs |
| 9. Chin | 18. Feet |

Dámaso Alonso and Marcos-Marín have argued that, the theological justification for the top-down scheme notwithstanding, it may be more natural than artificial, since it is the “normal” order of describing a person, though it is debatable whether this is the order when a man pays attention to a woman (Marcos Marín 23).⁸ In any case, if we take for example the two paradigmatic examples from Geoffrey of Vinsauf discussed above, the top-down scheme fits closely, if not exactly, the sequential order suggested by Faral. A few parts (the head, the throat, the torso, and the nipples) are not mentioned in Faral’s

⁷ Nature ... shapes man beginning with the head, limb by limb, ending her work with the feet.

⁸ In reporting Faral’s list Alonso counts separately the neck and the nape, for a total of 19 parts. Marcos-Marín adds a part not mentioned by Faral, the “throat,” and also totals 19 parts.

classification, while others (like waist, belly and hips) are not mentioned by Geoffrey of Vinsauf--though this may have to do with the mores of the time, and in *Poetria nova* the poet excuses himself for the omission blaming the inadequacy of words: “Taceo de partibus infra / aptius hic loquitur animus quam lingua” (Faral 215).⁹ But besides the number of body parts mentioned in the literary portrait of feminine beauty, or the ordering of the parts, the similarity of the attributes is just as significant (“bright” eyes, “rosy” cheeks, etc.) and indicates a broadly-shared cultural perspective.

The Arabic tradition

The possible influence of an Arabic canon of feminine beauty on Spanish medieval literature has played a part in a broader debate in mid-twentieth century Spanish academia. The debate polarized around the positions of Américo Castro and Claudio Sánchez-Albornoz with respect to the greater (Castro) or lesser (Sánchez-Albornoz) influence of Arabic culture in shaping “Spanishness.” Regarding canons of feminine beauty, the discussion has focused mainly on the *Libro de buen amor (LBA)*, perhaps because of the broad range of styles and genres in the work. Dámaso Alonso’s critique of Lecoy’s claim to find unequivocal Europeanism in *LBA*, for example, compares Juan Ruiz’s description of the beautiful woman with Faral’s scheme and shows the latter to be inadequate. Dámaso Alonso argues that the sequential order of the features differs, and some features are not even mentioned by Faral: “of beautiful shape” (“de talla”), “small head” (“cabeza pequeña”), “long eyelashes” (“luengas pestañas”), “small ears” (“orejas pequeñas”), and “red gums” (“enzías bermejas”). Alonso, however, takes into account only stanzas 432-435, which describe mostly the head, and excludes stanzas 444, 445,

⁹ “For the other parts I am silent / here the mind’s speech is more apt than the tongue’s” (Vinsauf, *Poetria nova* 37).

and 448, which describe other parts of the body, and hence his contention that Juan Ruiz's portrait of beauty corresponds with 40% of the features Faral describes is incorrect. If we include stanzas 444, 445 and 448, the correspondence is closer to 80%, even 90% if we consider "long sides" ("luengos costados") and "hips somewhat wide" ("ancheta de caderas") as references to the torso and waist. *LBA* stanza 445 mentions "moist armpits" ("sobacos ... un poco mojados"), a feature overlooked by Alonso that is also absent from Faral's scheme. In any case, Alonso sees the following six features as related to a specific Arabic canon of beauty: "tall" (one possible translation of "de talla"), "long neck" ("alto cuello"), "gap-toothed" ("dientes un poco apartadillos," supposedly like the Prophet Muhammad), "thin lips" ("labios angostillos," rather than "grosezuelos" ["somewhat full"] as in *La Celestina*), and "red gums" ("enzías bermejas") (Alonso 405-409). In addition, Alonso points to other features described by Faral as typical of medieval Europe which are present in the erotic Arabic work *Tuhfat al-'arūs* (written by al-Tidjānī, ca. 1301 CE); it contains the same number of parts (eighteen) and almost the same ordering as Faral's scheme. With regard to the "dientes un poco apartadillos" of *LBA*, however, Barbera points out that Chaucer used the attribute of "gat-toothed" ("gap-toothed")--considered a mark of lasciviousness--to enhance the Wife of Bath's eroticism in the Prologue to the *Canterbury Tales* (263). The attribute of "red gums" does not appear to be a typical Arabic feature either, and may be found in Middle English poetry: "rede gomys as a rose faire," probably from a Latin source (Curry 70).

Walter Mettmann has identified more direct evidence of Arabic influence in a thirteenth-century Spanish translation of an Arabic folk story, *La historia de la doncella Teodor*, based on the story of the slave girl Tawaddud in the *Thousand and One Nights*.

He submits a list of eighteen features of a beautiful feminine body, the very same number of Faral's "European" canon and Alonso's "Arabic" canon. Six attributes (length, small size, width, white, black, and red) are assigned to each one of three body parts:

Aquella muger es formosa que es sennora de diez e ocho sennales ... La que es luenga en tres, e pequenna en tres, e ancha en tres, e blanca en tres, e prieta en tres e bermeja en tres ... Luenga en tres: que sea luenga de costado, e que aya el cuello luengo, e los dedos luengos; blanca en tres: el cuerpo blanco, e los dientes blancos, e lo blanco de los ojos blanco; e prieta en tres: cabellos prietos, e lo prieto de los ojos prieto, e las cejas prietas; e bermeja en tres: mexillas bermejas, e beços bermejos, e ensias bermejas; e pequenna en tres: boca pequenna, naris pequenna, e los pies pequennos; e ancha en tres: ancha de caderas, e ancha de espaldas, e ancha la fuente, e que sea muy plasertera a su marido e muy ayudadera, e que sea pequenna de edad.¹⁰ (qtd. in Mettmann 143)

Only two of the features listed in the above scheme are absent from *LBA*, that is "broad-shouldered" ("ancha de espaldas") and with a "broad forehead" ("ancha de fuente"), the latter typical of the Latin and vernacular European traditions. Mettmann cites W. E. Lane and mentions an anonymous Arabic treatise as the source of this scheme, although the work prescribes nine types of attributes for each of four body parts; some attributes belong to more than one group: for example the legs are both "long" and "white." There is, however, no mention of the attribute "broad-shouldered" (Lane 215-216; Mettmann 146). At the same time, hair color in *LBA* is "blond" ("amarillo") rather than "black" ("prieto"), and the color of the eyebrows and of the cheeks is unmentioned. Four features found in *LBA* are not present in *La historia de la doncella Teodor*: "small head," "long eyelashes," "small and delicate ears," and "slender arms." It seems, in other words, that each scheme is no more than a loose rhetorical framework. Other versions of

¹⁰ The beautiful woman has eighteen signs: three long, three short, three small, three white, three black, and three red. Three long: torso, neck, and fingers; three white: body, teeth, and white of the eyes; three black: hair, eyes, and eyebrows; three red: cheeks, lips, and gums; three small: mouth, nose, and feet; three wide: hips, back/shoulders, and forehead.

the story introduce into the numbered scheme “white face” (“cara blanca”) instead of “the white of the eyes” (“lo blanco de los ojos blanco”), or “black eyelashes” (“pestañas prietas”) instead of “black hair” (“cabellos prietos”), and “broad wrists” (“ancha de muñecas”) instead of “broad forehead” (“ancha de frente”) (Mettmann 146).

The numbered scheme continued to be popular in the Renaissance. In Lope de Vega’s sixteenth-century version of the story, the three white features are teeth, face, and hands. One version includes new sets of threes, “firm” (“duras”) and “well proportioned” (“mesuradas”), while another increases the number of features to forty (in a ten-by-four scheme) that includes “sweet-smelling armpits” (as does *LBA*, 445a). Other reworkings of the numbered scheme are to be found in sixteenth-century French, Italian, and Latin works, with the number of features increasing up to sixty (Mettmann 147). López-Baralt mentions an early seventeenth-century manuscript (which she calls a “Kama Sutra catalán” that is probably a translation of a medieval Arabic original) that lists twenty-eight features in a seven-by-four scheme (77). She argues, too, in favor of an Arabic origin of *LBA*’s description, and adds three more features to the list of “typical” Arabic characteristics of feminine beauty: large, bright, colored eyes, “not deep/salient” (“grandes, someros, pintados, reluzientes”); white and pointed teeth (“blancos” and “agudillos”); and, finally, a straight nose (“la nariz afilada”) (80-82). She states, for example, that the terms that describe the eyes are borrowed from passages in Arabic literature, where they depict the eyes of the “huríes,” the beautiful virgins of the Islamic paradise, “paradigmatic Arabic females” (75).

A loose canon

These controversies notwithstanding, the various examples of a literary canon of feminine beauty in the different rhetorical traditions may be summarized and compared in terms of three dimensions: (1) the sequential ordering of the parts, (2) the body parts mentioned, and (3) the attributes given to each part:

(1) The enumeration is never strict; the sequence does not always begin with the hair and end with the feet; though it generally follows a top-down scheme. It may be that there is nothing “artificial” in a top-down description per se, especially one that begins from the face--which generally contains the most distinguishing and visible features of individual human beings.

(2) It follows that the most-often cited parts are facial, whereas references to the rest of the body are few. In medieval German, Old French, and Middle English literatures the descriptions of the human body below the waist are rare (Curry 117). Many descriptions do not mention body parts below the neck. Yet the parts described in each text are variable, ranging from a single mention of the eyes to a full-length portrait.

(3) Attributes of each part (from “white” skin to “small” feet) appear to be most consistent throughout the different literary traditions. Variation in hair color (blond, black, or red) is not attributable to a specific literary tradition. As was noted above, the term “vair” (“light blue” or “blue-gray”) for the eyes seems to have been used to convey brightness rather than color, just as “black” was used by Arabic authors. Even Classical Latin authors sometimes described the eyes as “black” though the emphasis was on the eyes’ brightness rather than their color

(Spaltenstein 114-115). In contrast, learned Arab poetry under the Umayyad rulers sometimes celebrated blue eyes--and golden hair (López-Baralt 73).

Reference to a small waist, or to wide hips (or “somewhat wide,” as in “ancheta de caderas”) is significant in terms of the ratio of waist to hips, and suggestive of an “hourglass” body shape.

Table 2 reports the attributes of beauty in the literary traditions discussed in this chapter. Although the few examples provided in the previous pages are inadequate for representing each literary tradition, they show significant correspondence among many features and attributes. The medieval traditions (Latin, French, and English) include: long blond hair; a high, white forehead; black, arched and separated eyebrows; big and bright eyes; rosy cheeks; a straight and “medium size” nose; a small mouth; red, full, and delicate; white and even teeth; a long and white neck; straight and long arms; white, smooth hands with long fingers; gently curving shoulders; small, round, and firm breasts; a slim waist; small feet; white skin, and a slender body shape. The Arabic tradition (whose sole representative we have is the *The Doncella Teodor* translation) differs significantly in the attribute of “broad-shouldered,” which contrasts sharply with the emphasis on small and slender features of all the other portraits. The Classical Latin tradition includes purple hair, as does the Song of Solomon, perhaps a reference to the hue left by henna-based hair dyes. In addition, the Song of Solomon, like Andalusian and Arabic poetry discussed in the previous chapter, lays greater emphasis on the sense organs of taste (lips, tongue) and smell (perfumes).

Table 2

Attributes of Beauty in Different Literary Traditions

	Biblical	Classical Latin	Medieval Latin	French	English	Arabic (Teodor)
Head	like Mount Carmel		circular			
Hair	like flock of goats; purple	long, purple, black, blond	long, blond	long, blond	long, blond	black
Forehead		white, bright	white, bright	high, white, bright	high, white	broad
Eyebrows		black, long	black arches, separated,	black, separated	black arches, separated	black
Eyes	doves; fishpools	bright	bright	large, bright	large, bright, round	black
Cheeks	rosy	rosy	rosy	rosy	rosy	red
Nose	straight		straight, medium size	straight, medium size	straight, medium size	small
Mouth	sweet tongue		small, a half circle	small	small, well proportioned	small
Gums					red	red
Lips	red	red	red; full but delicate	red; full but delicate	red, small, soft	red
Teeth	white, even	white	white, even	white, even, small	white, even	white
Chin			white	*	white, dimpled	
Neck/throat	white, long	white	white	white, long	white, long	long
Shoulders		*	curved	curved	curved	broad
Arms		soft	straight	straight, long	long, plump	
Hands		soft	smooth, white	white	white	
Fingers		*	long	long	long	long
Breasts	twin roes		white, small, firm, round	white, small, firm	white, small, round	
Torso			long			long
Belly	rounded		rounded		rounded	
Waist			slim	slim	slim	
Hips	like jewels			moderat. full	mod. round	wide
Legs			straight		white, shapely	
Feet	graceful	small	small		small	small
Skin	dark	white, smooth	white	white, soft, smooth	white	white
Voice	sweet				soft, clear	
Body size and shape	stately	not tall, fat, short, skinny	slender	slender	slender, well proportioned	

* The asterisk indicates that the part is mentioned only as “beautiful.”

Source: Compiled from the works discussed in the chapter.

CHAPTER 4 - WOMEN'S HEALTH AND COSMETICS

Cosmetics

Another perspective on the medieval ideal of feminine beauty may be found in cosmetic practices. All known cultures make use of a wide array of substances, objects, and techniques to decorate the bodies of men and women for purposes that include religious rituals, group identification, war symbolism, social status, age distinctions, rites of passage, and sexual attraction. This study is concerned with sexual attraction, and the cosmetic practices directly associated with enhancing the beauty of one's body to make oneself more attractive to the opposite sex, regardless the standard of beauty. Cosmetic practices throughout the world have been known from since the Paleolithic era. But the body of historical and modern works on ancient (as well as medieval) cosmetics is slight (Olson 117-118). The earliest and most complete archaeological evidence for powders, ointments, perfumes, cosmetic techniques and preparations used for the care of the body, hair, and face (including "kohl"--powdered antimony--for the eyes) is from Egypt (third millennium BCE); these products were also used in prehistoric Mesopotamia, Syria, Persia, Israel, Crete, India, China, and Mesoamerica (Fernández Rodríguez 3-4; Blanco-Dávila 1196-1200). Elaborate boxes with compartments and drawers for razors, pumice stones (for depilation and smoothing the skin), eye pencils, shadow powder, liquid colors, bronze dishes (for mixing the colors), mirrors, and small jars for ointments and creams are extant (Dayagi-Mendels 37-39; Angeloglou 23).

Ancient literary sources also mention cosmetics. The Hebrew Bible makes several references to women's make-up and accessories, all negative and associated with

sin: the Lord's condemns the daughters of Zion because they are "haughty, and walk with stretched forth necks and wanton eyes, walking and mincing as they go, and making a tinkling with their feet" (Isa. 3:16). The passage continues with a catalogue of all the adornments that women will lose in the final judgment, such as bracelets, anklets, rings, earrings, headbands, nose jewels, sweet smells, and refined clothes (Isa. 3:18-24). Queen Jezebel, just before her death, "painted her face, and tired her head" (2 Kings 9:30). Ezekiel personifies the sinful Samaria and Jerusalem as prostitutes "girded with girdles upon their loins, exceeding in dyed attire upon their heads" (Ezek. 23:15), and chastises Jerusalem because: "thou didst wash thyself, paintedst thy eyes, and deckedst thyself with ornaments" (Ezek. 23:40). According to the Mishna, a husband had to provide an allowance for his wife's cosmetic needs (Blanco-Dávila 1197). In the New Testament too women are told not to plait their hair, wear gold, or generally adorn their bodies (1 Pet. 3:3). Several passages mention a perfumed ointment, the spikenard, qualified as "costly" or "precious," and used to anoint Jesus's feet (Mark 14:3; Luke 7:37; John 12:3).

The use of cosmetics was also popular among women in classical Greece and in imperial Rome, though status and cost restricted the use to the elite. Classical Greek sources usually criticize make-up, and contrast it with manliness and gymnastics. For example, Socrates (in Plato's *Gorgias*), condemns the colors ("κόσμοι") and the smooth texture of a woman's skin as spurious beauty that deceives men (Wiseman 5).¹ Facial make-up, however, was common in classical Greece (Grillet 2-3). Women of high status in Roman society also desired a white complexion, hairless, smooth, free of wrinkles, warts, and other blemishes; they used rouge for their cheeks; enhanced their eyebrows,

¹ In Latin the term "fucus" referred both to a painter's color and to rouge, and "fucare" acquired the meaning of falsifying and misrepresenting (Wiseman 5).

eyelashes, and eyes with kohl; wore their hair long in elaborate styles, and dyed it black, blond and auburn; and they used abundant perfume (a luxury) on hair and body; excessive make-up, however, was associated with prostitutes (Olson 117-152).

Ovid's legacy to the Middle Ages is not limited to his descriptions of feminine beauty (discussed in the previous chapter), but extends to recipes for make-up. In the unfinished and short fragment *De medicamine faciei* ("On painting the face") Ovid lists several preparations (including ingredients and proportions) for cleansing, smoothing, and whitening the skin, as well as for reddening the cheeks. For example:

It has been found useful to add fennel to the fragrant myrrh (let the fennel weigh five scruples, the myrrh nine), and of dry rose-leaves as much as a hand can grasp, and frankincense with salt of Ammon. Thereon pour the juice that barley makes; let rose-leaves and salt together equal the incense in weight. Though it be smeared but for a short time on your soft countenance, a fine colour will remain on all your face. I have seen one who pounded poppies moistened with cool water, and rubbed them on her tender cheeks. (vv. 91-100)

A commonplace view is that the advent of Christianity in Europe led to the virtual disappearance of cosmetic practices during the Middle Ages, and that they were negatively associated with the exoticism of the Byzantine East and the Arab world. At the beginning of the third century CE one of the Church Fathers, Tertullian, wrote two books that condemned women's fashion, *De habitu muliebri* and *De cultu feminarum* (now known collectively as *The Apparel of Women*). Tertullian defines first the basic categories of discussion, "cultus" (dress and accessories) and "ornatus" (make-up):

Female toilet has two possible purposes—dress and make-up. We use the word dress when we refer to what they call womanly grace, whereas make-up is more fittingly called womanly disgrace. Articles of dress are considered gold and silver and jewels and clothes, whereas make-up consists in the care of the hair and of the skin and of those parts of the body which attract the eye. On one we level the accusation of ambition; on the other, that of prostitution. (Tertullian 122-123)

Most of the content of both books is concerned with the Christian value of modesty in women's dress and accessories: by artificially enhancing her beauty a woman becomes the object of sexual desire and is responsible for leading men into temptation and sin. There are also a few references to the cosmetic practices of the time, especially in *De cultu*:

For, surely, those women sin against God who anoint their faces with creams, stain their cheeks with rouge, or lengthen their eyebrows with antimony. (Tertullian 135-136)

I see some women dye their hair blonde by using saffron. They are even ashamed of their country, sorry that they were not born in Germany or in Gaul! ... As a matter of fact, the strength of these bleaches really does harm to the hair. (Tertullian 137)

What profit, again, do you derive for your salvation from all the labor spent in arranging your hair? Why can you not leave your hair alone, instead of at one time tying it up, at another letting it hang loose, now cultivating it, now thinning it out? ... Besides, some of you affix to your heads I know not what monstrosities of sewn and woven wigs, now in the form of a cap as if it were a casing for the head and a covering for the crown, now in the form of a chignon at the back of the neck ... I certainly hope that I, in the day of Christian joy, miserable man that I am, may be able to raise my head at least as high as your heels. Perhaps I will then see whether or not you will arise with your ceruse, your rouge, your saffron, and all that parade of head-gear; whether it will be women painted up that way whom the angels will carry up to meet Christ in the clouds.

(Tertullian 138-139)

Tertullian claims he speaks not as a man who wants to deprive women of what is their own, and condemns equally men's "desire to please" and be physically attractive:

The male sex also has its own peculiar trickeries for enhancing their appearance: for instance, cutting the beard a bit too sharply, trimming it too neatly, shaving around the mouth, arranging and dyeing our hair, darkening the first signs of gray hair, disguising the down on the whole body with some female ointments, smoothing off the rest of the body by means of some gritty powder, then always taking occasion to look in a mirror, gazing anxiously into it. (Tertullian 140)

We do not know whether the Church's authority in these matters was effective in changing fashion. Roman medicine, however, considered cosmetics and perfumery a branch of medicine, and Galen wrote the first known scientific treatise on cosmetics, *De simplicium medicamentorum temperamentis ac facultatibus*, where he describes the "ceratum galeni refrigerans," a preparation based on essence of rose water, perhaps the first cold-cream (Fernández Rodríguez 5; Blanco-Dávila 1198).

Paulus Aegineta, active at the end of the sixth or beginning of the seventh century, wrote a seven-book compendium in Greek on medical ailments and their remedies, including surgery, drawing mainly from Oribasius and Galen. Book III contains advice on topical affections, as the author states, "beginning from the crown of the head and descending down to the nails of the feet"² (Paulus Aegineta xix).² Scattered among medical remedies there are several recipes for hair growth, black and blond hair-dyes, and techniques for making the hair curled (Sections I and II). Others are against wrinkles, freckles, facial hair, and for making the face ruddy (Section XXV), or for the depilation of the chin and the genitalia (Section LII). At the end of the seventh book there are three sections with many recipes for oils, ointments, and perfumes (Sections XX-XXII). Regarding the relationship between medicine and cosmetics, Francis Adams (English translator of Aegineta's work) notes in his commentary that "Galen, when about to treat of compositions for the hair, remarks that the application of these does not belong properly to the physician, but that he may sometimes be obliged to furnish them to royal ladies, whom, under certain circumstances, he cannot venture to disobey" (Book III, Section II, 344).

² This is the same order prescribed for the rhetorical portrait of a person, discussed in the previous chapter.

Preparations for disguising gray hair are included also in Byzantine medical compendia (Stannard 7), and Arabic knowledge of cosmetics included facial masks, scented skin cleansers, defoliants, and hair-dyes (such as henna) (Blanco-Dávila 1199). Prominent medieval medical scholars who wrote on cosmetics include: the Andalusian botanist and pharmacist Ibn al-Bayṭār, born in Malaga, but who exercised his craft in North Africa and the Near East after 1219 (d. 1248 in Damascus); one of his two major works is the *Kitāb al-Mughnī fi 'l-aḍwiya al-mufrada*, with one chapter on cosmetics (out of twenty) (Sarton vol. 2.2, 663-664). The physician and surgeon Guglielmo da Saliceto (1210 Saliceto-1277 Verona?), who included a book on cosmetics and dermatology among the five of his *Summa conservationis et curationis* (Sarton vol. 2.2, 1078). Solomon Kohen, or Abū Manṣūr Sulaymān ibn Haffaz al-Kūhin, a Jewish physician active in Egypt (d. 1295-1296), who devoted to poison and cosmetics one of the seven parts of his medical encyclopedia *Kitāb al-Muntakhab* (Sarton vol. 2.2, 1098); the surgeon Henry of Mondeville, from Normandy (d.1325-1330), who included a “*Doctrina decorationis*” (in twenty-four chapters) in the third treatise of his *Cyrurgia*, treating of cosmetics, depilatories, and other beautifying techniques, among other medical issues (Sarton vol. 3.1, 869).

Several authors maintain that increased contact of Europe with the Middle East, through Islamic conquests, Christian crusades, and trade, appears to have had little or no immediate effect on European society, and the use of cosmetics became popular among the nobility only during the Renaissance (Dayagi-Mendels 8; Angeloglou 36). Portraits of noble ladies from late medieval Western Europe emphasize whiteness and smoothness of skin (freckles were considered a major aesthetic defect), plucked eyebrows and

hairline (making the eyes more prominent and the forehead broader and higher). In continental Europe (as opposed to England) rouged cheeks were allowed (Wykes-Joyce 36-37). Hair too was a pale color, and usually covered by a head-dress (the “wimple”), while wigs--popular throughout the ancient world--were strongly condemned by the early Christian Church as an insult to chastity (Woodforde 11). It seems women paid more attention to elaborate dress and other accessories, like bodices, belts, scarves and jewelry, but not without escaping criticism from the Church (Angeloglou 39-42; Wykes-Joyce 34-35). Heavy make-up was, in any case, still associated with prostitutes and courtesans.

The situation may have been different in the Iberian peninsula, given the greater influence of the Byzantine empire first and the Muslim conquest later, but historical accounts are rare. A brief mention of make-up occurs in an astrological treatise, *El libro conplido en los uidizios de las estrellas*, a Spanish translation made at the court of Alfonso X of an Arabic work by Ibn Abī al-Rijāl (or Aly Aben Ragel), ca. 1254 (Aben Ragel lxiii). The planet Venus is described in terms of feminine beauty, including “de bue[n] parecer, afeytada, linpia, hermosa” (“good-looking, made-up, clean, beautiful”) (Aben Ragel 15).

Sánchez-Albornoz, in his fictional/historical reconstruction of daily life in a medieval city in Iberia (*Una ciudad de la España cristiana hace mil años*) describes a rich household in León, royal seat in the tenth century. Sánchez-Albornoz’s purpose is to provide the reader with a composite picture of the life of the nobility with details culled from documents of the time, and the main emphasis in the portrait of Doña Adosinda is on her clothes. However, he does think it necessary to add that the lady, no longer a young woman but still beautiful, was blond (141). There is also a late medieval anecdote

that illustrates the negative view of cosmetics at the court of Castile. In 1455 the fifteen-year old sister of King Alfonso V of Portugal, Juana, arrived in Castile with an entourage of young ladies-in-waiting in order to marry King Enrique IV of Castile (his second wedding). Their liberal use of perfumes and cosmetics astonished the modest Castilian court. The contemporary commentator Alonso de Palencia (a critic of King Enrique IV) wrote that:

Desde los dedos de los pies, los talones y canillas, hasta la parte más alta de los muslos, interior y exteriormente, cuidaban de pintarse con blanco afeito, para que al caer de sus hacaneas, como con frecuencia ocurría, brillase en todos sus miembros uniforme blancura.³ (qtd. in Marino 45)

Besides the excessive use of white make-up, Palencia, like other moralists, criticized provocative dress that included low necklines, tight corsets, the “verdugo” (farthingale), and the wearing of unconventional hats (including typically masculine ones). Queen Juana, dressed in full battle-gear, even participated in a brief clash with the Moors. Despite their unconventional behavior, the Portuguese ladies achieved great social success and many married into the Spanish nobility (Marino 48).

Before examining the evidence for cosmetic practices in medieval Iberia, the next section discusses medieval cosmetics in its relationship to contemporary views of what constituted “women’s health,” based on principles of medieval medicine. Another section addresses the influence of these views on misogynist literature. The last section is an analysis of nine medieval texts that provide cosmetic recipes, four in Latin (two “pan-European” and two from Catalonia), one in Arabic (from al-Andalus), three in Catalan, and one in Castilian.

³ “From their toes, heels and shins, up to the highest part of their thighs, both inside and out, they took care to paint with white make-up, so that when they slid from their horses, which occurred often, their entire members would shine with uniform whiteness” (Marino 45).

Medicine and sex difference

Joan Cadden's work on medieval medical views of sex difference shows that they were not homogeneous but, rather, an amalgam of different theoretical traditions, some contradictory, that placed emphasis on the practical results of any time-honored remedy (4-5). Furthermore, although religious and political powers used principles from different theoretical traditions to reinforce a desired social behavior, the traditions allowed for a broad interpretation of gender roles (7). Late medieval Europe offers a number of medical and natural philosophical traditions on women's health.

Hippocrates developed the most ancient of them in the fifth and fourth century BCE in Greece. A theoretical basis may be seen in the concept of "balance:" the task of the physician being to maintain and restore balance to achieve good health. Based on the theory of the four humors (cholera / hot; phlegm / cold; black bile / dry; and blood / moist), it presupposes the existence of two polarities (too much or too little). It is not, however, hierarchical, in that no one quality/humor or "complexion" is superior to another. For example, with respect to reproduction, both males and females were seen to equally contribute their own "seed" (Cadden 16-18). The Aristotelian conception in *Generations of Animals* (fourth/third century BCE) shares much with the Hippocratic one (21). Aristotle's interest as a natural philosopher was to place medical knowledge within a teleological framework of causation, and he assigned values to polarities: in the case of sex difference, it was the male's quality of being hotter than the female that allowed him to produce a semen that defined the "form" of the fetus, whereas the colder female could only provide the nourishment ("the matter") of the fetus. Woman was therefore not-quite-a-man, a weaker and passive receptacle (Cadden 22-24). A third major influence on

medieval medical theory was the tradition of Soranus, Greek physician in Rome during the second century CE, author of *Gynecology* (26). He too understood health and disease in terms of balance and imbalance, but his “Methodist” approach was based on the opposition of tension and laxity, rather than the quality of humors. His method, unlike that of Aristotle, prescribed the same treatments for males and females, and implicitly understood both sexes as active contributors to the formation of the offspring (27). Unlike Hippocrates, he saw menstruation as related only to reproduction, and not to female health in general (29). Galen, also a Greek physician living in Rome during the second century CE (after Soranus), was probably the most influential figure in the later Middle Ages (30). Borrowing selectively from all his predecessors he endeavored to systematize medical knowledge within a rational framework. In *On Seed*, for example, he dissented from the Aristotelian idea that women did not produce seed--though he maintained that their semen was cooler, moister, and less plentiful, and therefore less powerful than men’s (Cadden 31-34).

By the late-eleventh century (during the medieval “Renaissance”), and influenced by Arabic scholarship, strands of these traditions constituted medieval medical and scientific texts (54). This assimilation was characterized by an effort to integrate practical medical knowledge into a broader theoretical framework (56). The revolution in scholarship brought about by the universities produced more detailed and more precise information on the subject of reproduction, as well as greater theoretical consistency. It did not lead, however, to the development of a single, dominant theoretical model of sex difference, and in fact preserved the syncretism and practical focus of the previous centuries (102-103).

Cadden claims that modern scholarship has tended to exaggerate the differences in the medieval period between the Aristotelian and Galenic views on male and female generative contributions, presuming that the Aristotelian, misogynist view predominated: “Medieval authors’ treatments of the subject are often subtle and complex and are seldom unambiguously tied to a single ancient authority,” and this may be observed by studying the debates of the scholastic questions (118). For example, the issue of a more or less active female role in reproduction, was only raised in discussions of sex determination in the embryo (120). The consensus was that the role of the female seed was very limited. The basis for this view had more to do with trying to fit existing knowledge within a coherent system of reproductive theory than with the denigration of women (131). Even with regard to the purpose of sexual pleasure in reproduction, late medieval scholars rarely distinguished between male and female pleasure, and in either case the ultimate end was procreation (136). Also, though the main focus was the male “lovesickness,” authors like Peter of Spain examined its effects on women, making a distinction of degree rather than quality (155).

The construction of gender categories in late medieval society (what was “manly” and what was “womanly”), on the other hand, was affected by systems of power, authority, and the reproduction of knowledge (168). Ambiguities in scholastic science and medicine carried over into medieval gender concepts. On the topic of “masculine” versus “feminine,” for example, most authors saw sex differences as founded on a distinction between male and female “complexions”--that is the predominant element in the balance among the four qualities. Since this balance varied among individuals of each gender, sex differences appeared to be more a matter of degree, so that “typical”

women were similar to “phlegmatic” men (170-171). Anatomical differences between women and men supported interpretations which held women to be both passive (a vessel) and active (having an insatiable sexual appetite) (178). Prominent body hair and facial hair were a main signal of masculinity, as well as proportional to men’s libido (181). There was general agreement, however, that the differences in group personality and behavior between men and women were based on innate, “natural” constitutional differences, the product of divine Creation or of human procreation (190).

The concept of different constitutions being the outcome of various balances of qualities allowed for the “natural” existence of types that did not fit into the binary distinction of male and female, such as masculine females and feminine males, eunuchs, and hermaphrodites (202). Feminine or masculine qualities were applied to every aspect of the physical and spiritual worlds, though they could be positive or negative, “conveying the sense of duality without being strictly dichotomous” (209). Medicine and natural philosophy had little to say about deviant sexual behavior, such as same sex-relations, virginity, or sexual abstinence (sometimes seen as harmful for both men and women). Articulation of an orthodox sexual behavior--at a time when the Church was implementing ecclesiastical reforms designed to strengthen marriage and clerical celibacy, as well as defending challenges to its doctrine--rested on the Church’s prohibition of the pursuit of sexual pleasure for its own sake (219). What emerged, however, were non-dogmatic general ways of viewing sex difference, such as “the sense that women had less reproductive, physical, and intellectual strength and ability than men, and at the same time greater susceptibility to pleasure, disease, and reproductive failure than men” (280).

Medicine and Literature

The male disease known as “lovesickness,” or “amor hereos,” began with a man’s fixation on a beautiful woman and led to excessive sexual desire and the deterioration of mind and body (Solomon 11). In the first place, by the late Middle Ages a close relationship existed between medicine and religion, or between physical and psychic health, so that licensed physicians as well as clergymen played a role in restoring health. In fact, the two often acquired similar university training (23). There was, moreover, an ancient tradition that placed medicine alongside rhetoric, connecting healing with preaching (25). Since antiquity chants, hymns, spells and prayers had been seen to possess healing powers, and physicians also recognized the power of the patient’s “imaginative faculty” for his/her recovery (37-38). In late medieval Spain, Solomon identifies six interrelated beliefs about the nature of disease (or “corporeal disorder”): (1) a normal condition of mortal existence; (2) a punishment for sin; (3) God’s test of human beings; (4) caused by the Devil; (5) an imbalance caused by an excess or deficiency (of elements, humors, etc.), and (6) related to cosmological and political disorder. These explanatory models were seen to be complementary, and recognized that one and the same therapy would not ameliorate or cure disease in all individuals (40-48).

The Church considered sexuality, or rather sexual misconduct, as a cause of illness, both for the individual and for entire societies (Christian Spain’s defeat at the hands of the Moors in the eighth century was laid on the sexual misconduct of the Visigothic King Rodrigo). The roots of sexual activity were believed to lie in the “erotic imagination” that arose, as Andreas Capellanus maintained, “solely from the thought formed in the mind as a result of the thing seen” (Solomon 52). While the faculty of the

imagination could be used to help impotent and shy men, it also led many to “immoderate” sexual intercourse, which entailed loss of strength, accelerated aging, and even premature death (56). One method for combating harmful erotic images was to occupy the mind with alternative stimuli, from distraction (going on a trip) to pain (beating), or even inducing revulsion by techniques such as smelling the burning excrements of the beloved (Solomon 56-59). Such therapies could also be administered simply by talking to the patient (“confabulatio”), to distract him, to instill fear, or to make the beloved’s image disgusting: Bernard of Gordon suggested telling the patient that she is a drunkard, that she urinates in bed, that her hands and feet are deformed, that she stinks, and that she is dirty (Solomon 62). According to Solomon, the origin of these techniques lay in specific treatments for cases of “amor hereos” but were soon prescribed for any sex-related disease, the therapeutic objective being to encourage men to avoid women, the latter being identified as the root cause of the disease (64).

The idea of women as the source of disease may be traced back at least to the patristic period, and religious sermons throughout the Middle Ages widely exploited it. In addition, popular medieval literature was also a tool for the dissemination of medical thought about disease and health. It is from such a perspective that the *Corbacho* and the *Spill* represent women as diseased (and sinful) and illustrate how contact with them leads to disease (and sin) in men (Solomon 75). Women in both works are described in terms of excess in their behavior and their bodily functions. Their insatiable desire for material goods drains men’s possessions, they talk uncontrollably, and are unable to keep secrets (78-79). Their bodies are naturally diseased and they are the agents of disease and death (80). Men who have sexual relations with women become weak, lose their sight, hearing,

and smell, and by simple association with women are left emasculated (86). Women are also the agents of congenital defects and premature death of their children, are unable to properly care for them, and are often guilty of killing or mutilating them (sometimes implicating unwitting males in their crimes). Finally, women are also responsible for the “epidemic” destruction of cities and civilizations (92).

Solomon contends that literature was considered by medieval authors as an instrument for affecting social behavior, to inform and reform (94). By the fifteenth century clergymen, notaries, lawyers, and physicians were dependent on compendia that codified their discursive material and provided close-at-hand tools for their profession. Compendia were also written as popular manuals in the vernacular for use by non-professionals, especially in the medical field (98).⁴ Latin examples include Constantine the African’s *Viaticum* and Peter of Spain’s *Thesaurus pauperum*. In the vernacular, we find in Iberia the *Regiment de preservació de pestilència* (by Jacme d’Agramont), the *Regiment de sanitat* (by Arnau de Vilanova), the *Speculum foederi*, and the *Menor daño de la medicina* (by Alfonso Chirino) (98-100). Belief in the healing power of discourse may be seen in the numerous examples of remedies that require the writing of a prayer on a piece of paper to be placed on the patient’s head, or to be soaked and the water drunk as a medicine (Solomon 102-103). The *Corbacho* and the *Spill* may be considered examples of such a perspective, written with the goal of controlling and curbing what they considered “harmful amorous practices,” from religious and medical points of view (105). Employing the strategy of “confabulatio,” the clergyman-physician-writer confronts the (male) patient as reader, addressing him in the manner of a friendly counselor who offering his own experience (as opposed to more impersonal medical

⁴ Monica Green’s essay “The possibilities of literacy and the limits of reading” disputes this point.

works) (117). To this end, both works employ a variety of verbal stratagems, with purportedly personal anecdotes, biblical stories and proverbs, as well as using rhyming lines (even woven into the prose of the *Corbacho*) as mnemonic devices (121-122).

Where rational arguments were insufficient, other techniques would reform the reader: inflicting pain and abjection. In the *Spill* and *Corbacho* the authors describe in detail the actions of women who inflict pain on men, sometimes comparing it with the future pain of purgatory (127). Another technique consisted in describing the punishments that women themselves would incur as a result of their evil actions, while praising the lives of saintly and heroic women, so that men's fixation would turn from the daughters of Eve to the Virgin Mary (132). Two of the most popular saints in Spain were St. Lucy and St. Agatha, the former having taken out her own eyes (which had "captivated" a suitor), and the latter having had her breasts cut off for resisting the advances of a powerful man (139).

Beginning in the twelfth century, university-trained physicians initiated a process to strengthen their control over medical practice by licensing practitioners. By the fifteenth century these regulations were rigorously enforced in the Iberian peninsula, and the hospital was transformed from an institution that cared for the poor into one that allowed total supervision of patients in a controlled setting (Solomon 151). The author of the *Spill*, Jaume Roig, held for many years the post of official "Examiner of Physicians" of Valencia, as well as holding an administrative position in the Hospital d'Inocents, often celebrated as the first mental institution in the West (155). Both the *Spill* and the *Corbacho* make a clear distinction between the authorized physician and the unauthorized healer, denouncing the latter as inept and detrimental to health. The two

works attack especially women, accused of using substances in order to create disease, as well as being skilled in the art of feigning disease (Solomon 155-156). This “clinical anxiety” of physicians also appears in other works, notably in *La Celestina*, where the matchmaker/healer Celestina is portrayed as the cause of chaos and death in the pursuit of her own profit rather than the cure of the disease of one of the protagonists, Calisto, a victim of “lovesickness” (166). These works, therefore, also represent a vast array of arguments that marginalized women from the practice of medicine (172).

Medical practice and women

The commonplace view of the role of women in medicine is that during the Middle Ages “women’s health was women’s business” and that midwives were the sole providers of women’s health care (Green, “Women’s Medical Practice” 39). Green argues that such a view rests on two assumptions: a “midwife” necessarily cared for every aspect of women’s health, and a clear sexual division of (medical) labor operated, such that women only attended women, and men only men. Women were, in fact, practitioners: physicians, surgeons, barber-surgeons, apothecaries, and other empirical healers (“Women’s Medical Practice” 40-41). The data on women practitioners, however, are scarce, partly because of methodological problems, such as the underrepresentation of women in the medical professions (given their exclusion from university training), their “invisibility” in public records (given their legal dependence on fathers or husbands), and historians’ use of problematic categories like “vetula,” “midwife,” “nurse” or “obstetrix” (Green, “Women’s Medical Practice” 43-44; “Documenting Medieval Women” 336-337). On the other hand, several examples of women engaged in the same trade as their physician husbands have been documented, and there is evidence that women were

involved in multiple occupations (sequentially or simultaneously) without “specializing” or identifying with any of them (Green, “Documenting Medieval Women” 328-329).

Evidence from the gynecological literature on the sexual division of labor shows that male physicians always retained control of various aspects of women’s health, notwithstanding claims to their lack of interest in the matter, social conventions of “propriety,” or even the appearance of vernacular texts addressed to women (Green, “Women’s Medical Practice” 61-63). In a study of Middle English obstetrical and gynecological texts, Green observes that the special relationship women had with vernacular texts does not warrant the assumption that vernacular gynecological texts were specifically intended for female readers (even those expressly addressed to women), or that they were limited to a non-Latinate audience, although they suggest a specialized readership of physicians, surgeons, and other learned individuals--most likely males (“Obstetrical and Gynecological Texts” 56-58). Moreover, despite the general rise in literacy among women in the late Middle Ages, medical books owned by women constituted a tiny fraction of all books owned by women, who were mostly of bourgeois or noble background (Green, “The possibilities of Literacy” 2). The limitations of public records relating to women preclude development of a satisfactory understanding of the issue. It seems unlikely, however, that women possessed medical books, especially since there was little incentive for upper class women to learn medicine as long as they could employ professionals (Green, “The Possibilities of Literacy” 23). Medical books explicitly intended for female use (also a tiny fraction of all medical literature) are not general anatomical and pharmaceutical treatises but, rather, are sex- or gender-specific, dealing with gynecology, obstetrics, and cosmetics--as well as being written in the

vernacular. The vast majority of this genre of medical books does not address female readers, and these works were generally in the possession of men, even of those who did not practice medicine (Green, “The Possibilities of Literacy” 34-37).

The works discussed below are normally classified under the rubric of “women’s health.” They contain some advice on non-gender specific issues, such as headaches or nose-bleeds. Most of the content, however, addresses problems specific to women’s gynecologic and obstetric well-being. In addition, they include a section on cosmetics, according to a medical approach that considered physical beauty an integral part of “women’s health” (Cabré i Pairet, “La cura del cos” 15).

The Latin cosmetic tradition (*Trotula*)

The *Trotula* was the best known gynecological, obstetric, and cosmetic work of the Middle Ages. The original document was almost certainly written in Salerno, a thriving commercial port city in southern Italy and cross road of Mediterranean trade, which by the time of the medieval “renaissance” in the twelfth century had established a renowned medical “school” (Green, *The Trotula* 2). At the monastery of Monte Cassino (some eighty miles inland from Salerno), a series Arabic medical texts were translated into Latin in the late eleventh century, but the Salerno school went much further, fusing the older Latin texts with the Arabic ones, and adding commentaries, it produced what became standard medical handbooks until the end of the Middle Ages (Green, *The Trotula* 2).

The *Trotula* is composed of three separate treatises. Two are concerned with gynecology and obstetrics: the *Liber de sinthomatibus mulierum*, or *Conditions of Women* (or *Trotula major*), based largely on the *Viaticum* (a Latin translation of an Arabic

treatise); and the *De curis mulierum*, or *Treatments for Women* (also *Trotula minor*), a practically-oriented compendium of traditional practices, including cosmetics, also bearing signs of Arabic influence. The third treatise is the *De ornatu mulierum*, or *Women's Cosmetics*, probably the earliest medieval text of its kind; it manifests a strong influence from Arabic medicine (Green, *The Trotula* 13).

The medical texts issued by the Salerno school in the late-eleventh century were written by learned male physicians (such as Constantine the African), but these works added little new to knowledge about women's diseases. In the city there was also a tradition of medical practitioners who had little to do with the academic world. Many of them were women whose knowledge was taken seriously enough to be incorporated into the *Trotula* (14). The addition of a cosmetics section in Latin medical writings was also rare, and made the new Salernitan writings on women largely independent of previous Latin works (Green, *The Trotula* 17).

By the mid-thirteenth century, the three treatises of the Latin *Trotula* had been edited several times and brought together into what Green terms a "standardized ensemble," now extant in twenty-nine manuscripts (Green, *The Trotula* 56). Green catalogues as many as 124 extant Latin manuscripts which contain parts of the treatises, including one in prose and one in verse; the evidence from Spain, however, is limited to only one Latin manuscript now in Barcelona (thirteenth century), and another in Madrid (thirteenth/fourteenth century) of uncertain "southern European" origin ("The development of the Trotula" 174, 176). Twenty-three vernacular renditions from the thirteenth century onwards are extant, including one in Catalan, but none in Castilian (178). Some are addressed specifically to women, though nothing is known of their

owners, and it seems likely that they were intended for male readers (Green, *The Trotula* 61).

The first treatise, *Liber de sinthomatibus mulierum*, treats gynecological and obstetrical conditions, from menstrual problems to complications of childbirth. Drawn largely from the writings of Soranus, the content is framed within a Galenic theoretical perspective (elements, humors, etc.) on gynecological questions developed by Byzantine and Arabic medical writers after Galen's death (Green, *The Trotula* 18-19).

The second treatise of the *Trotula* "standardized ensemble," *De curis mulierum* (*Treatments for Women*), is similar in content to the first, but foregoes consideration of theoretical questions--although its theoretical underpinnings, such as the distinction between "hot" men and "cold" women, or the four elements, are clear (Green, *The Trotula* 37-38). It is also a chaotic assembly of treatments, lacking a clear organizing principle, offering remedies for a wide range of problems. The recipes deal mostly with advice on gynecology and obstetrics, such as menstrual regulation, lesions of the breasts, difficult birth, "fall of the uvula," or infertility, although some of them address sexual /cultural practices, from constriction of the vagina to the restoration of virginity (39-40). The treatise also contains remedies for male genital and reproductive problems (44).

The second half of the treatise, however, includes chapters that contain cosmetic recipes and specify ingredients and quantities, procedures for preparation, manner of application, and the results to be expected. Here, for example, is a recipe entitled "On making the face red:"

For making the face red, take root of red and white bryony and clean it and chop it finely and dry it. Afterward, powder it and mix it with rose water, and with cotton or a very fine linen cloth we anoint the face and it induces redness. For the woman having a naturally white complexion,

we make a red color if she lacks redness, so that with a kind of fake or cloaked whiteness a red color will appear as if it were natural.⁵

(Green, *The Trotula* 139)

The chapters/recipes on cosmetics (about 19% of the *De curis mulierum*), are interspersed among others that treat a variety of medical topics discussed above. Nonetheless, they may be grouped by five major categories of cosmetic care: skin, hair, mouth, eyes, and perfume. There is some overlap among them, as where a toothpaste is recommended for whitening the teeth as well as strengthening the gums, or where a black dye is recommended for the hair as well the eyebrows (in these cases the recipes are entered in both categories.) The categories also exclude recipes of a more medical than aesthetic nature, for instance, swelling of the eyes, scabies, head lice, or loosened teeth (though they all affect appearance.) This classification will be used to summarize all the nine treatises discussed in this chapter. Table 3 reports the types and number of recipes in each category in the *De curis mulierum*.

The third, and shortest treatise, *De ornatu mulierum* (*On Women's Cosmetics*), differs from the previous two in that it has an organizing principle: a recommended sequence. First the woman bathes to soften her skin, applies depilatory creams and then rinses; next caring for the hair, followed by facial care, and ends with care of the teeth, gums and lips. Included among the cosmetics are also three chapters on gynecology, but their contents is somewhat cosmetic since they treat of constriction of the vagina “so that a woman who has been corrupted might be thought to be a virgin” (Green, *The Trotula* 189). The author claims that one of the recipes against bad breath (“foul stench of the mouth”) is a very effective preparation used by a “certain Saracen woman:” laurel and

⁵ Green's edition includes a transcription of the Latin standardized ensemble and an English translation.

Table 3

Purpose and Frequency of Cosmetic Recipes in *De curis mulierum*

Stated purpose of recipe	Frequency
<i>Skin</i>	
• protect from sunburn (a recipe “from Salernitan women”)	1
• whiten (one cream “will last for eight days”)	2
• redden face	1
• remove redness	1
• remove wrinkles	1
• cover freckles	1
• hide veins	1
• remove warts	1
• against swelling of the face	1
• whiten and smooth hands	1
<i>Mouth</i>	
• whiten teeth	3
• strengthen gums	1
• heal fissures of the lips	3
• against bad breath	2
<i>Perfume</i>	
• against foul sweat	1

Source: Compiled from Green, *The Trotula*.

musk held under the tongue, “especially when she has to have sexual intercourse with anyone” (Green, *The Trotula* 189). The recipes in *De ornatu mulierum*, as in *De curis mulierum*, rely on local as well as imported ingredients, and are suggestive of the physical aesthetic preferences of noble women in Salerno. Some recipes are recommended as being the practice of Muslim women (and these are the only instances where a source is named, such as “a Saracen preparation”). The author often stresses the practical value of the recipes; he also admits that he has obtained this information from

women who practice the art of cosmetics. In this treatise only broad sections bear titles.

Table 4 summarizes the different recipes according to the classification used above.

Table 4

Purpose and Frequency of Cosmetic Recipes in *De ornatu mulierum*

Stated purpose of recipe	Freq.
<i>Skin</i>	
• bath for softening	1
• depilate	6
• relieve the burning caused by the depilatories	1
• cleanse and “refine”	4
• whiten	11
• redden the face (“like Salernitan women”)	2
• make a composite white/red color (like “the women of the Saracens”)	1
• protect from sunburn	1
<i>Hair</i>	
• blond dye (to make the hair “flavi” or “aureos”)	7
• black dye (“a proven Saracen preparation”)	5
• improve thickness	2
• increase length	2
• make curly	1
• perfume with musk or clove (“but take care that it not be seen by anyone”)	1
• make soft and smooth	1
• against falling hair	2
• improve growth	1
<i>Mouth</i>	
• whiten teeth	1
• soften lips	1
• redden lips	1
• redden gums	2
• against fissures of the lips	1
• attenuate the thickness of the lips	2
• against bad breath, whether caused by the stomach or putrid gums	3

Source: Compiled from Green, *The Trotula*.

According to Green, who has conducted the most comprehensive analysis of the *Trotula*, *De ornatu mulierum* was “certainly” written by a man, while *Liber de sinthomatibus mulierum* was “probably” written by one (*The Trotula* 48). Female authorship is possible in the case of the *De curis mulierum*, given its connection to contemporary women practitioners in Salerno, and specifically to one or more women named Trocta (or Trotta, Trota) (49). Since *De curis* is the only treatise ascribed to an author, it is possible that the compiler of the “standardized ensemble” called it “Trotula,” creating from the presumed name of the author a title (55). The *Trotula*, however, “seems to have functioned as a prime tool by which male practitioners did, in fact, come to have significant control over the practice of gynecology and cosmetics” (Green, *The Trotula* 61).

Cosmetics in al-Andalus

Two centuries after the Muslim invasion of Spain, the Umayyad monarch ‘Abd al-Raḥmān III proclaimed himself caliph (912 CE) and set up a Western Caliphate independent of Baghdad which lasted about one century. The advances in a number of professional, scientific and intellectual fields that took place in Spain during this century are well known. Several influential medical authors stand out. Yaḥyā Ibn Ishad, the physician, wrote the first known drug compendium in al-Andalus. Hārūn Ibn al-Ashbuni wrote a surgical work that has not survived. Khālīd Ibn Yazīd and Ḥāmid Ibn Samadjūn wrote works on botanical drugs. Sulaymān Ibn Djuldjul, among many other works, wrote a commentary on Dioscorides’ *Materia Medica* (Hamarneh and Sonnerdecker 6-10). The physician al-Zahrāwī wrote the encyclopedic medical work *al-Taṣrīf*, which brought him renown during his time in both the Arabic world as in the West. Al-Zahrāwī (916-

1010/1013) was probably born in al-Zahra, the Umayyad royal court a few miles from Cordoba (as suggested by his nickname “al-Zahrāwī”) and his family must have been connected with the caliph or the court, although there is no evidence that he ever had a royal appointment. In the Latin West his name was rendered either as “Alsaharavius” (and other similar spellings) or as “Abulcasis” (and similar variants), the latter derived from his full name Abu’l-Kāsim Khalaf Ibn ‘Abbas (Hamarnah and Sonnedecker 13-19).

In the second half of the twelfth century Gerard of Cremona translated into Latin the thirtieth treatise of *al-Taṣrīf*, a thirty-treatise medical compendium, introducing it into Latin Europe. Concerned with surgical practice, the treatise contains detailed discussions and descriptions of surgical operations and instruments, and it exercised a major influence on European medicine, including the medical school of Salerno (through Roger of Parma), and was printed as late as 1778 (Hamarnah and Sonnedecker 23-24). Another influential treatise of *al-Taṣrīf*, the twenty-eighth (which dealt with simple and compound drugs) was translated into Latin and Provençal, and became known as *Liber Servitoris* (28). The first and second treatises, which review elements, humors, anatomy and classification of diseases and their treatments, were also translated into Latin; other parts of *al-Taṣrīf* were translated into other vernacular languages, such as French, Spanish, and Hebrew, but the work has not been translated in its entirety into Latin or any other language (29-30).

Hamarnah provides the first summary in English of the nineteenth treatise, which is concerned with perfumes and cosmetics (309). This treatise (twenty-six folios, representing only about 3% of the whole work) is divided into two parts, each of whose ten chapters overlap greatly in content. The first part deals with the preparation of

perfumes, spices, incense, aromatic waters, and anointing oils; the second is concerned with techniques and products for the care and beautification of the body (309). Table 5 summarizes the content of each chapter in the first part.

Table 5

Contents by Chapter of the First Part of al-Zahrāwī's Nineteenth Treatise

Ch.	Content
1	Preparation of the elements essential for the manufacture of perfumes and spices, including ambergris, musk, white, yellow, and red sandalwood, cinnamon, clove, aloes, nutmeg, cardamom, caraway, cubeb, camphor, black mustard, prickly ash bark, storax, calamus, costus, gum olibanum frankincense, saffron, myrtle, red rose, thyme, jasmine, oil of cade, litharge, beeswax, mastic, and elder flowers.
2	Classification of the above-mentioned medicated perfumes according to their beautifying properties and differentiation between good and inferior types.
3	Manufacture of “duhn” from the ben tree and of other medicated lotions. “Duhn” (plural “adhan”) refers to the oily essence extracted from a number of substances (from wheat to eggs), cooked with fruit and other aromatic spices to create a liquid important for medicinal as well as cosmetic use (al-Zahrāwī dedicates a whole treatise to “adhan”).
4	Manufacture of aromatic waters from nutmeg, saffron, rose, clove and apple to which are then added musk and ambergris. Al-Zahrāwī adds that many of these recipes are part of the “secret art” of making perfumes and cosmetics.
5	Manufacture of “ghawali” (an expensive and fragrant preparation of spices and perfumes, recommend for ailments of the heart and brain) and of the “lafayif” (perfumed sticks, rolled and pressed in a mold). The latter, says Hamarneh, could be the earliest antecedents of today’s lipsticks and solid deodorants.
6	Manufacture of incense-based drugs that help relieve cold symptoms and coughing, but are also used to freshen the air in stuffy rooms.
7	Manufacture of ambergris-based preparations and medicated powder-sprays with properties similar to “ghawali.”
8	Manufacture of medicated spray liquids, hand and body lotions to soften, “purify” and perfume the skin. Also mouth washes.
9	Preparations of compresses and poultices for the stomach, which can also be inhaled (camphor-based). These can also be used to fumigate, or saturate clothes and bed sheets so that their therapeutic effect would be preserved.
10	Descriptions of elaborate processes necessary, for example, for the preparation of a bleached and perfumed “adhan,” or for making medicated rosaries, necklaces, and beads.

Source: Compiled from Hamarneh 310-316.

Nine of the ten chapters of the second part are directly connected with physical appearance and cosmetics; the last chapter is concerned with gynecology. Generally, the recipes in each chapter overlap in purpose with those of other chapters. Table 6 presents the purpose of the recipes according to the classification used above, as well as the chapters in which they are contained (Hamarneh does not provide the number of recipes).

Table 6

Purpose of Recipes in the Second Part of al-Zahrāwī's Nineteenth Treatise

Stated purpose of recipe	Chapter #
<i>Skin</i>	
• depilate	2, 8
• whiten	4
• remove freckles and other blemishes (including small-pox scars)	4
• soften (face, hands, and body)	4, 7
• redden the face	4
• protect from sunburn	4
• aromatic deodorants (under arms, elbows, and behind the ears)	8
• maintain firm breasts (techniques)	9
<i>Hair</i>	
• black dyes (also for turning blond hair into black)	1
• henna-based dye	1
• thicken (for stronger hair)	1
• improve hair growth (also for eyebrows, eyelashes, and men's beards)	2, 3
• prevent hair loss	2
• curl smooth hair	2
• straighten curly hair	2
<i>Mouth</i>	
• whiten teeth	5
• strengthen gums	5
• redden lips	5
• freshen breath (including neutralizing the odors of garlic and onion)	5
• improve the voice (also for hoarseness, sore throat, etc.)	6
<i>Eyes</i>	
• turn "blue eyes black"	3

Source: Compiled from Hamarneh 318-325.

Al-Zahrāwī presents many of these recipes as well tested and received from earlier physicians. For example, regarding hair-dyes, he mentions Ibn Māsawayh and Ibn Ishāk (from the ninth century), and al-Rāzī (“Rhazes” in Latin), Ibn al-Djabali, and Ibn al-Djazzār (all from the tenth century). He also warns against other hair-dyes that can be harmful to health. Regarding whitening creams (Chapter Four) al-Zahrāwī cites a number of classical authorities, including Dioscorides, Galen, Paulus, and Aegineta. He is careful to address the cost of the recipes, giving both expensive and cheap alternatives for many of them (Hamarnah 320). Most of the cosmetic recipes in the treatise are intended for women, yet al-Zahrāwī also included some for men, such as those that enhance the growth of the beard or of the eyebrows.

Latin texts from Catalonia

Two Latin texts on cosmetics, *De ornatu mulierum* and *De decorationibus*, are attributed to the Catalan physician Arnau de Vilanova (Valencia 1238? - Genoa 1311). Vilanova studied at the School of Medicine in Montpellier, and later returned to the city and wrote many of his medical works based on extensive research on Arabic and Hebrew documents. He achieved fame as the physician of several kings and popes, and was close to the Franciscan Order; he also wrote some mystical tracts.

De ornatu mulierum is preserved in four fifteenth-century Latin manuscripts, either together with other medical works or with other works by Arnau de Vilanova. A Vatican Library manuscript (Pal. Lat. MS 1331) includes the *Liber Servitoris* written by al-Zahrāwī, author of the Arabic treatise on cosmetics discussed above. This version of *De ornatu mulierum* (ff. 126r-130r) was used as a base for the transcription by Cabré i Pairet (“La cura del cos”183). It lacks numbered chapters/sections. The text begins with

instructions for the preparation of a steambath “quando domina corpus suum vult purgare ab omni sorditie” (“when a woman wants to cleanse her body of all impurities”), that is followed by recipes for depilation, hair care, skin whitening, hair care and mouth care. The last section of the text addresses gynecology and obstetrics, with recipes for regulating the menstrual flow and for problems of conception, abortion and lactation. Two are “folk methods” for determining the sex of the fetus inside the womb. A number of recipes, however, are related to medical as much as aesthetic problems. These include buccal ailments (gum disease and decaying teeth), eye problems (running eyes and redness), or hair care (from dandruff to tineas).

Following the classification used above, Table 7 reports the purpose of cosmetic recipes and their frequency in the *De Ornatu mulierum* by Vilanova. Most of the recipes are concerned with depilatories and whiteners. The importance of the section on depilation is stressed in the introduction: “depilatio et clarificatio dominabus multum sunt < ... > vel necessaria et secundum rationem convenit eas tenere faciem claram, fulgentem et pulchram.”⁶ This text also offers a broad array of whiteners based on different ingredients: the “cerusa plumbi” (lead-based); the “cerusa cornu cervi” (from buck’s horn), suitable for both poor and rich women; preparatory procedures for the “cerusa draguntina” (from dragon-wort / bistort) that can be also followed for making “cerusa” with other roots, like “sparagis, brionia, lilio et ceteris;” the “cerusa frumenti” is good for “maintaining youth and recover a youthful face;” from wheat is also extracted the “cerusa tritici;” the “cerusa marmoris” is from ground marble; there is also a “cerusa de radicibus” (from various roots), and a “cerusa de genciana” (from the gentian herb).

⁶ Depilation and cleansing are greatly valued by women ... whether by necessity or because they deem convenient to have clear, bright, and beautiful faces.

Table 7

Purpose and Frequency of Cosmetic Recipes in Vilanova's *De ornatu mulierum*

Stated purpose of recipe	Frequency
<i>Skin</i>	
• steam-bath to soften skin	1
• depilate and remove blemishes	20
• whiten	22
• redden the face (“si aliqua domina fuerit discolorata”)	5
• give the face a saffron color (“croceus”)	1
• remove redness, spots and freckles	3
<i>Hair</i>	
• blond dye	2
• white dye (“albo”)	1
• black dye, also for eyebrows (“cere et non est melior isto”)	7
• increase length	2
• increase thickness	2
<i>Mouth</i>	
• whiten teeth	3
• heal and beautify gums	4
• redden lips	1
• heal fissured lips	2
<i>Eyes</i>	
• to make them black	1
• to make them variegated, of different hues (“glauci vel pallidi”)	1
<i>Perfume</i>	2
• perfumed paper to wear hanging from the neck	2

Source: Compiled from Cabrè i Pairet, “La cura del cos” 186-226.

Numerous whiteners are indicated for the face, breasts, neck and hands, or indeed for any other part of the body a woman wants to whiten (75). The close of the section on whiteners offers a final explanation on how to apply the above recipes, and a lead-based ointment for soothing the skin after the removal of various cosmetic preparations (also useful for dry skin of the face and hands, as well as lips). The author also warns against the use of some cosmetic ingredients that are harmful to the teeth and mouth.

The second Latin text by Vilanova, *De decorationibus*, is preserved in three manuscripts that also contain fragments of other medical titles. British Library MS Royal 12.B.XII includes a copy of *Trota de ornatu mulierum* as well as the *De decorationibus* (ff. 199r-v) used by Cabrè i Pairet as the basis for her transcription (“La cura del cos” 228). It contains only thirteen recipes. Following an introductory paragraph on the importance of knowing the correct remedies starting from the causes of medical problems, it instructs the reader on the preparation of a steam-bath for the opening of the pores. The section on the care of the teeth and gums stresses the importance from a health perspective, as much as it is for beauty: “Dentium non minor debet esse decor quam iuvementum, et ideo non minor ornatus quam faciei”⁷ (Cabrè i Pairet, “La cura del cos” 234). Table 8 reports the recipes and their frequencies.

Table 8

Purpose and Frequency of Cosmetic Recipes in Vilanova’s *De decorationibus*

Stated purpose of recipe	Frequency
<i>Skin</i>	
• depilate	2
• cleanse and remove blemishes	3
• redden the face.	1
<i>Hair</i>	
• blond dye,	1
• black dye (for graying hair)	1
• stimulate growth, including in eyebrows and beard	1
<i>Mouth.</i>	
• whiten teeth	3
• strengthen the gums.	3

Source: Compiled from Cabrè i Pairet, “La cura del cos” 231-238.

⁷ The teeth’s beauty should not be cared for less than their health, and they should not be less beautiful than the face.

Catalan texts

There are three extant texts written in Catalan: *Tròtula* (Trotula), *Flos del tresor de beutat* (Flower of the Treasure of Beauty), and *Flos de veritat del tresor de beutat* (Flower of Truth of the Treasure of Beauty). The first, known as the “Catalan Trotula,” was compiled by Mestre Joan de Reimbamaco in the late fourteenth century. Despite its title, it is based largely on *De ornatu mulierum* by Arnau da Vilanova, with fragments from *De curis mulierum* and the addition of a “regimen of health” for conclusion (the author refers to his work as being a translation). It opens with a dedication to a queen, stating the authors's name and the book's title: “Assí comença lo libre qui parla gint e desliure de tot adop de la regine, per la qual en tot son temps viurà sana; lo qual à fet mestre Johan a la infanta molt agradant, al qual à mès nom Tròtula” (Cabrè i Pairet, “La cura del cos” 243). This is followed by thirty-two rhyming verses dedicated to the queen. The use of cosmetics in the Aragonese court of King Alfons V “El magnànim” (1396-1458) is well known, and the work was probably written for his wife María (Cabrè i Pairet, “La cura del cos” 110-112; Green, *Women’s Healthcare* xix). The Catalan *Tròtula* contains little of the medical information found in the Latin *Trotula* standardized ensemble, and cosmetic advice predominates. By titling his work *Tròtula* the author exploited the well-known association of the name with women’s medicine, while redefining women’s medicine principally as cosmetics, rather than gynecology and obstetrics (Green, “The Possibilities of Literacy” 35).

Cosmetic recipes occupy about 65% of the manuscript (some twenty-one folios).

Table 9 summarizes the content of the cosmetic recipes and their frequencies.

Table 9

Purpose and Frequency of Cosmetic Recipes in Joan de Reimbamaco's *Tròtula*

Stated purpose of recipe	Frequency
<i>Skin</i>	
• steam-bath	2
• depilate (“without tweezers”)	12
• soothe after depilation	1
• cleanse (“a tota dona se convé que tenga gint sa cara”)	11
• whiten and “clarify”(face, hands, neck, and breasts)	41
• remove spots and blemishes	7
• make golden	1
• redden (“si por aventura dona ha color trop blancha e descolorada”)	4
• make the breasts firmer	11
• remove stretch marks	3
<i>Hair</i>	
• black dye (“la qual fans los sarayns e los juyes riques”)	9
• blond dye	1
• white dye	1
• brown dye (“saur”)	3
• promote growth (also for eyebrows and beards)	3
• against dandruff	1
<i>Mouth</i>	
• whiten teeth	8
• redden gums	5
• strengthen gums	3
• heal fissures of the lips	2
• against bad breath	7
<i>Eyes</i>	
• make them black	1
• make them variegated (“vair e gars”)	1
<i>Perfumes</i>	
• eliminate body odor	9
• perfume genitalia	8

Source: Compiled from Cabré i Pairet, “La cura del cos” 243-333.

One small section (about four folios) offers twenty-eight types of treatments for various gynecological and obstetric problems according to the theory of humors. The last

five folios of the manuscript consist of a “regimen of health” with detailed advice on the daily routines of hygiene and beauty, what the lady should wear and eat (three laxative recipes are also included) according to her “complexion” and to the four seasons of the year, with two recipes of medicines “for the whole body.” At the close of this section the words “Deo gracias” seem to signal the end, but two more gynecological recipes follow (Cabrè i Pairet, “La cura del cos” 333-347). The text consists of thirty-three chapters with titles, but no numbers.

The second Catalan text, *Flos del tresor de beutat*, is probably the work of Manuel Dieç de Calatayud, majordomo of King Alfons V of Aragon, and dates from the first half of the fifteenth century (Cabrè i Pairet, “La cura del cos” 349).⁸ The main text of the *Flos* is divided into ninety-three numbered chapters, each bearing a title that specifies the purpose of each recipe (some chapters contain more than one recipe). The recipes include a list of ingredients (mostly of vegetable origin) with the instructions for preparing baths, creams, ointments, etc., and occasionally a comment that emphasizes or elaborates on the claim made in its title. Most chapters/recipes are about ten or twelve lines in length.

In the introduction, the author relates that he compiled his work by selecting the best recipes from an otherwise unknown work, *El tresor de beutat*, hence the title *Flos* (“flower” or “anthology”). It strongly resembles the thirteenth-century Catalan work *Tròtula* by Master Joan de Reimbamaco, reviewed above. Forty of ninety-three chapters (about 45%) address various common ailments. Most are concerned with the mouth, including lips and tongue, and especially toothache and gum disease. It also offers

⁸ There is a Castilian translation of the work: *Flores del tesoro de la belleza. Tratado de muchas medicinas o curiosidades de las mujeres*. Ms. 68, Barcelona University Library. Ed. Teresa María Vinyoles. Palma de Mallorca: Lunas - José J. de Olañeta, 1993.

treatments for the eyes (redness, running eyes, cataracts, etc.), the ears (including deafness), the nose (cold, blisters, etc.), and the legs. The longest chapter contains fourteen remedies for headaches that afflict, as its title specifies, men as much women (“axí d’òmens com de dones”). All these chapters on medical recipes that apply to both women and men, in fact, begin with the gender-free word “a persona qui à ...” (“for the person who”) followed by the ailment. Another category of medical recipes offers gynecological and obstetrical remedies, such as for regulating the menses, preventing abortion, providing aid for lactation, and hygiene and constriction of the vagina. The gynecological/obstetrical and cosmetic recipes usually begin directly with the instruction “si vols ... prin ...” or “si volets ... prenets ...” (“if you wish to ... take...”), or with the expression “a dona qui à ...” (“for the woman who has ...”).

The recipes concerned with cosmetics occupy fifty-three chapters, or 65% of the text. As is the case with the other treatises examined here, there is no clear theoretical separation of health advice from cosmetic advice. In this treatise too we find a predominance of recipes for depilation and whitening the skin. Whiteners, as the author explains in his introduction to the section, are not solely for the face, but for whichever body parts the woman wants to lighten in color: “Así comensen los escleridors obs de la cara, mans e pits e dels altres membres ques volrà om esclarir” (Cabrè i Pairet, “La cura del cos” 362). Comments illustrating the desired results often accompany the recipes, equating “beautiful” with “white” and “natural,” as in the recipe for a powder that “fa la cara bella e clara e semblant de color natural.” Table 10 reports the purpose of the cosmetic recipes with their frequencies.

Table 10

Purpose and Frequencies of Recipes in *Flos del tresor de beutat*

Stated purpose of recipe	Frequency
<i>Skin</i>	
• bath to soften the skin	1
• depilate	4
• soothe the skin after depilation	1
• whiten and clarify	20
• redden	1
• smooth and soften the hands	1
• remove stretch marks	1
• make the breasts firm and round	1
<i>Hair</i>	
• blond dye	1
• black dye (“aquest ussen moros molt”)	3
• prevent loss	1
• prevent growth	1
<i>Mouth</i>	
• whiten teeth	7
• redden gums	2
• eliminate bad breath	5
<i>Eyes</i>	
• eliminate redness	1
• make “kohl”	1
<i>Perfume</i>	
• “marvelous” perfumes for the whole body	2

Source: Compiled from Cabrè i Pairet, “La cura del cos” 353-394.

The third Catalan manuscript is the anonymous *Flos de veritat del tresor de beutat*. It is a much abridged version of *the Flos del tresor de beutat*, or perhaps a copy from the same source (Cabrè i Pairet, “La cura del cos” 351). The introductory paragraph is nearly identical to that of the *Flos del tresor de beutat* (henceforth called *Flos*), with two main exceptions: the author now adds to his own compilation of cosmetic recipes the term “veritat,” and addresses it to a noblewoman (rather than to a group of noblewomen).

This very short text contains only ten unnumbered chapters/recipes. The first five reiterate the first five chapters in the *Flos*, while the remaining five chapters correspond to Chapters Sixteen, Seventeen, Eighteen (with two variants), and Nineteen of the *Flos*. Among differences in spelling and vocabulary between this text and the *Flos* we find another example of the use of “beautiful” as a synonym for “white:” the last chapter of this text claims that the recipe makes the face “axí com nova de hun petit infant de fort bella color” (400), while the equivalent chapter of the *Flos* renders the same message as “axí nova com de un petit infant, e de fort blanca color” (362). Excluding three chapters dealing with feminine hygiene and gynecology, Table 11 summarizes the content of the cosmetic chapters.

Table 11

Purpose and Frequency of Cosmetic Recipes in *Flos de veritat del tresor de beutat*

Stated purpose of the recipe	Frequency
<i>Skin</i>	
• bath	1
• depilate	4
• cleanse	3
• whiten	1
<i>Mouth</i>	
• give pleasant scent	1

Source: Compiled from Cabré i Pairet, “La cura del cos” 395-400.

A Castilian text

The only known document in Castilian concerned with cosmetics is the anonymous work from the late-fifteenth (or perhaps early-sixteenth) century *Manual de mugeres en el qual se contienen muchas y diversas reçeutas muy buenas* (“Manual for

Women, in Which Are Contained Many and Different Very Good Recipes”). The copy consulted for the present work is from the Biblioteca Virtual Cervantes website.⁹ The work includes cosmetic, culinary, medical, and other recipes on household matters, and is closer to the tradition of household instructional texts for women, common in Latin and vernacular literatures at the time (see Anderson for an analysis of English texts). It is a practical manual that reflects the domestic tasks women performed: it mixes recipes for hand lotions with others for pastry, or with preparations to alleviate cough, or with instructions for making glue. The medical recipes make no explicit reference to any author or theoretical framework. The brief, simple recipes are introduced by a title that specifies the function of the product, followed by the list of ingredients and quantities, and the instructions on their preparation. Some recipes also include instructions on storage of the final product. Sometimes a final note emphasizes the efficacy of the recipe.

Of the 150 recipes, thirty-one are devoted to food, or about 20% of the total number of recipes. Some are for savory meat dishes (from “chorizo” to “olla morisca”), but the majority are for what may be called sweet desserts (from “bizcocho” to “turrones.”) Another twenty-seven recipes (18 % of the total) are for medical issues, mainly common ailments of men and women, such as running eyes, angina, sore throat, earache, toothache, asthma, cough, tineas of the hair, and itching. Only five of these medical recipes address specific female issues: one remedy for women who have difficulty giving birth, one to stimulate lactation, and three for post-partum care. Other

⁹ There is also a print edition of the work: *Manual de mugeres en el qual se contienen muchas y diversas reçeutas muy buenas*. Ed. Alicia Martínez Crespo. Salamanca: Universidad de Salamanca, 1995.

non-cosmetic recipes include making a glue from “albayalde” (make-up) suitable for glass, one for dyeing cloth golden-brown, and one to remove cloth-stains.

Cosmetics makes up over half of the document. Table 12 reports the content of the recipes and their frequencies. In this text too cleansing and whiteness are equated, as in a recipe that states that the product “es bueno para quitar toda señal del rostro, aclararle y ponerle blanco.” Unusual is the large number of recipes devoted to the preparation of perfumes, not only for the body but especially for clothes and for the home, such as

Table 12

Purpose and Frequencies of Cosmetic Recipes in the *Manual de mugeres*

Stated purpose of recipe	Frequency
<i>Skin</i>	
• depilate	3
• cleanse (water-, wine-, and mercury-based recipes)	21
• smooth and soften	7
• redden the face (“para sacar color al rostro”)	1
• prevent sunburn (“para el rostro cuando caminan”)	1
• clean, smooth, and soften hands	13
<i>Hair</i>	
• wash (lye-based recipes)	3
• blond dye	1
• stimulate growth	1
• soften and smooth	2
<i>Mouth</i>	
• whiten teeth	4
• strengthen and redden gums	5
<i>Eyes</i>	
• eye-shadow (“alcohol”)	1
<i>Perfume</i>	
• for the body, clothes, and the home	28

Source: Compiled from Biblioteca Virtual Cervantes <www.cervantesvirtual.com/servlet/SirveObras/45702845323467217876679>

“pebetes de olor” (incense-sticks), “violeta de Damasco,” “aguas muy olorosas,” “polvillos de Chipre,” and “pasticas de olor para perfumar.” Curiously, following a sequence of some twenty recipes devoted to food preparation, the text of the *Manual de mugeres* ends with a cosmetic recipe for a hand lotion. Similarly, *De curis* ends with a recipe for a hand lotion after two recipes for toothache, while the *De ornatu mulierum* ends with two cosmetic recipes (to whiten the face) after twenty-six gynecological and obstetrical recipes.

Conclusion

This review of the cosmetic recipes available to women in medieval Spain is only indirect evidence for the actual cosmetic practices of women. The treatises present two main limitations: (1) They are only nine texts that cover a rather long period, from the tenth to the fifteenth century, during which many significant cultural and economic changes took place; and (2) the number and variety of recipes devoted to a cosmetic practice (or lack thereof) is not a direct indication of its relative importance, since we do not know who and how often practiced it. Despite these limitations, a comparison of the treatises shows many striking similarities in the objective of their recipes, that is in their conception of how to enhance feminine physical beauty. Furthermore, the fact that each treatise devotes more recipes to some practices over others is an indirect indication of a preference. The texts that contain multiple recipes on, for example, dyeing the hair blond or black, provide in each recipe alternative ingredients and techniques of preparation to suit local availability and price, making the practice more accessible to a larger number of women. In this sense, a document that contains ten different recipes for bold dyes and

only one for a black dye would indicate that blond hair was much more popular across regions and social status than black hair.

In the first place, the questions of the date, language and provenance of the texts need to be considered (Table 13). The oldest document, the nineteenth treatise of *al-Taṣrīf*, dates from the end of the tenth century, and was written in Arabic in al-Andalus. Next are two Latin texts of the Trotula “standardized ensemble” (*De curis* and *De ornatu mulierum*) as they circulated throughout Europe from the mid-thirteenth century onwards, though they are recompilations of texts originally written in mid-twelfth century. Two are Latin texts from Catalonia (*De ornatu mulierum* and *De decorationibus*) written at the end of the thirteenth century. Another three texts are from Catalonia, but written in Catalan, one from the late fourteenth century (*Tròtula*) and two from the early fifteenth century (*Flos del tresor de beutat* and *Flos de veritat del tresor de beutat*). Finally, one Castilian text dates from the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century, *Manual de mugeres*.

Table 13

Date, Provenance and Language of the Treatises on Cosmetics

	al-Taṣrīf (19 th Tr.)	De curis (standard)	De ornatu (standard)	De ornatu (Vilanova)	De decor. (Vilanova)	“Tròtula” (Reimba.)	Flos del tresor	Flos de veritat	Manual de muger.
Century	10 th (late)	13 th (mid.)	13 th (mid.)	13 th (late)	13 th (late)	14 th (late)	15 th (early)	15 th (early)	15 th /16 th
Provenance	al-And.	Europe	Europe	Catal.	Catal.	Catal.	Catal.	Catal.	Castile
Language	Arabic	Latin	Latin	Latin	Latin	Catal.	Catal.	Catal.	Castil.

The texts span five centuries and were composed in the main written languages of medieval Spain. On the other hand, all the compilations bear a strong relation to each other and to other Arabic and Latin manuscripts. As discussed above, a number of recipes for skin and hair care in the (mostly cosmetic) *De ornatu mulierum* also appeared in an earlier version of the (mostly medical) *De curis mulierum*. *De ornatu mulierum* itself served as the main source for a work in Latin by the same title attributed to Arnau de Vilanova, as well as the main source for the work in Catalan by Johan de Reimbamaco (significantly titled *Tròtula*). The connection with Arabic beautification practices is made explicit in several recipes of *De ornatu mulierum* (standardized ensemble). One of its recipes for reddening the face is attributed to “Salernitan women” and derives from a work by Bernard of Provence (Green, *The Trotula* 54-55). This same relationship with the Salernitan school is also present in the work of Manuel Dieç de Calatayud (the *Flos del tresor de beutat* and its shorter version *Flos de veritat del tresor de beutat*), who was majordomo of Alfons V, King of Aragon and of Naples, the latter possession including the city of Salerno. The similarities among the different texts are due either to direct borrowings or to the same cosmetic goal shared by different recipes. It is therefore difficult to distinguish clearly between distinct cultural and linguistic areas or historical periods.

Table 14 shows that only the very short text of *De decorationibus* by Vilanova contains recipes wholly devoted to cosmetics. *De curis mulierum* (as implied by its title) is concerned with medical issues, especially gynecology and obstetrics, and yet includes a small number of cosmetic recipes. All of the other allegedly cosmetic texts include recipes for common medical problems as well as specific to feminine issues (though

Table 14

Frequencies and Percentages of All Recipes by Major Category

	al-Taṣrīf (19 th Tr.)	De curis (standard)	De ornatu (standard)	De ornatu (Vilanova)	De decor. (Vilanova)	“Tròtula” (Reimba.)	Flos del tresor	Flos de veritat	Manual de muger.	Totals *
Cosmetics	N/A	20 (19%)	60 (85%)	93 (60%)	13 (100%)	165 (73%)	52 (56%)	7 (70%)	89 (59%)	499 (60%)
Gynec. and obstetrics	N/A	54 (49%)	3 (4%)	16 (10%)		28 (12%)	10 (11%)	3 (30%)	5 (3%)	119 (14%)
Other medical	N/A	36 (32%)	8 (11%)	47 (30%)		33 (15%)	31 (33%)		22 (15%)	177 (21%)
Other**									34 (23%)	34 (4%)
All recipes	N/A	110	71	156	13	226	93	10	150	829 (100%)

* Because the number of recipes of *al-Taṣrīf* is unavailable, the totals do not include that work.

** Mostly culinary recipes.

some hygienic and gynecological advice is offered for increasing men’s, not women’s, sexual pleasure). Even the nineteenth treatise of *al-Taṣrīf*, “On perfumery and cosmetics,” is part of a medical summa that includes medical and gynecological recipes. Finally, *Manual de mugeres* includes many more culinary than medical recipes.

This discussion shows a close association existed in medieval society between feminine health and cosmetics, though it is expressed by male authors of gynecological and cosmetic texts (Green, “The Possibilities of Literacy” VII). Unlike the gynecological and obstetrical texts written for male readers, the cosmetic texts are generally addressed to a woman reader. Two of the Catalan texts, the *Flos del tresor* and the *Flos de veritat*,

use the terms “sacret” to refer to the genitalia, a sign of the shift begun in the thirteenth-century that led from a medical interest in the “diseases of women” to the disclosure of some kind of occult (for men) “secrets of women,” with the production of texts that brought together gynecological, generational, and cosmetic issues (Green, “The Possibilities of Literacy” VII). Bearing in mind that many medical recipes also have an aesthetic component (such as those for decaying teeth, scabies, or tineas), a comparison of cosmetic recipes of the nine texts shows the main beautifying goals. Table 15 reports the recipe frequencies for each text.

Skin care: Every treatise devotes most of its recipes to aspects of skin care, about 58% of the cosmetic recipes. The majority are for the face, but many are also recommended for the other normally exposed body parts, neck and hands (or indeed any other part that one may desire, as many recipes state). All but two of the texts (*De curis* and *Manual de mugeres*) begin with instructions for a steam-bath to soften and prepare the skin for depilation and cleansing. The recipes advise on how to remove hair from face and body, and prevent re-growth. Next comes cleansing the skin of all blemishes, spots, freckles, wrinkles, etc., and the application of various preparations to achieve a uniformly clear, soft and smooth skin (*Manual de mugeres* contains an unusually high number of recipes devoted only to hand care, perhaps given its more “practical” character). Lastly, recipes for whitening the skin, with a little rouge on the cheeks (only the two shortest texts, *Flos de veritat* and *De decorationibus* by Vilanova do not mention whiteners). *De ornatu* by Vilanova, on the other hand, offers a recipe to darken the face “si domina desiderat colorem nigrum vel subnigrum in facie” (“if a lady desires a dark or darkish color for the face”), as does the *Tròtula* by Reimbamaco: “Ay dones que s’asalten

Table 15

Frequencies and Percentages of Cosmetic Recipes in All Treatises

	al-Taṣrīf (19th Tr.)	De curis (standard)	De ornatu (standard)	De ornatu (Vilanova)	De decor. (Vilanova)	“Tròtula” (Reimba.)	Flos del tresor	Flos de veritat	Manual de muger.	Totals *
Clear and smooth skin	Yes	7 (35%)	6 (10%)	12 (13%)	4 (31%)	30 (18%)	6 (12%)	6 (86%)	29 (33%)	100 (20%)
Depilation (face / body)	Yes		7 (12%)	21 (23%)	2 (15%)	11 (7%)	5 (10%)	(6) **	4 (4%)	50 (10%)
Smooth and soft hands	Yes	2 (10%)					1 (2%)		11 (12%)	14 (3%)
Firm breasts	Yes					11 (7%)	1 (2%)			12 (2.5%)
Remove stretchmarks						3 (2%)	1 (2%)			4 (<1%)
White skin	Yes	2 (10%)	11 (18%)	22 (24%)		40 (24%)	16 (31%)			91 (18%)
Dark skin				1 (1%)		1 (<1%)				2 (<1%)
Red skin	Yes	1 (5%)	3 (5%)	4 (4%)	1 (8%)	2 (1%)	1 (2%)		1 (1%)	13 (2.5%)
Thick, long, smooth hair	Yes		7 (12%)	2 (2%)					6 (7%)	15 (3%)
Curly hair	Yes		1 (2%)							1 (<1%)
Prevent hair loss	Yes		2 (3%)				1 (2%)			3 (<1%)
Hair re-growth	Yes		1 (2%)	5 (5%)	1 (8%)	5 (3%)				12 (2.5%)
Blond hair	Yes		7 (12%)	7 (8%)	1 (8%)	5 (3%)	1 (2%)		1 (1%)	22 (4.5%)
Black hair, eyebrows	Yes		5 (8%)	7 (8%)	1 (8%)	8 (5%)	3 (6%)			24 (5%)
Red and soft lips	Yes	3 (15%)	5 (8%)	3 (3%)		2 (1%)				13 (2.5%)
White teeth, red gums	Yes	3 (15%)	2 (3%)	5 (5%)	3 (23%)	17 (10%)	8 (15%)		7 (8%)	45 (9%)
Fresh breath	Yes	1 (5%)	3 (5%)			8 (5%)	5 (10%)	1 (14%)	1 (1%)	19 (4%)
Color eyes	Yes			2 (2%)		5 (3%)	1 (2%)		1 (1%)	9 (2%)
Perfumes	Yes	1 (5%)		2 (2%)		17 (10%)	2 (4%)		28*** (31%)	50 (10%)
										499 (100%)

* *al-Taṣrīf*: number of recipes is unavailable and these totals do not include that work.

** *Flos de veritat*: the recipes for cleansing are also for depilation.

*** *Manual de mugeres*: the number includes recipes for clothes and home.

de color bruna o negra en lur cara o en altre loc” (“there are ladies who cover their face or other parts with brown or black”). *Tròtula* and *Flos del tresor* also offer advice on how to remove stretch-marks and how to make the breasts firmer (the latter also mentioned by *al-Taṣrīf*).

Hair care: The next largest group is devoted to hair care (about 15 percent of all recipes), with instructions for making the hair soft, smooth, thick, long, curly, preventing loss, promoting growth, and giving a pleasant scent (the mostly medical *De curis* and *Flos de veritat*--the shortest text--do not mention hair at all). Most of the recipes are for dyeing the hair blond or black, in about equal numbers (only the *Manual the mugeres* does not mention black hair). The same black dyes, however, are also recommended for wider use such as graying hair, eyebrows, eyelashes, and beards (the use for beards is mentioned in five texts).

Mouth: All nine texts contain recipes for the beautification of the mouth (another 15% of all recipes.) Most are for whitening the teeth and reddening the gums (unmentioned only by *Flos de veritat*), but there are also several specifically for eliminating (or masking) bad breath, and some for softening and reddening the lips.

Eyes: Eye make-up, mentioned in five of the nine texts, constitutes only about two percent of all recipes. Most are for coloring the eyes black. Two recipes advise on how to obtain eyes that are “glauci vel pallidi et varii” (*De ornatu* by Vilanova), or “vairs e gars” (*Tròtula*), that is, “bright.”

Perfumes: Recipes for perfumes constitute about 10% of all cosmetic recipes, and are present in six texts, especially in the *al-Taṣrīf*, in the *Tròtula* by Reimbamaco, and in

the *Manual de mugeres*, although many perfumes in the latter text are also meant for use in clothes and the home.

How do these preferences compare with the preferences expressed in literary works and discussed in the previous chapter. It must be noted that all the cosmetic recipes are addressed to women, save an indirect reference to masculine beauty in black-dye recipes that are also recommended for beards. Literary works too rarely mention the beauty of men, in contrast to references to their youth or social status. As regards specific aesthetic traits we find the following similarities between the literary portrait of the beautiful woman and the goals of the cosmetic recipes:

1. Long, smooth, soft and scented hair
2. White, smooth, soft and hairless skin, for the face, neck and hands
3. Rosy cheeks
4. Bright eyes
5. Black and thin eyebrows
6. Black eyelashes
7. Red and soft lips
8. Red gums
9. White teeth
10. Pleasant breath
11. Firm breasts
12. Perfumed body

On the other hand, certain traits of the rhetorical portrait are not found in the cosmetic recipes:

1. Preference for blond versus black hair
2. Size or shape of the body or any of his parts (nose, fingers, waist, etc.)

Differences between the preferences of the literary portraits and those of the cosmetic recipes can be reduced to the different nature of the two enterprises: the literary portrait offers an idealized image of beauty that cannot find a perfect correspondence in any historical woman; the idealized cosmetic image may be present as a final goal, but the recipes only offer superficial (“cosmetic”) changes that women can prepare and use, and cannot include modifying parts of the body, such as making the nose smaller or change the color of the eyes (as in modern cosmetic surgery or optometry). Furthermore, the texts that have no eye make-up recipes or have few hair care recipes are the texts with the lowest total number of recipes, suggesting that the cosmetic recipes were omitted because they were not considered as fundamental as the care of the skin and of the mouth. It may, however, be significant that there should be as much emphasis on blond hair as on black hair, perhaps indicating the added value of possessing a relatively rare trait among medieval Spanish women.

CHAPTER 5 - BEAUTY AND EVOLUTION

As we have seen in the previous chapters, there is great similarity between the cosmetic (historical, behavioral) ideal of feminine beauty in the Middle Ages and the literary ideal. One way to account for such similarity is to adopt the perspective that both cosmetics and literature reflect behaviors and preferences which are rooted in psychological mechanisms that have emerged during the course of human evolution. The next part of this chapter discusses evolutionary psychology, its influence on literary criticism, and the findings of evolutionary research on beauty in connection with the literary and cosmetic ideals.

Evolutionary psychology

Evolutionary psychology essentially combines evolutionary biology and cognitive psychology, applying evolutionary concepts to the understanding of the mind. Since the publication of *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* (1859), and--specifically with regard to human evolution and behavior--*The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (1871), Darwinian ideas on human evolution by (mainly) natural selection have a troubled history within and without academia. Spencer and other “social Darwinists” at the end of the nineteenth century appropriated the theory of natural selection in order to justify individual competition and social inequality in human society (Richards 244). In addition, the theory became associated with the eugenics movement and fascist ideology in the early decades of the twentieth century, supporting ethnocentric and racist views of one social group’s superiority over others, such as the work done by Konrad Lorenz in Nazi Germany (Richards 533). From the 1920s until the 1960s, therefore, anthropology, sociology, and psychology shunned evolutionary approaches

because of their apparent biological determinism, and instead saw human behavior as largely culturally acquired or learned, according to the principles of “behaviorism” (Richards 536). During the same period, however, advances in genetics led to a reappraisal of the role of natural selection in evolution, culminating in a “modern synthesis” of evolution and genetics (Scher and Rauscher 3). From the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s, the research of W. D. Hamilton, George Williams, and Robert Trivers brought new attention to the principles of natural selection as they applied to genes rather than individuals, and especially to behavior (Richards 537-540). In 1975, Edward Wilson published *Sociobiology: the New Synthesis*, in which he proposed the systematic study of the biological bases of all behavior, supporting his arguments with extensive evidence from the animal world. Wilson also concluded that all human behavior, including our cultural institutions, ethics, and aesthetics, carried an evolutionary legacy (542). In the following years Richard Dawkins (*The Selfish Gene*, 1976) and Richard Alexander (*Darwinism and Human Affairs*, 1979) also contributed to the development of this field, known as “sociobiology” (as opposed to “behavioral ecology,” concerned with the study of non-human animals) (Scher and Rauscher 6). These authors’ views were strongly criticized by other evolutionary theorists for being untested “just-so” stories (Jay Gould) or excessively reductionist (Richard Lewontin) (Richards 545-546). They have also been accused of providing politically conservative thinkers with a biological justification for maintaining human inequality (Richards 608)).

By the 1960s, however, a new “paradigm” had emerged in psychology, a “cognitive revolution.” Psychologists began thinking of the mind in terms of an information-processing model (in association with developments in computer science)

rather than as stimulus-response models (according to behaviorist theory). The mind was not seen as a general-purpose processing center, but consisting of separate domains (“modules”) specific to different types of information or behavior. A classic example-- often cited as heralding this new conception of the mind in the 1960s--is Chomsky’s concept of language acquisition, based on the innate rules of universal grammar (Scher and Rauscher 4-5).

Donald Symons’s *Evolution and Human Sexuality* (1979) was the first systematic combination of evolutionary theory (in the form of sociobiology) and cognitive psychology (as opposed to behavioral psychology) (Scher and Rauscher 7). Research in the 1980s and 1990s by Daly and Wilson, Tooby and Cosmides, Pinker, and Buss, to mention but a few influential scholars who focused on human psychology, led to the emergence of the field of “evolutionary psychology” (Scher and Rauscher 8). The field has experienced a tremendous growth since 1980, at least judging by the steep and steady increase in the number of journal articles published and classified under “theory of evolution” in the PsychInfo Database (Scher and Rauscher 2). Five basic assumptions characterize the main approach in this field: (1) “cognitivism,” an information-processing model of psychological mechanisms; (2) “adaptationism,” that is to say, the view that the human mind evolved as an adaptation to our ancestral environment during the course of over a million years, in the “environment of evolutionary adaptiveness” (EEA); (3) “modularity,” or the assumption that the mind is a system of functionally specialized domains, or modules; (4) “inclusive fitness,” the view that selection operates at the level of genes, and (5) “species-typicality,” or the universal nature of psychological adaptations that underlies individual, cultural and gender differences (Scher and Rauscher

9-10). This approach is also called “narrow evolutionary psychology,” in contrast with broader and even more recent approaches also based on evolutionary theory and psychology but with a different set of assumptions and methods, and as yet less developed (for a discussion see Scher and Rauscher’s edited volume *Evolutionary Psychology. Alternative Approaches*). There are also differences among scholars who, though sharing a broad evolutionary / natural selection / Darwinian approach, disagree on what constitutes an “adaptation” and on whether all proximate causes of behavior should be reduced to the principle of “inclusive fitness” (Symons *On the Use* 149-150; Storey xix; Carroll, *Literary Darwinism* 193-194).

Evolution and literary criticism

Historically, various approaches to literary criticism have borrowed the conceptual tools of other humanities and social sciences disciplines to bring a new perspective to literary texts. For example, Russian Formalism in the 1920s and 1930s drew heavily on structural linguistics, Marxism and feminism in the 1960s and 1970s were based on political/economic and sociological perspectives, and postmodernism since the 1970s has been dominated by a Lacanian interpretation of Freudian psychology, the structural linguistics of Derrida, and the philosophical poststructuralism of Foucault (to mention just the major strands). The latest efforts have led to a variety of theoretical perspectives on literature which, despite their different emphases, share two broad poststructuralist assumptions: (1) the fundamental indeterminacy of meaning, which leads to the view that all knowledge, including scientific knowledge, is ultimately self-referential and offers no “truths” outside of its own conceptual framework, and (2) the equation of culture with language, as in Derrida’s well-known affirmation that “there is

nothing outside the text” (or outside “discourse”), so that the structure of power relations within each type of discourse is responsible for the “construction” of reality.

Evolutionary literary criticism, as an emergent field in literary studies, rejects these relativistic assumptions and approaches the study of literature (as an institution or practice, as genres, as themes, as well as individual works) by drawing on the empirical findings of evolutionary psychology. In addition, unlike other critical approaches that have seized ideas from other scientific disciplines to provide novel ways to analyze literature--but without accepting their scientific criteria--it seeks the integration of the study of literature (and culture in general) with that of a “physicalist” psychology (Constable 113).

Joseph Carroll has offered the most comprehensive view of the application of evolutionary theory to the study of literature in *Evolution and Literary Theory* (1995). His approach is based on four major concepts drawn from evolutionary psychology: (1) the primacy of the relationship between human beings and their environment; (2) the evolution of psychological structures through a process of natural selection; (3) the principle of “inclusive fitness” (for reproductive success) as the ultimate cause of human behavior, and (4) representation as a form of “cognitive mapping” of the environment. The central assumption, therefore, is that literary works “reflect and articulate the vital motives and interests of human beings as living organisms” (Carroll 3). Literature, as an expression of the subjective and aesthetic qualities of human experience, is a form of representation, of cognitive mapping, of categorizing. In contrast with the “social constructivist” view of most contemporary literary criticism, Carroll views language as a system of signs that corresponds to a reality that exists outside of language, and must

have evolved because of its adaptive value in describing the world in a sufficiently reliable way (105). Literary works, just like all other forms of representation, function as “mediums of knowledge,” and are distinguished from other mediums of knowledge that also use language by their subject matter (the subjective sense of human experience, unlike scientific works) and the faculties they engage (emotional, aesthetic and sensory properties, deriving from a poem’s rhythm, or a novel’s style) (105-106). In this sense, literature is not subsumed by other fields nor does it exclude other fields that may present literary qualities (109). In turn, evolutionary literary criticism occupies an intermediate position between two complementary concerns: that for scientific, objective knowledge, and that for literary, subjective experience. In other words, it seeks to gain objective knowledge about literature as well as convey its cultural value (112).

Carroll’s approach to literary criticism is thus concerned with literary “representations” of human experience (of people, objects, words, sounds, etc.) and with the “figurative structures” created by affective, conceptual and aesthetic relations in a literary work. He views representation as a continuum between the two opposite poles of realism and symbolism--partially correlating with Watt’s theory of realism and Frye’s theory of symbolism (129). People, places, objects, and actions are represented at the realist end of the continuum as they appear in common observation, while at the symbolic end they are represented as the basic elements of the author’s worldview (such as personified forces of nature, or as human passions such as love and jealousy-- “allegorical” representation is subsumed under symbolism) (130-131). This perspective reintroduces the importance of the author as subject and creator (in contrast with the “decentered” postmodernist subject): “What we interpret is not merely a text but also a

communicative act, and what we understand is a configuration of words that is always, necessarily, part of the larger total situation of the speaker” (158). The “elemental” dispositions of the figurative structures are viewed as species-typical, part of a “human nature,” and correlating--but not identical--with the concept of universals (that is, features common to all known cultures) (159). At the same time, there is much individual and group variation in these dispositions (in terms of sex, class, culture, etc.), which often emerges in a text as the tension between the author’s individual psyche and the larger normative characteristics of his/her culture and of the whole human race. Therefore, “species-typical” norms and “cultural” norms are considered as distinct categories (163).

Carroll’s model for interpreting figurative structures consists of a thematic table, schematically represented as concentric circles which include, in descending order of inclusiveness, the cosmos, life, the specifically human, society, the family, the heterosexual couple, and the individual (225-226). Carroll chooses the category of the heterosexual couple (or the “sexual dyad”) for special consideration, given its central role in virtually all literary configurations:

Literature is the chief cultural archive for the historical experience of gender differences. Literary figurations of gender vary widely; they are not always consonant with the findings of modern biology; and those findings are neither conclusive nor wholly consistent. But gender itself--“these forms, male and female”--has always arisen out of the biological nature of human beings. (268)

Carroll dismisses the supposed antithesis between “innate” versus “acquired” characteristics, and insists on the evolutionary position that gender differences arise from the interaction of innate characteristics and environmental influences (which include social influences) (271-272). He discusses the influence of the patriarchal social

paradigm on literary figurations of gender, and emphasizes the greater role played by individual personality differences in literary male and female characters (277-278).

Since the publication of his work in 1995 a growing numbers of scholars have applied concepts derived from evolutionary psychology to literary criticism, and the interdisciplinary journal *Human Nature* has published many of such studies.¹ Some authors have focused on the social functions of narrative and fiction. For example, storytelling itself may have emerged as an adaptation that offered a more effective means of acquiring and storing information, with both fictional and nonfictional representations serving as models of experience for the audience (Sugiyama, *Narrative* 238). Sugiyama has analyzed how the art gives the storyteller the opportunity to manipulate the perceptions, opinions and behavior of others to serve his/her own “fitness interests.” These interests vary according to the individual’s sex, health, social status, marital status, number of offspring, etc., and we can expect different individuals to have different versions of the same story according to these variables, which is in fact supported by the folklore record (*On the Origins* 403). According to Boyd, human beings show a remarkable capacity to understand others in terms of their beliefs, desires and intentions-- what is known as “folk-psychology” (or “Theory of Mind”). Narrative (including gossip), as he demonstrates with an analysis of Dr. Seuss’s *Horton Hears a Who*, is a way to keep track of others’ intentions and behaviors indirectly, to see whether others (including fictional characters) achieve their goals, and whether they deserve them. It also commands our interest because we desire full knowledge of a situation, because we want to know “the whole story” (Boyd 208). Zunshine has investigated the cognitive

¹ As of 1996 there were probably about fifty scholars who had an active interest in this approach (Carroll, Review of *Mimesis*).

mechanisms that lead us to construe the world in terms of “truths” and “nontruths” (“nonfiction” and “fiction”), and allowed for experimentation with literary forms that challenged readers’ expectations of “truth-values” during the English Enlightenment (216). The adaptive function of narratives is also stressed by Rabkin, who analyzes how Bible myths (in creation stories, or The Fall) and fairy tales (like Cinderella, or Pinocchio) are related to contemporary science fiction stories. Their narratives establish boundaries between what is admissible and what is not, categories that are both social and biological, with normative rules such as “Thou shalt not kill,” or stages of sexual maturity, or the maintenance of social order (Rabkin 166). Science fiction is grounded in Bible myths and fairy tales, and prompts us to consider new definitions of what it means to be human (Rabkin 178-180). The importance of group boundaries may also be seen in the large number of hero-ogre folk stories from different world cultures, in which a hero defeats a semi-human ogre. The hero’s action benefits the “ingroup,” reinforcing an innate positive bias in the perception of the self and the ingroup, and a negative bias in the perception of the outgroup (Jobling 262). Stiller et al. have investigated the representation of social networks in Shakespeare’s dramas and found that they are structured in a way that closely mirrors human interaction patterns of the past and present. For example, the plays contain thirty-forty characters, there is a small number of degrees of separation among characters--usually no more than two, and the number of characters interacting on stage is four or fewer (“cliques”); increases in the number of characters require increases in the number of cliques making for a less connected play (400). The authors hypothesize that these regularities reflect the size of human groups in the Pleistocene in which our cognitive capacities evolved (404). Robert Storey, in

Mimesis and the Human Animal, focuses on the evolutionary mechanisms of emotions and how they affected the development of Western tragedy and comedy.

More directly related to topic of feminine beauty is the research of authors who have focused on various aspects of reproductive behavior and sex differences. In particular, Thiessen and Umezawa (1998) outline twelve major predictions and principles based on evolutionary psychology that can be useful for the analysis of literary works: (1) males seek youth and beauty from females, while females seek resources from males; (2) polygyny predominates in societies where resources are unevenly distributed; (3) males tend to display their wealth and power; (4) altruistic acts and resources are distributed along kinship lines; (5) alliances are made to sustain the reproductive efforts of the participants; (6) females and their relatives gain by attaching themselves to wealthy males; (7) males are more concerned than females with their paternity; (8) to protect paternity, males “guard” their mates; (9) males rely on morphological and behavioral traits of the offspring to determine paternity; (10) males are greater risk-takers and more competitive than females; (11) males who lose status and resources also lose reproductive opportunities; (12) all primary emotions that are fundamental to our survival and reproduction are “universal” (297-298). Thiessen and Umezawa’s analysis of the eleventh-century Japanese epic *The Tale of Genji* shows a number of behaviors associated with processes of sexual selection, for example: the paramount importance of youthful and beautiful women as mates for Genji, the emperor’s son, and for the other male protagonists of the tale (300-301); the intense competition among males for the approval of women: successful males reproduce copiously with several women, while unsuccessful ones do not reproduce at all--though all women reproduce (302); the

constant male “guarding” of their partners to prevent infidelity, which occurs nonetheless (306); and the maintenance and distribution of males’ wealth and power along kinship line (308).

Robin Fox has examined several epic works of western culture--such as the Old Testament, the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, the Arthurian cycle, the *Volsunga Saga* and *El Cid*--from the perspective of sexual competition. All these works manifest a pattern of competition between older (or more powerful) males and younger (or subordinate) males over access/control of young fertile women (135). Fox also maintains that, historically, a gradual decline of the influence of the “tragic triangle” theme takes place in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and a corresponding increase in the “happy ending” theme, probably reflecting a loss of influence by older males in mate choice, and the growing independence of younger males and women (Fox 142-143).

A sexual selection perspective also informs a study of four versions of the Arthurian legend of Guinevere and Lancelot, by Chrétien de Troyes, Thomas Malory, William Morris and Lord Tennyson (Nesse). Despite the differences in style, moral stance, and historical periods (they were written over a time span of 600 years) the works nonetheless reflect the same male concerns preoccupations that prioritize male reproductive strategies and devalue female reproductive strategies (160). Mate selection is also Cyhntia Whissell’s focus on twenty-five popular women’s fiction novels (most from Harlequin series) and six well-known romantic stories (such as the Old Testament’s Ruth, or *Jane Eyre*). The male protagonists choose their mates on the basis of their fertility and sexual exclusivity, while the female protagonists choose their mates on the basis of economic resources and parenting potential (444). In a study of heroes in British

Romantic literature of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, the women participants rated most attractive for long-term relationship those heroes who exhibited willingness to contribute parental investment (“proper” heroes). For short-term relationships they chose handsome, risk-taking heroes (“dark” heroes) (Kruger, Fisher, and Jobling 2003).

Another avenue of research has focused on the anthropological concept of human universals, implicit in the search for species-typical behaviors, and contrasted with a “particularist” view (each perception is unique, the only regularity is change) and historicism (experience is socially constructed) (Carroll, *Literary Darwinism* 117-118). George P. Murdock’s set of human universals is the most-often mentioned database in the anthropological literature. It includes seventy-three items arranged alphabetically from “age-grading” to “weather control.” Among the arts, for example, we find “dancing,” “decorative art,” “folklore,” and “music.” The universals more directly connected with reproductive behavior are: “bodily adornment,” “courtship,” “family,” “hair-styles,” “incest taboos,” “kin groups,” “marriage,” “population policy,” “postnatal care,” “pregnancy usages,” “puberty customs,” and “sexual restrictions” (qtd. in Carroll, *Evolution* 158). The anthropological concept of universals is complex in both definition and research methodology, especially the concept of “absolute universals.” Donald Brown distinguishes several narrowly qualified universal variants, such as “conditional universals” (given condition A then behavior B), “statistical universal” (occurring more often than chance dictates), “near universals” (occurring in almost all societies), “universal pools” (a fixed set of possibilities with different local variations), and even “negative universals” (those behaviors that never, or almost never, occur) (Brown 160-

161). Brown warns that evolutionary psychology's search for innate universals must be wary of deducing an adaptive cause from an organ's present function (which could be a byproduct of selection), especially in the case of complex mental mechanisms. There is also much disagreement on what features are universals, whether universals are few and general or many and specific, whether and how they can be discovered, etc. (Brown 165-166).

In the field of literary criticism, few contemporary scholars would accept universalist claims for literature except at a high level of generality, such as "all peoples have literature" (Gottschall, *Patterns* 366). Gottschall's study of 658 oral folk tales from forty-eight different cultures, however, shows that the most pervasive theme of these tales is the attraction and securing of mates. Male characters tend to value physical attraction in females, and female characters tend to value social status and/or wealth in males (while both emphasize kindness). Male protagonists are more likely to be described as "physically heroic," "courageous," or "active" than female protagonists. Most resources and efforts are expended on behalf of mates or close genetic relatives at the expense of distant relatives. Despite some strong cultural variation on given features, Gottschall believes that these findings support the conclusion that these patterns are "statistical universals," and demonstrate the value of literary works as sources of data in the search for universals (*Patterns* 376-377). Sugiyama contrasts the universality of folktales' themes with the particularity of their variants, the latter depending on the conditions of local environment: a predator is represented as a tiger in China, and as a wolf in Europe, according to each predator's most common habitat ("Cultural Variation" 387). She also suggests that the universality of themes is implicit in Stith Thompson's classification of

folktales (used successfully by many researchers) since his categories reflect typical adaptive problems and/or domains of information, from “Animals” and “Taboos” to “Traits of Character” (391-392). The Freudian interpretation of the Oedipus myth as a universal is challenged by Sugiyama, who proposes instead an analysis of the myth based on the evolved psychological mechanisms for incest-avoidance, and notes that oedipal myths are uncommon in the folklore record (“New Science” 34).

Another group of scholars takes an approach to literary criticism more closely associated with cognitive psychology than evolutionary psychology, and who consider “evolutionary literary theory or ‘biopoetics’ as an outlier that helps define the boundaries of cognitive literary criticism proper” (Richardson 3). The main difference between cognitive and evolutionary literary criticism is the former’s non-reductionist position, with less emphasis on adaptation and the use of empirical methods, while placing greater emphasis on sociocultural contexts (Richardson 24). Spolsky, for example, draws an analogy between Darwin’s “fuzzy” category of species (that is, the category must allow for the possibility of adaptive change) and the instability of meaning in language postulated by poststructuralism (59). In addition, she argues that this very flexibility in the categorization of reality, a “good enough” approach rather than any claim to possess a “true” picture of the world, has been responsible for our cultural development (Spolsky 60). Cognitive literary criticism itself includes perspectives such as “cognitive rhetoric and blending theory” (Mark Turner), “cognitive poetics” (Reuven Tsur, Patrick C. Hogan), “cognitive narratology” (Manfred Jahn), “cognitive aesthetics of reception” (Ellen Esrock and Elaine Scarry), and “cognitive materialism and historicism” (Ellen Spolsky, Mary Crane). Like most of the evolutionary scholars reviewed above, the main

area of expertise of these cognitive critics is English literature, with few exceptions such as Patrick Hogan's work on literary universals of exempla in the Arabic Aristotelian tradition (for a collection of studies in this field see Richardson and Spolsky).

Aesthetic considerations of literature, as well as of the human body, are also within the domain of "evolutionary aesthetics" or "bio-aesthetics." In 2004 this field was still in "the fledging stages ... more a vision than a productive project" (Volland and Grammer 4-5). It is a very broad field that includes contributions ranging from neuronal science's discoveries about the brain to the aesthetic functions of prehistoric tools. Its central concern is the understanding of human preferences, of distinguishing between those parts of our social and nonsocial environment that we like and those we do not like--as well as attributing positive moral qualities to what/whom we consider "beautiful" (Volland and Grammer 1-2). Randy Thornhill offers the following as the starting point for a Darwinian theory of aesthetics: "Beauty is a promise of ... high likelihood of survival and reproductive success in the environments of human evolutionary history. Ugliness is the promise of low survival and reproductive failure" (9-10). Aesthetic judgments, therefore, are manifestations of psychological adaptations to solve different evolutionary problems, such as the aesthetic valuation of landscape features (where beauty represented cues to a safe and rich habitat), to the aesthetic valuation of social scenarios (such as those provided by literature), to the aesthetics of the human form and its relationship to sexual attraction (Thornhill 26-30). A significant contribution to this "naturalistic aesthetics" is Ellen Dissanayake's work on the arts.

In an assessment of the impact of evolutionary psychology and cognitive science on literary studies, Jackson argues that the evolutionary approach taken by most of the

above authors (but especially Carroll and Storey) does not provide us with any new insights into literary interpretations, except grounding familiar themes in biology and cognitive science. Jackson believes that the approach has gone some way towards showing “how” literature operates in relation to cognition and evolution in an attempt to explain “what” it is, but it has been unable to contribute anything of real interest to the interpretation of specific texts, explaining the meanings of specific examples of literature (“Questioning” 336). Its search for universals limits its scope to identifying which universals are present in literature and to accounting for variation from the norm; in turn, the explanation of difference may be a scientific one (such as a predictable physical response to a certain pattern of sounds, or of concepts)--in which case it will not be of interest to most literary scholars, or based on environmental factors--and therefore having recourse to social and cultural causes (341). In the end, according to Jackson, at issue is the fundamental tension between what makes us the same and what makes us different, and that the one is constitutive of the other (344). In addition, Jackson believes that the fundamental epistemological and methodological differences between the scientific approach and the humanistic one make the acceptance of the psychological-evolutionary perspective among literary scholars unlikely (“Issues” 176-177).

In summary, the application of evolutionary psychology to literary criticism has barely begun. Its development is at the center of much polemical debate regarding the acceptance of scientific conceptual frameworks and methods by the humanities, and the related issue of “interdisciplinarity” (Easterlin and Riebling; Jackson; Nordlund). Its research has mainly focused on the adaptationist value of literature (and narrative) as a form of representation, and has been concerned with the comparative study of broad

cross-cultural themes (such as patterns of sexual selection). While all of the studies of mate preferences in literary characters have emphasized feminine beauty and youth as the main criteria of men's preferences, no study has examined the specific components of beauty that have emerged from research in evolutionary psychology. Nor has any study focused on Spanish literature, or on the medieval period. The next section summarizes the main findings of evolutionary psychology with regard to feminine beauty and compares them with the literary and cosmetic ideals.

The evolutionary psychology of beauty

“Como dize Aristóteles, cosa es verdadera, / el mundo por dos cosas trabaja: la primera, / por aver mantenençia; la otra cosa era / por aver juntamiento con fenbra plazentera”¹⁰ (Ruiz 71). This stanza from the *Libro de buen amor* succinctly summarizes, albeit from a masculine and “sub-lunar” perspective, the two categories of adaptive problems encountered by humans (and non-human animals) in the course of evolution: (1) those related to survival, including selecting and obtaining food, detecting and avoiding predators, and group living; and (2) those related to reproduction (through sexual selection), including mate selection, parenting and kinship. The understanding of the adaptive value of beauty, or physical attractiveness, in human beings may therefore be approached from the point of view of sexual selection and reproductive success during the course of human evolution.

In the first place, we need to distinguish long-term from short-term mating strategies. For the purpose of the present discussion on women's beauty suffice it to say that, in terms of short-term strategies, both men and women are ready to lower their

¹⁰ “As Aristotle says, and a true thing it is, the whole world exerts itself for two things: the first is to find sustenance, the other thing is to couple with a pleasant female” (Willis 28).

standards significantly to pursue them (Buss, *Evolutionary* 185-186). As for long-term strategies, Buss's *Evolutionary Psychology* summarizes current research on the subject. The main difference between males and females is due to the fact that female parental investment is initially much greater than males, in terms of gestating, bearing, lactating, nurturing, protecting, and feeding the offspring (107). According to Trivers's theory of parental investment, because females invest more in offspring they are more selective about mating than males, and evolution has favored those females who prefer men who are more likely to contribute resources to the raising of offspring (107). In the human case, adaptive problems faced by females included finding a mate who was able and willing to invest, able physically to protect her and her offspring, had good parental skills, was compatible, and healthy (107-108). Research since the 1980s has found evidence to support a number of hypothesized solutions to these adaptive problems, showing that women's evolved mate preferences for men include the following: possession of economic resources (also in terms of future potential) and high social status, both related to greater age in men; ambition or industriousness; dependability and stability; physical characteristics such as size, strength, height and overall health (the latter related to face and body symmetry); demonstrations of love and commitment (such as marriage); and willingness to invest in children (109). These preferences may vary according to several contexts: women's own youth and attractiveness (their personal mate value), the time of the menstrual cycle (when approaching ovulation there is stronger preference for male physical characteristics), geographic location (urban settings with higher cost of living require more resources), and sexual orientation (heterosexual, lesbian or bisexual) (130). Women's access to personal economic resources does not

appear to influence the direction of their preferences, as financially successful women place even greater value than those less financially successful on men's high income and social status (132).

On the other hand, from a masculine viewpoint, the adaptive problem in evolution was to select a healthy woman with high reproductive value at the peak of her fertility. Unlike men's characteristics, however, such qualities in women are not expressed in observable indicators. And while men share some of women's mate preferences (health, intelligence, kindness, and similar values), evolutionary psychology maintains that there are two major interrelated cues to women's reproductive status and health: age and beauty (Symons, *Beauty* 112 ; Buss, *Evolutionary* 161).

A woman's fertility (measured by the number of offspring actually produced), and her reproductive value (measured by the number of children she is likely to have in the future) decline with age, reaching essentially zero by age fifty. Cross-cultural research has shown that, from contemporary American society to the Yanomamö of the Amazon, men prefer younger women as wives, though there is some cultural variation--for example, the age gap is smaller in Scandinavian countries than in Nigeria and Zambia (Buss, *Evolutionary* 139). Furthermore, as men age, they prefer women who are increasingly younger than they are, while teenage males prefer women who are slightly older than they are (in their mid-twenties, at the peak of their fertility). Evolutionary theory suggests, therefore, that youth in women is associated with their fertility and reproductive value.

Regarding beauty, many of the physical features men consider attractive in women are linked to youth, health, fertility and reproductive value. A significant body of

research shows that features most associated with beauty are consistent across cultures (Buss, *Evolutionary* 144), and may also be observed in twelve-month-old infants (Rubenstein et al. 5), suggesting innate mechanisms. In the first place, there is a wide consensus on the preference for symmetrical features, in both men and women. Asymmetry appears to be the product of environmental factors such as accidents as well as showing the presence of parasites and disease which affected the development of the individual, and therefore also a cue to health status. It is also a cue for age, since exposure to environmental stressors increases with age, and so does asymmetry (Gangestad et al. 74; Symons, "Beauty" 101-102). Attractive faces (female and males) also appear to represent the "average" face of a given population--"average" meaning that its features are obtained by merging many individual faces with a computer morphing procedure that creates a composite (Rubenstein et al. 9). According to evolutionary theory, average physical characteristics are attractive because they are indicators of health and genetic fitness, given the role of natural selection in stabilizing the features of a population and selecting against extreme features (Rubenstein et al. 28). The preference for "average" features--not only in faces--may also be a by-product of a cognitive mechanism not related to mate choice but to a general human propensity for abstracting prototypes (Rhodes et al. 39). In any case, if beauty is in the "adaptations" of the beholder (Symons, "Beauty" 112), we would also expect to find sex-specific preferences, that is, preferences for traits that are typically "masculine" or "feminine."

The literary works and the cosmetic treatises examined in the previous chapters manifest a clear distinction between what constitutes masculine beauty and what constitutes feminine beauty. Female beauty is a major theme in medieval literature,

while men are almost always admired for their strength, courage, and social status. In addition, portraiture of female ugliness has much in common with masculine characteristics such as body size, short neck, hairiness, a darker skin color, and deeper tone of voice. Symmetrical features are not explicitly mentioned as such in descriptions of beauty, but may be inferred from the repeated use of phrases such as “sobrecejas ... yguales” (*Libro de Alixandre* 1875a-b), “nariz igual y dreyta” (*Razón* 63) or “narices afiladas” (Marqués de Santillana 15), and “dientes iguales” (Ruiz 434b). Average features, in terms of harmonious proportion, are continuously suggested by the literature (that also draws on the Aristotelian concept of a golden mean): “nin era muy gorda nin muy delgada; nin era luenga nin era corta” (*Vida* 228-229), “que non sea luenga nin otrosí enana” (Ruiz 431b), or “ben talhada” (*Cancioneiro* 1504). This also happens with specific body parts: “nariz mediana” and “manos pequeñas en mediana manera” (Rojas 231). Indeed ugliness is often associated with disproportionate size, as in giants or dwarfs. On the other hand, battle scars on men’s bodies are considered attractive as a sign of their courage (and survival ability), despite the asymmetry they may cause in appearance, as in Amadís de Gaula.

Virtually every literary work makes explicit or implicit mention of the woman’s youth, sometimes giving her age as in “dieciseis años no complía” (Ramírez 12), but more often through terms such as “donzela,” “niña,” or the various diminutives used in the *villancico* (“pastorcica,” “pajercillo,” etc.). It is significant that homosexual Andalusian poetry praises many of the same features in male lovers that are indicative of their youth (“boy-love” poetry seems to reflect an actual sexual practice [Roth 164]). Ugly women, on the other hand, are always old, but not all older women are ugly. Health

is never mentioned specifically, though the signs of youth are an indirect indication of good health. These also include literary references to white teeth and red gums, that is healthy teeth and gums. About 15% of the cosmetic recipes are to whiten teeth, strengthen gums, and soothe lips, and are not sex-specific. Health concerns are also related to references to smell and taste. Unpleasant odors and tastes have the function of repelling, signaling a potential harm to the individual. In literature, the lady's beauty is often compared to the "freshness" of roses and lilies, and her mouth is described as tasting like honey or a sweet fruit. But there is no mention of artificial perfumes associated with beauty (according to the prevalent view that beauty had to be "natural"), except in connection with the moralist attacks on make-up. The evidence for the use of perfumes to enhance one's "freshness" comes from the cosmetic recipes that recommend perfumed baths, or explain the preparation of scents for the hair and clothes, or to fight bad breath (some are small packets to be worn around the neck).

As regards the face, specific facial features include a short (relative to the average in the population) distance between the lips and the bottom of the chin, a small chin, a small nose, small mouth, full red lips, high forehead, big eyes, and high and curved eyebrows (Grammer et al. 94; Jones 83-87). These are proportions of "babyfacedness," or "neotenous" features, that make the face appear younger than the actual age. Along with high cheekbones and fat deposition in breasts, thighs and buttocks, these features are related to a high estrogen-to-testosterone ratio, and are indirect signals of fertility. Hormones also influence musculature and body build (for example, shoulder width has much smaller values in women than in men), as well as body hair (much less present in women, especially in youth), while hair loss and baldness are a result of male sex

hormones (Grammer et al. 95; Skamel 184-185). Features relating to the face are the most common in the description of female beauty, especially large, bright eyes: “ojos grandes, someros, pintados, reluzientes” (Ruiz 433), “ojos de garza” (*villancicos*). Long, thin, arched, and separated eyebrows, as in “las cejas en arco alçadas” (Marqués de Santillana 14) also serve to increase the apparent relative size and “brightness” of the eyes, as does make-up eyelids and eyelashes. Small and sunken eyes are a feature we find in descriptions of ugly women as well as men: Mary’s “ojos covados” (*Estoria* 250), the Archpriest’s “ojos pequeños” (Ruiz 1488a). References to a high, “open,” “resplendent” forehead are just as common: “la fruent avié muy blanca, alegre e serena” (*Libro de Alexandre* 1874a), or “fuentes claras e luzientes” (Marqués de Santillana). A small mouth, with full red lips, is another typical feature: “boquita de cerezas” (*kharajāt*), “labros vermejos, non muy delgados” (*Razón* 66), or “los labrios, colorados y grosezuelos” (*La Celestina* 231). Cosmetic recipes for eyebrows, eyelids, and eyelashes have the purpose of highlighting and magnifying the eyes, increasing the appearance of youthfulness. About half of the cosmetic recipes focus on the elimination of body hair and on making the skin free from all blemishes. The literary texts never explicitly mention lack of body hair, but they always emphasize white and clear skin, and hairiness is associated with ugliness: *LBA* 448a has “barbuda” as one of the features to avoid in the ideal woman, and a *cantiga* describes an ugly woman as “uelosa como cam.”

Head hair has the function of distributing into the air the pheromones produced in the apocrine glands, and long female hair may be correlated with optimal levels of sex hormones (Grammer et al. 95). Hair length is also related to women’s facial attractiveness, and long and medium-length hair appear to be positively related to men’s

perception of feminine beauty (Mesko and Bereczkei 264). The impact of hair length is greater in the case of otherwise less attractive women, who can significantly increase their perceived attractiveness by lengthening the hair. The “good genes” hypothesis best explains this phenomenon: only those who have good phenotypic and genetic quality can afford the costs (in terms of metabolism and time and energy necessary for its care) of long hair (Mesko and Bereczkei 265). In general, young women tend to wear longer hair than older women, and in this broad sense it is a sign of youth (Hinz et al. 166). In the Middle Ages long hair was indeed associated with virginity, and also acquired a magical quality in traditional stories (Lida de Malkiel 33). Among the more detailed literary descriptions, beautiful hair is missing only in the portrait of the queen of the Amazons (*Libro de Alixandre*), while it is one of the most common features in all portraits. *Razón de amor* is the only work that mentions short hair, something unique in any of the literary traditions reviewed (see Chapter Two). Most cosmetic treatises devote considerable space to the maintenance of well-groomed, long, and healthy hair. They also include many recipes for hair-dyes (blond and black). In Spanish literature, blond hair appears to be more typical of learned poetry and appears to be associated with nobility: “rruvios, largos cabellos / segund doncellas d’estado” (Marqués de Santillana 11-12). In the *cantigas* it is not mentioned, and in the Andalusian and Arabic tradition hair is black, not without exceptions (see Chapter Three). Factors related to social status may be involved, but light-colored hair is a feature also associated with neoteny (Jones 98). Preference for any hair color is also dependent on the distribution of hair color in a population: males seem prefer the rare color, and rare genes that signal parasite resistance (Grammer et al 96).

The preference for a slim or plump body varies culturally, probably due to the availability of food in a society, and therefore associated with wealth and health in a food-scarce society (in food-abundant societies we find the inverse relationship, as thinness is more valued and more common in the upper social strata). However, the way in which the fat is distributed on the body is highly sex-specific, and this is shown by the ratio between the size of the waist and the size of the hips (“waist-to-hip ratio,” or WHR) (Singh 294). The WHR is similar for boys and girls before puberty (0.85 to 0.95), but after puberty girls’ pelvises expand and female hormones lead to the deposit of fat on the hips, buttocks and thighs, lowering the WHR to 0.67 to 0.80 and creating an “hourglass” figure; the male preference is for a WHR of 0.7 (Singh 302; Furnham et al. 741). The WHR is an indicator of women’s health, a high WHR being linked to diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, heart attack, stroke and gallbladder disorders. It is also an indicator of women’s reproductive status: women with a low WHR start ovulating younger, become pregnant more easily, and have children earlier than women with a high WHR. The ratio increases with age as estrogen production and fertility decline, and after menopause it approaches the same values as males, whose WHR also increases with age (Singh 294-295). The preference for a low WHR, however, appears less pronounced in food-scarce foragers societies, and therefore dependent on ecological factors, as shown by studies among the Hadza of Tanzania (Marlowe and Wetsman), the Matsigenka of Peru (Yu and Shepard), and the Shiwiar of the Ecuadorian Amazon (Sugiyama). All literary Spanish works that contain references to body shape the emphasis is either on avoiding extremes (as in “nin era gorda nin muy delgada; / nin era luenga nin era corta,” *Vida* 228-229), or on being slender (as in the “corpo delgado” of the *cantigas*). Many of

these works also emphasize a slim waist or wide hips: “correa de tres palmos en la ceñía doblada” (*Libro de Alixandre* 1873b); “por la çentura delgada” (*Razón* 68); “ancheta de caderas” (*LBA* 445c); “delgadica en la cintura” (*Romancero*); “en la su çinta delgadas” (Marqués de Santillana 27). On the other hand, being skinny or fat is associated with ugliness (and old age): “braços luengos e secos dedos” (*Vida* 740), “o uentre grand e inchado” (*cantigas*).

Contemporary cross-cultural studies show a widespread male preference for skin color which is at the lighter end of the locally represented spectrum, though not necessarily the lightest possible skin color (Van den Berghe and Frost 92). Light skin color is an indicator of youth (young women have lighter skin than older women) and an indicator of reproductive status, as the skin lightens slightly during ovulation as compared with other times during the menstrual cycle. At the same time, the skin becomes suffused with blood (“vascularized”) creating a light glow, a reddening, of the cheeks (Van der Berghe and Frost 95). Several skin conditions are also related to abnormal levels of sex hormones and ovarian dysfunction (Grammer et al. 96). The emphasis on white skin color, whether in the forehead, the nose, arms, or feet, is found in all literary genres and traditions, as are rosy cheeks: “blanca era y bermeia” (*Razón* 58), “blanca soy como el papel / la color tengo mezclada / como rosa en el rosel” (*Romancero*). Darkness of skin is generally an attribute of ugliness and old age, as in “la faz muy negra e arrugada” (*Vida* 733), “más negra es que un diablo” (Martínez de Toledo 136). This preference for a light-colored skin is supported by the number of products for whitening and cleansing the skin in the cosmetic recipes, which make up about 40% of all recipes. Many *villancicos* (as well as the Song of Solomon) also praise swarthy skin, but

the implication is generally that one is beautiful in spite of the color. Fieldwork naturally required exposure to the sun and whether, while noble status afforded a pampered life indoors, so that social rank also played a role in the preference for a lighter skin color (for example, it is one of the very few attributes of beauty in epic, such as *El Cid*, or in ballads, such as “Blancaniña”).

Gil-Burmann et al. have made an analysis of current personal advertisements in Spanish newspapers to determine current differences in mate choice between men and women. Their study focused on several traits, such as age, physical attractiveness, socioeconomic status, commitment to family, and belief in sexual fidelity (497). In agreement with other cross-cultural studies, their results show that men prefer women younger than themselves, and young women prefer men older than themselves (503). The trait most sought by men (in all age groups) is physical attractiveness. In contrast, most women seek men with a high socioeconomic status, though younger women tend to prefer physical attractiveness (which may be an indication of women’s adapting to an environment of increasing economic independence) (505). Both men and women tend to advertise themselves as attractive, though this trend decreases with age, as older people put more emphasis on their own socioeconomic status, both men and women (501). While the study does not address the specific features concerned with attractiveness, it underscores the continued significance of feminine beauty in gender relations in contemporary Spain.

CHAPTER 6 - CONCLUSION

This study has analyzed major works and genres of Spanish medieval literature and revealed the variety of descriptions of feminine beauty. Some are extensive and detailed portraits, such as those of the *Libro de Alixandre*, *Razón de amor*, *Santa María Egipcíaca*, *La Celestina*, *Repetición de amores*, and especially the *Libro de buen amor* which contains twenty-five features. The other works reviewed offer much more limited and fragmentary descriptions. The *kharajāt*, the epics, *cantigas*, the chivalresque romances of Çifar and Amadís, the *villancicos*, and the ballads (with a few exceptions, such as late Sephardic variants) only mention few traits of beauty. The difference between the two groups' treatment of feminine beauty may be related to the difference between a "learned" tradition and a "popular" tradition, or between the artistic expressions of two social classes and the different social roles of women (Sponsler 119-120). This division is also associated with the difference between works by known authors and anonymous ones, an issue which is in turn related to the debate over the literary or oral origins of different genres (Deyermond 24-26, 47-49). If we consider the anonymous poems and songs collectively, however, it is clear that the features described as beautiful are consistent with the more elaborate versions of the literary portrait. Specifically, the literary representation of feminine beauty throughout Spanish medieval literature range broadly along two dimensions: (1) the number of body parts mentioned, and (2) the sequential ordering of the parts. There is no "canon" in this sense. On a third dimension, that is, the attributes given to each part ("long" hair or "white" skin, for

instance), there is however great consistency among all the examples, and we may speak of a “canonical” portrait of feminine beauty.

The literary antecedents of the cultured formal portrait are found in the Latin tradition, and contemporary examples abound in European vernacular literature. But the rhetorical developments of the twelfth-century renaissance in France and Italy, in Latin and vernacular, did not reach the Iberian peninsula until a century later, with the exception of Catalonia, historically close to France (Deyermond 56). In fact, even during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries there are few works of Latin rhetorical theory from Castile and León, and the main focus is on the “ars dictaminis” rather than on the “ars poetriae” or the “ars praedicandi” (Faulhaber 140-142). As regards vernacular literature, and specifically the portrait of feminine beauty, the earliest examples comparable to Vendôme or Vinsauf’s didactic texts are the *Libro de Alixandre* and *Santa María Egipcíaca*, both from French sources, and the Aragonese *Razón de amor*, close to the Provençal tradition and the Galician-Portuguese *cantigas*. This belatedness is usually seen as a consequence of the political and military conflicts that dominated the peninsula during the eleventh and twelfth centuries, both within the kingdoms of Castile and León as well as externally in their wars against the Almoravids and the Almohads (Deyermond 57-58). Historical differences notwithstanding, the abundance of similar examples across different vernacular traditions, including Arabic, suggest that the attributes identified with the literary portrait of feminine beauty were shared by many contemporary cultures. These portraits, often in the form of repetitive catalogues, are also typical of much medieval poetry that tried to convey instruction on every aspect of knowledge. It is not new information, but rather knowledge that the

audience already possesses and nevertheless enjoys hearing, a phenomenon that cannot be explained simply by appealing to rhetoric, since rhetoric explains the formal characteristics of poetry, not the material itself, which depends on the taste of writers and audiences (Lewis 199-201). These portraits, therefore, must have enjoyed popularity because they formed part of a widely shared conception of feminine beauty. Lewis has also remarked that the “medieval imagination” attempted to describe as factually as possible, focused on the foreground, and close-up (206). The richness of detail of the more elaborate descriptions present this quality, which makes them faithful representations of people’s conception of beauty.

Medieval cosmetic treatises continued an ancient tradition that associated beautifying practices with women’s health, and included cosmetic recipes along with medical ones. The recipes for depilatories, whitening creams, hair dyes, and perfumes reveal the aesthetic preferences of medieval women, consistent with the literary portrait. The idealized image of feminine beauty reflected a real goal, though the resources and time required limited many of the practices to elite women. Cosmetic practices are known from the most ancient literature, as is their critique, following a long-standing view that distinguished between natural and artificial beauty, and condemned the latter as vain and deceitful (even before Christianity). Medieval misogyny directly attacked cosmetics and rich clothing, due in part to a hermeneutics that considered woman secondary in nature to man, an illusion or ornament that distracted man’s attention from God, particularly through the gaze (Bloch 8-15). Misogynist works in the vernacular languages of the Iberian peninsula appear toward the end of the thirteenth century in Catalan, whereas in Castilian there are no major works until the fifteenth century, such

as the *Corbacho* or the *Repetición de amores* (Ornstein 220). Ornstein argues that in medieval Castilian literature there are in fact many more works that praise the virtues of women than those that condemn their vices (220-221). This does not mean, however, that the moral idealization of women and their idolization, phenomena typical of the thirteenth and fourteenth century Marian cult, is not another manifestation of misogyny.

C. S. Lewis has pointed out a general medieval aspiration to synthesize “theology, science, and history into a single, complex, harmonious mental ‘Model of the Universe’” however provisional (11). Poets were not necessarily aware of this epistemological model (it was enough for them to follow the examples of classical authority), but it is their poetic rather than philosophical treatises that offer the best examples of the model (Lewis 17-18). For example, De Bruyne has argued that the medieval aesthetic conception of beauty combined proportion with brilliance of color. Proportion was perceived in the simplest relations (based on numerical quantities) in the arts, nature, or the universe: “*Pulchritudo apta commensuratio partium*” (beauty consists in the proper proportion of the parts”) (49-50). Brilliance was light, the essence of color, the necessary condition for visibility, and a source of heat and vital warmth that drew its strength from the soul. A balanced skin color, fresh and rosy, was a sign of well-balanced humors (De Bruyne 55-56).

These explanations, based on a broad interpretation of the medieval world view, may be sufficient for an understanding of some features of the literary descriptions of feminine beauty. The theoretical perspective offered by evolutionary psychology enriches our understanding of these descriptions by showing that they represent universal male preferences based on mechanisms of sexual selection. The portraits of feminine

beauty discussed in this study, as well as the cosmetic treatises are, with few exceptions, the creation of men. They represent men's perceptions of an abstract concept, the ideal woman, and hence their preferences. At the same time, cosmetic practices demonstrate that women also shared this conception of beauty. This does not exclude that such views were imposed on women by a patriarchal system, but rather explains the focus on specific features of physical beauty.

Peter Dronke, in his extensive study on the relationship between medieval Latin and the rise of the European love-lyric, has suggested that “the feelings and conceptions of *amour courtois* are universally possible, possible in any time or place and on any level of society. They occur in popular as well as in learned or aristocratic love-poetry” (*Medieval Latin* 2). According to Dronke, courtly love is thus not a “new feeling” in European poetry, and neither is it borrowed from another tradition (the Arabic), but has evolved through centuries--in form as much as in rhetoric--in both popular and aristocratic circles (50-54). Discussing the similarities between the *kharajāt* and the *cantigas de amigo*, Deyermond also points out that, besides the common tradition of popular love songs arising from similar social and cultural conditions, heterosexual love poems are bound to resemble each other to some extent throughout the world because they reflect similar basic emotions (10). Not all medieval scholars share this view. From the perspective of evolutionary psychology, however, contemporary researchers have examined the concept of romantic love as a universal, defined as “any intense attraction that involves the idealization of the other, within an erotic context, with the expectation of enduring for some time in their future” (Jankowiak and Fischer 57). Their analysis, based on Murdock and White's *Standard Cross Cultural Sample* anthropological

database of world cultures, shows the presence of romantic love in about 90% of 186 sampled cultures. Their suggestion is that romantic love is in fact a human universal, or at least a “near-universal” (in Brown’s terms) (61). The evidence from literature and cosmetics reviewed in the present work suggests that the male conception of feminine beauty also has a universal character.

In constructing theories, medieval natural philosophers attempted to account for and do justice to empirical phenomena, to “save appearances.” Any theory, however, can be inventive and elaborate enough to do so without contributing to a better understanding of the phenomena themselves (such as the complex epicycles devised to account for the movement of celestial bodies in relation to a fixed earth). William of Occam refined this conception by insisting that the best theory saved the phenomena with the fewest possible assumptions (Lewis 13-16). In this respect, evolutionary psychological theory provides a more parsimonious explanation than rhetorical theory for at least one aspect of the medieval literary portrayal of feminine beauty, that is, its features and their attributes. This study indicates that future research in other literary traditions and historical periods may further strengthen this perspective.

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