UNIVERSITY OF LONDON THESIS

Degree MPhil Year 2008 Name of Author NORMAN, Nicoletta Anna Sonia

La vostra gran bieltate
M'ha fatto donna amare
E lo vostro ben fare
M'ha fatto cantadore

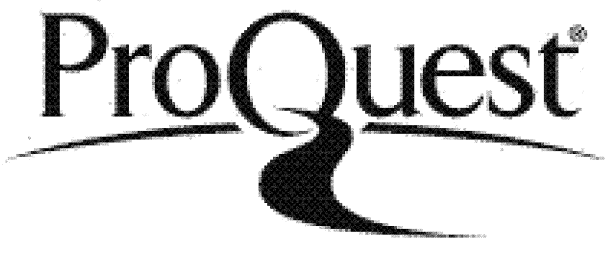
(Guido delle Colonne, Gioiosamente Canto, ll. 49-52)

A study of female beauty in Italian literature in the thirteenth and early fourteenth century

Nicoletta Anna Sonia Norman

Submitted as part of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Philosophy
at the University of London

February 2008



ProQuest LLC
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346

Declaration

I, **Nicoletta Anna Sonia Norman**, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

24th February 2008

Abstract

This study considers aspects of the presentation, iconography and visualisation of women in Italian prose and poetry in the period 1230 to 1330. It explores female beauty in both its appearance and its impact upon the beholder. Though the study focuses mainly on literary sources, other kinds of historical and religious material, from antiquity to the Middle Ages, are also included. Some of these are intended further to illustrate aspects of aesthetic sensibility generally in this period, and some of them to provide a context for medieval Italian literature by demonstrating the social situation of women in general.

The study is divided into four chapters each considering the different ways in which female beauty is explored and celebrated. The first chapter examines and catalogues formal aspects of female beauty from the point of view of the *descriptio mulieris*. The second chapter investigates analogies and comparisons often incorporated into descriptions of women, analogies and comparisons at every point remarkable for their imaginative resourcefulness and hyperbolic intensity. The third chapter considers the perception of beauty and its psychology *ex parte subiecti,* in the onlooker. The fourth chapter explores by way, principally, of the extraordinary, the miraculous and the angelic, the relationship in *madonna* of the beautiful and the good, of the moral and the aesthetic.

Table of Contents

Introduction

My purpose in what follows is to consider the presentation, iconography and visualisation of women in Italian literature in the period 1230 to 1330. The study consists of four chapters and explores the depiction and celebration of female beauty in both prose and poetry. The first chapter investigates the formal aspects both of beauty in general and of female beauty in particular. The second chapter explores specifically female beauty in terms of the kinds of analogy, comparison and hyperbole frequent in literary texts. Typically, the beauty of *madonna* – here as throughout I use the term 'madonna' as a convenient way of designating the woman celebrated by the lover as the object of his affection and/or admiration – is said to surpass anything and everything to be found in nature. Indeed, she emerges, not so much as a historical character, but rather as an icon of aesthetic excellence and as one whose outward form is lit up by the beauty of the soul within. The third chapter examines aspects of the general psychology of beauty in relation to the properties of form in *madonna* and to the reaction of the lover or the one who looks upon her. The fourth chapter explores the relationship in *madonna* of beauty and moral goodness, with special reference to the imagery of the extraordinary, of the miraculous, and of the angelic.

The first thing that needs to be done by way of introduction to this project, however, is to stress the essentially literary register of it all, the way in which, for all his earnestness, the poet or lover is playing a kind of literary game. Little, in other words, so far as we can judge, of what is said by way of praising *madonna* has any, properly speaking, historical or experiential basis. Thus when the poet praises his lady in terms, say, of the beauty of the planets or of precious stones, he is dealing in the stock-in-trade emphases of his tradition and craft. Similarly, when he celebrates her beautiful features he is incorporating a set of aesthetic ideals that form part of the tradition.[1] Unique inflexions, certainly, are discernible, and by way of them the poet sets about exploring and expressing aspects of his own discrete spirituality; but the discourse remains, even so, topical in character, responsive to the commonplaces to which he is heir. There is, however, a significant social dimension to the verse, in that, for all its topicality, it reflects the social – and pre-eminently feudal – circumstances of its early inception, the hierarchical structures of medieval society in which it is rooted. The kind of lyric poetry we are about to consider has therefore, even if at a remove as far as its specifically sub-Alpine development is concerned, a certain documentary interest, a certain light to throw on the circumstances of its coming about.[2] In neither of these senses, therefore, is the poet's hymn to his lady and to her beauty entirely devoid of positive, as distinct

[1] Walgrave tells us: 'Throughout the Middle Ages, the image of women was rather stereotyped [...] The ideal of feminine beauty was a slight build, a pale skin with red cheeks and lips, pale grey eyes in an oval face, and long blonde hair' (J. Walgrave, *Het Labo van de Verleiding: Geschiedenis van de Make-up; The Laboratory of Seduction: History of Make-up* (Antwerp: Koningin Fabiolazaal, 1998), p.59). See figures 1 and 2 for an example of Giotto's depiction of the Madonna. Here we notice the oval face, the pale skin and the gentle blush of the cheeks, qualities, as we will see, celebrated in art and literature of the period.

[2] According to M. W. Labarge (*Women in Medieval life: A Small Sound of the Trumpet* (London: Hamilton, 1986), p. 26), courtesy was considered a noble virtue reserved for those belonging to the upper social spheres. It was because of these specific social structures, rules and the privileges they included that praise poetry developed – also retaining its own special rules and privileges. In the first two books of *De Amore* we find a comprehensive guide to the importance placed on social structures and the rules of love. See *Andreas Capellanus on Love*, edited by P. G. Walsh, Medieval and Renaissance Editions (London: Duckworth, 1982).

from merely aesthetic, interest. Deep within itself it has about it a certain historical and, as far as this or that particular poet is concerned, confessional accountability.

The first chapter of my thesis will be concerned with some of the abstract features of beauty in the contemporary mind, with questions of form generally as they apply to *madonna*. In, for example, Augustine there is just such a statement of beauty in general. In his letter to Nebridius (III. 4) he says:

> Quid est corporis pulchritudo? Congruentia partium cum quadam coloris suavitate.[3]

Beauty, Augustine says (in a definition destined itself to become topical), consists of harmony in respect of the parts and pleasing light and colour. As far as harmony is concerned, the concept was not new with St Augustine, but is also found in fragments of Polyclitus' extant writings. Panofsky, reflecting on these fragments, discusses his methods of constructing the body: 'Polyclitus describes the proper proportions of finger to finger, finger to hand, hand to forearm, forearm to arm and, finally, each single limb to the entire body [...].'[4] What Polyclitus was trying to achieve was a depiction of the human form whose beauty was a matter of proportionality. Beauty was seen, therefore, as a matter of the integration of the parts within the whole, symmetry and proportion thus being a leading object of delight.[5]

Light, on the other hand, is significant to an understanding of beauty if only as a necessary condition of perception. Light is beautiful because it is pure, eternal and unchanging, and because it emanates perfectly and constantly from its source. As

---

[3] *Sancti Aurelii Augustini Epistulae: I – LV*, edited by Kl. D. Daur (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004).

[4] E. Panofsky, *Meaning in the Visual Arts* (London: Penguin, 1955), p. 93.

[5] Plotinus, in his *Enneads* (I. vi, 2), correspondingly, thinks of ugliness as patternlessness, something outside of Reason: 'All shapelessness whose kind admits of pattern and form, as long as it remains outside of Reason and Idea, is ugly by the very isolation from the Divine-Thought. And this is the Absolute Ugly: an ugly thing is something that has not been entirely mastered by pattern, that is by Reason, the Matter not yielding at all points and in all respects to Ideal-Form' (*Plotinus: The Enneads*, edited by S. MacKenna (New York: Larson, 1992), p. 66). It is a matter of disunity and formal anarchy.

Aquinas tells us in his commentary on the *Divine Names* (IV. v, 125-9)[6] of the Pseudo-Dionysius (the Areopagite), God, or the Good, is defined as intellectual light and the source of all light. God emanates light and illuminates spiritually those who participate in his likeness. In his *Summa Theologiae* (Ia. xxxix. 8),[7] Aquinas, speaking now of light in its material aspect, suggests that form is beautiful under two aspects in particular, from the point of view of harmony or proportion (or a fittingness of the parts within the whole) and from the point of view of light, radiance and colour. Edgar de Bruyne, in reviewing this latter aspect of beauty, follows through its implications with respect to womankind in particular: 'Chez Windon comme chez Baudri,' he writes, 'toute la figure de la femme animée est baignée de lumière. Ses yeux comme des étoiles ou des flambeaux, ses cheveux fauves sont comme d'or, son cou brille plus que les lis ou la neige fraîche. Ses dents resemblent à l'ivoire ou aux marbre de Paros, ses joues blanches et vermeilles sont plus belle que les roses.'[8] Beauty, then, is pre-eminently a matter of radiance, of a certain kind of glowing presence and luminosity.

Colour, in its purity, clarity and vibrancy, is also an integral part of the beauty of form in its apprehension. In the human form, it contributes to beauty by way of the radiant hues and tones of the skin and the brightness of the hair, while also indicating aspects of health and youth. Edgar de Bruyne puts it thus: 'En plus de leur beauté formelle, les couleurs ont une valeur symbolique: entre le blanc, couleur de la lumière pure, et le noir, couleur ténèbres, se trouvent le jaune, couleur de la terre, le vert de l'eau, le bleu de l'air, le rouge du feu.'[9] Colour, therefore, over and above its formal

---

[6] *S. Thomae Aquinatis: In Librum Beati Dionysii de Divinis Nominibus Expositio*, edited by C. Pera, (Rome: Marietti, 1950).
[7] *S. Thomae Aquinatis: Summa Theologiae*, edited by P. Caramello, *Pars prima* (Rome: Marietti, 1950).
[8] *Études D'Esthétique Médiévale: L'Époque Romane* (Brugge: Tempelhof, 1946), vol 2, p. 177.
[9] *Études D'Esthétique Médiévale: De Boèce a Jean Scot Erigène* (Brugge: Tempelhof, 1946), vol 1, p.7.

beauty, has a symbolic value or function by virtue of the various ideas and associations it evokes, from purity to passion.

Turning to the question of poetic representation (my Chapter II), we frequently find in the texts under discussion that women are compared to elements of nature such as flowers, animals, precious metals and gems as a means of confirming their beauty. Each element of nature, understood as beautiful, has its own praiseworthy qualities, and women who are equated with these elements assume their qualities. For the perennial significance of flowers generally and for what was held to be their exemplary beauty, we must look to history. In the ancient world the notion of flowers conjured up images of paradise: 'The name of paradise in the Biblical tradition was Persian and the concept was in turn derived from the earlier gardens of Babylon and Assyria which were associated either with temples or with royalty. Some were royal parks for hunting; others, like Eden, were irrigated gardens, of which the best known were the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, built by Nebuchadnezzar II for his wife [...].'[10] Paradise was therefore a garden, consisting of cultivated flowers, trees, plants and shrubs. Gardens were not only important as royal parks but they also formed an important part of the temples, where they were used for religious rituals and worship.[11] Flowers too were a significant part of worship within Europe and the Near East. Garlands were often taken to the gods as offerings, either to accompany blood sacrifices or to replace them.[12] Flowers, herbs and plants, moreover, were significant for they were highly prized for their perfume, their aromas and their oils.[13] Their importance lies in their use by women in their bathing rituals and as cosmetics. However, they were also significant in terms of their medicinal qualities and were used to treat all manner of

[10] J. Goody, *The Culture of Flowers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 29.
[11] Ibid., p. 45.
[12] Ibid., p. 70.

maladies from headaches to indigestion.[14] In endless different ways, then, the plant world offered an analogy for specifically female beauty.

Analogies are also found in the sphere of the planets and stars generally. Women who are compared to elements of the celestial sphere are most often praised for their clarity, their purity and their perpetual resplendence. Much of this has its basis in Greek and Roman mythology where attributes of the gods were often ascribed to medieval *madonna*. An example of this is evident in the depictions of the sun god Apollo driving his fiery chariot across the sky: 'like all other solar heroes, Apollo is beautiful and golden-haired, radiant and genial [...].'[15] In another example we are told of Artemis (Diana) goddess of the moon and the hunt. She was the twin sister of Apollo and was famed for her grace and her beauty. 'In works of art this goddess is generally represented as a beautiful maiden, clad in a short hunting dress [...] and a crescent on her well-poised head.'[16]

The heroines of classical literature, in their grace and magnanimity, all furnished the poet with the means of celebrating his lady. Exemplary in this respect is the case of Helen of Troy. Helen was the wife of Menelaus, the king of Sparta. Paris, the son of Priam, king of Troy, was asked to judge a beauty contest between three goddesses, Hera, Athene and Aphrodite. Each goddess offered Paris a bribe, but it was Aphrodite who won. She offered Paris a woman, Helen, whose beauty equalled her own, and advised him on how to win her. This acted as a catalyst and caused a sequence of events which culminated in the Trojan War.[17] Helen's beauty became legendary through her various representations in art and literature that spanned the ancient Greek world, the

---

[13] Ibid., p. 37.
[14] K. Beals, *Flower Lore and Legend* (New York: Holt, 1917), p. 120.
[15] *Greece and Rome: Myths & Legends*, by H. A. Guerber (London: Chancellor, 1995), p. 435.
[16] Ibid., p.95.
[17] Ibid., pp.107-10.

Middle Ages and beyond. Her name, therefore, came to represent beauty itself. Morgan le Fey is another legendary figure with whom women are often compared. She was said to be a beautiful fairy and the half-sister of King Arthur. She too, therefore, was considered to be an icon of beauty and offered the poets a standard for the estimation of female beauty in general.

On the subjective side of the question (the object of my concern in Chapter III), we often find illustrations of female beauty that come about as a consequence of the beholder relating his experiences. It is this psychological reaction to the beauty of *madonna* that defines its significance. Aquinas, in the *Summa Theologiae* (I. ii. 27), tells us that beauty is a matter both of cognition and of delectation:

> Pulchrum autem respicit vim cognoscitivam: pulchra enim dicuntur quae visa placent.

He says that beauty is found in what pleases us and what delights the senses, and in what therefore – as Dante insists at one point[18] – generates a movement of desire. Thus beauty has its part to play in the generation of love, the point of arrival in respect of perception and pleasure. The question is, in fact, traceable all the way to Plato and his own meditation on beauty and its psychological reception. For Plato, everything that *is* in the world as an object of perception participates in beauty. Socrates, in the seventh book of the *Republic* (VII. v) turns his attention to the perception and estimation of beauty:

> I shall return to our friend who denies that there is any beauty in itself or any eternally unchanging form of beauty, that lover of sights, who loves visible beauty but cannot bear to be told that beauty is really one, and justice one, and so on – I shall return to him and ask him "Is there any of these many beautiful objects of yours that may not seem ugly? [...]"
> "No," replied Glaucon, "they are all bound to seem in a way

[18] *Purg.* XVIII. 22-27 ('Vostra apprensiva da esser verace / tragge intenzione, e dentro a voi la spiega, / sì che l'animo ad essa volger face; /e se, rivolto, inver di lei si piega, / quel piegare è amor, quell'è natura / che per piacer di novo in voi si lega', cited in the edition by U. Bosco and G. Reggio (Florence: Le Monnier, 1988).

> both beautiful and ugly [...]"
>
> (479 a-b)[19]

The passage suggests that any object may appear both beautiful and ugly at one and the same time in the eye of the beholder, the notion of participation carrying with it a merely partial perception *ex parte subiecti* of the reality in question, and thus a sense of aesthetic ambiguity. Something participating in something else is necessarily, from the point of view of the beholder, both beautiful and less than beautiful. Augustine, similarly concerned with the subjective aspects of the question and with how, exactly, beauty is perceived and enjoyed by the individual, states:

> Itaque de istis secundum illam judicamus, et illam cernimus rationalis mentis inuitu.
>
> (ll. 71-2)[20]

Here he suggests that the observer is equipped with a species of divine illumination by which he is able somehow to intuit the beauty of form itself. The positive encounter remains decisive, but to it the subject brings a kind of transcendental awareness, a recognisance of form in its totality and integrity.

However this may be, beauty, – as I shall show in Chapter IV – throughout, bears an intimate relationship with goodness; so for example, Aquinas in his commentary on the *Divine Names* of the Pseudo Dionysius, on precisely this issue, says:

> Dicit ergo, primo, universaliter loquendo: omne quod est, est ex pulchro et bono quod est Deus, sicut ex principio effectivo; et in pulchro et bono est, sicut in principio contentivo vel conservativo; et ad pulchrum et bonum convertitur, ipsum desiderans, sicut ad finem, et non solum est finis ut desideratus, sed etiam inquantum omnes substantiae et actiones ordinantur in ipsum, sicut in finem; et hoc est quod subdit: et omnia quaecumque sunt et fiunt, propter pulchrum et bonum sunt et fiunt et ad ipsum omnia inspiciunt, sicut ad causam exemplarem, quam habent ut regulam suae operationis; et ab ipso moventur, sicut a causa movente; et

[19] *Plato: The Republic*, edited and translated by D. Lee (London: Penguin, 1987).
[20] *Sancti Aurelii Augustini: De Trinitate: Libri XV*, edited by W. J. Mountain (Turnhout: Brepols, 1968).

continentur et conservantur in suo motu et actione.

(IV. viii, 390)

Aquinas speaks of the interchangeability of beauty and goodness in whatever is in keeping with the exigencies of its proper nature. Each of these things, as transcedentals of being, are co-extensive with being itself, and, in this or that object of perception, complement and confirm one another. All these aspects of the aesthetic question, merely hinted at here by way of introduction to what follows, find their way into what for the sake of convenience we might call the erotic-aesthetic question, the question of female beauty both in itself and as contemplated by the onlooker and, especially, by the poet as lover. In this as in most other senses, each successive emphasis in our enquiry has its roots in the *mare magnum* of ancient and medieval aesthetic sensibility generally.

Methodology

The 'control texts' of the thesis consist of various kinds of literature from the Italian high Middle Ages, including in addition to the lyric poetry of (in its broadest sense) the Sicilian School (up to and including the *stilnovisti*), chronicles and didactic texts. There is also some reference to philosophical and religious texts and to the world of art and literature extending from antiquity to the medieval period. Since it is my aim to discuss the iconography and visualisation of women, I have also made use of a number of visual resources, of images deriving mainly from illuminated manuscripts, paintings and sculptures. These images are intended to assist in the process of visualisation, of bringing the text to life, and exemplifying what we find there. They are not intended as an object of analysis in and for themselves.

The following is a list (in alphabetical order for the most part) of the main authors and texts upon which the study rests. Full bibliographical information is provided at the end of the text. Primary texts dating from an earlier period (including classical texts) are for the purpose of contextualisation and are registered in the bibliography. I have throughout used up-to-date critical editions known to me. Where there is no modern edition, where there is no edition of collected works by any one author, or where certain poems are not included in particular editions I have used the *Duecento* collections by Contini and by Salinari.

Sicilian School

The poetry of the *Scuola siciliana* was written by a group of poets, under the patronage of Frederick II; it flourished from circa 1220 for some thirty years of his reign. It was lyrical poetry written in the vernacular and generally composed by members of his court. These poets were strongly influenced by the styles and themes found in the poetry of the Provençal troubadours. The poets I have used from this period (rarely are they precisely datable) are as follows:

Federico II, from: *Federico II di Svevia* (Cassata, Quiritta, 2001).

Filippo da Messina, from: *Duecento: La Poesia Italiana dalle Origini a Dante* (Bonomi, http://www.silab.it/frox/200/ind_scu.htm, 2004).

Giacomo da Lentini, from: *Giacomo da Lentini: Poesie* (Antonelli, Bulzoni, 1979).

Giacomo Pugliese, from: *La Poesia Lirica del Duecento* (Salinari, UTET, 1951).

Guido delle Colonne, from: *Poeti del Duecento* (Contini, Ricciardi, 1960).

Inghilfredi, from: *La Scuola Poetica Siciliana: Le Canzoni dei Rimatori Nativi di Sicilia* (Panvini, Olschki, 1958).

Jacopo Mostacci, from: *La Poesia Lirica del Duecento* (Salinari, UTET, 1951).

Rinaldo d'Aquino, from: *La Poesia Lirica del Duecento* (Salinari, UTET, 1951).

Stefano Protonotaro, from: *Poeti del Duecento* (Contini, Ricciardi, 1960).

Didactic and Moral Poetry and Prose

Didactic poetry and prose flourished throughout the *Duecento* and *Trecento*. I have included here religious and moral texts, bestiaries and otherwise mythological works. I have made reference to the following:

Bestiario Moralizzato di Gubbio (Celli, Costa & Nolan, 1983), (towards the end of the 13th Century).

Fiori e Vita di Filosafi ed altri Savi ed Imperadori, from: *La Prosa del Duecento* (Segre and Marti, Ricciardi, 1959), (between 1271 and 1275).

L'Intelligenzia (Mistruzzi, Carducci, 1928), (the second half of the 13th Century).

Libro della Natura degli Animali, from: *La Prosa del Duecento* (Segre and Marti, Ricciardi, 1959), (towards the end of the 13th Century).

Roman de Troie by Binduccio dello Scelto, from: *Volgarizzamenti del Due e Trecento* (Segre, UTET, 1953), (before 1322).

Reggimento e Costumi di Donna by Francesco da Barberino (Sansone, Loescher - Chiantore, 1957), (c. 1316).

Il Tesoretto by Brunetto Latini (Ciccuto, Rizzoli, 1985), (between 1260 and 1266).

Tuscan Poetry

The popularity of the lyric poetry of the *Scuola siciliana* began to spread before the death of Frederick II, and its themes were embraced by poets in other regions with dialectical variations. The tradition finally reached the north where it was refined creating a new style of poetry, subsequently known as the *Scuola toscana*; with Guittone d'Arezzo generally recognised as its most prolific exponent. The poets and poetry I have used from this tradition are as follows:

Bonagiunta Orbicciani, from: *La Poesia Lirica del Duecento* (Salinari, UTET, 1951), (towards the second half of the 13th Century).

Chiaro Davanzati, from: *La Poesia Lirica del Duecento* (Salinari, UTET, 1951), (towards the second half of the 13th Century).

Dante da Maiano, from: *Dante da Maiano: Rime* (Bellarini, Le Monnier, 1969), (c. 1301).

Guittone d'Arezzo, from: *Rime di Guittone d'Arezzo* (Bonifazi, Argalia, 1950), (towards the second half of the 13th Century).

Il Mare amoroso, from: *Poeti del Duecento* (Contini, Ricciardi, 1960), (late 13th Century).

Dolce Stil Nuovo

Guido Guinizzelli is generally recognised as the precursor of a group of poets whose writing came to be categorised as the *dolce stil nuovo*, an expression first used by Dante when identifying a new mode of writing in relation to Guittone and other predecessors. It flourished in the later 13th and early 14th centuries and was influenced by the *Scuola siciliana* and the *Scuola toscana*. The poets and poetry I have used from this tradition are as follows:

Guido Guinizzelli, from: *Guido Guinizzelli: Rime* (Rossi, Einaudi, 2002), (towards the second half of the 13th Century).

Guido Cavalcanti, from: *Guido Cavalcanti: Rime, con le Rime di Iacopo Cavalcanti* (De Robertis, Einaudi, 1986), (towards the late 13th Century).

Lapo Gianni, from: *La Poesia Lirica del Duecento* (Salinari, UTET, 1951), (between the late 13th and early 14th Centuries).

Cino da Pistoia, from: *Poeti del Duecento* (Contini, Ricciardi, 1960), (between the late 13th and early 14th Centuries).

Dante:

The *Fiore*, from: *Il Fiore e il Detto d'Amore: Attribuibili a Dante Alighieri* (Contini, Mondadori, 1984), (between 1280 and 1293).

The *Detto d'Amore*, from: *Il Fiore e il Detto d'Amore: Attribuibili a Dante Alighieri* (Contini, Mondadori, 1984), (c. 1285 and 1290).

The *Vita Nuova*, from: *Dante Alighieri: Opere Minori* (De Robertis and Contini, Ricciardi, 1984), (between 1292 and 1293).

The *Convivio*, from: *Dante Alighieri: Convivio* (Ageno, Le Lettere, 1995), (between 1304 and 1307).

The *Commedia*, from: *Dante Alighieri: La Divina Commedia* (Sapegno, Ricciardi, 1957), (between 1308 and 1321).

Prose

The *Novellino*, from: *Novellino e Conti del Duecento* (Lo Nigro, UTET, 1963), (between 1280 and 1300).

Marco Polo's *Milione* (c. 1292):

Marco Polo: Il Milione Veneto, ms. CM 211 della biblioteca Civica di Padova (Barbieri, Marsilio, 1999).

Marco Polo: Il Milione (Ruggieri, Olschki, 1986).

Other Texts

Ars Amatoria, from: *Ovidi Nasonis: Ars Amatoria* (Lenz, Paraviae et Sociorum, 1969), (between 1 BC and 1 AD).

Ars Versificatoria, from: *Matthei Vindocinensis: Opera, Ars Versificatoria* (Munari, Storia e Letteratura, 1988), (before 1175).

Le Roman de la Rose, from: *Guillaume De Lorris et Jeun De Meun: Le Roman de la Rose* (Lanly, Librairie Honoré Champion, 1971). (begun by Guillaume De Lorris c. 1237).

Liber de Planctu Naturae, from: 'Alanus de Insulis: Doctoris Universalis, Opera Omnia', *Patrologia Latina*, (Migne, 1855), (before 1171).

In Librum Beati Dionysii de Divinis Nominibus Expositio, from: *S. Thomae Aquinatis: In Librum Beati Dionysii de Divinis Nominibus Expositio* (Pera, Marietti, 1950), (between 1265 and 1268).

Naturalis Historiae, from: *C Plini Secundi: Naturalis Historiae, Libri XXXVII* (Mayhoff, Teubneri, 1906), (c. 77AD).

Chapter 1

'La Bellezza d'una Donna': Aspects of Form

Introduction

What follows is an account of female beauty as represented in Italian literature from the years 1230 to 1330. It explores and catalogues beauty from the point of view of the *descriptio mulieris* – that is a description of the female form beginning at the head and ending at the feet – and includes definitions of beauty by establishing, by way of a sort of counterpoint to the main theme, what is ugly. I shall also consider in this chapter beauty from the point of view of cosmetics, dress, and other adornment. I begin, though, with a number of general considerations relative to the conception and celebration of the female form in antiquity and in the medieval period.

The female form

Descriptions of beauty among the poets and writers of the period of beauty generally involve notions of symmetry, proportion, size, shape, complexion and colour. These notions come down from antiquity. In ancient Egypt, an artist, in representing the body, '[...] first constructed a network of equal squares and then inserted into this network the outlines of his figure unconcerned as to whether each line of the network coincided with

one of the organically significant junctures of the body [...]. The Greek artist-theoretician proceeded in the opposite way. He did not start with a mechanically constructed network in which he subsequently accommodated the figure; he started, instead, with the human figure, organically differentiated into torso, limbs and parts of the limbs, and subsequently tried to ascertain how these parts related to each other and to the whole.'[1] According to the ancient Greek sculptor Polyclitus, physical beauty involved above all the perfect accountability of one part of the body to another, each having about it a proper symmetry and proportion.[2] As such, it can be understood in mathematical terms, everything corresponding to everything else in a reasonable or calculated fashion. An example of this is found in a description of a beautiful girl set out in the *Documentum de Modo et Arte Dictandi et Versificandi* by Geoffroi de Vinsauf, a text describing the art of speaking and versifying, written at the beginning of the 13th Century. The description was paraphrased as follows by de Bruyne in his history of medieval aesthetics: 'Au corps svelte et gracile, à la taille mince, aux épaules ni tombantes ni carrées, adaptées à l'ensemble par une loi musicale d'harmonie, aux bras délicats et longs terminés par des doigts enfilés, à la poitrine neigeuse gonflée de deux petits seins, aux jambes légères appuyées sur un petit pied, telle apparait au poète la jeune fille.'[3] To the fore, then, are considerations of size, symmetry, shape, and unity, in addition to which de Bruyne notes a number of other ideal features of female beauty as conceived by Geoffroi and his contemporaries. Thus the woman's body, especially as regards her legs, is slender and light. She has good posture, shown in her shoulders, and her arms are long. Other features, however, especially her breasts and her feet, are small, but there is overall, a sense of harmony and proportion, a proper correspondence

[1] E. Panofsky, *Meaning in the Visual Arts* (London: Penguin, 1955), p. 93.
[2] Ibid.

of parts within the whole (de Bruyne's nicely expressive 'par une loi musicale d'harmonie').[4] Similarly eloquent in respect of what amounts, therefore, to a *communis opinio* or general stereotype for the period is, for example, the description of Cleopatra found in the *Fatti di Cesare* sequence of the *Intelligenzia* (208), where we find the following:

> Con quelle spalle piene e si ben fatte,
> Con quel petto grossetto e sovrastante;
> E l'anche avea grossette, e isnelle e adatte,
> Le man sottili e i nodi d'un sembiante;
> Le gambe sue grossette, e ben ritratte,
> E 'l piè su' corto e dritto e ben calzante.
>
> (ll. 1-6)[5]

Here Cleopatra is described as having full and well formed shoulders, with discreetly ample breasts and slender hips. Her hands are slim, her legs are well rounded and her feet are small and straight, the whole, therefore, confirming a readily documentable pattern of thought and imagination.

However, it is not just the size, shape and proportion of the body that makes it beautiful. Beauty is also a matter of presentation. In sonnet CLXV of the *Fiore* we find advice from the Vecchia on how women should attempt to appear:

> E s'ella va da.ssera o da mattina
> Fuor di sua casa, vada contamente:
> Non vada troppo ritta né tro' china,
>
> Sì ch'ella piaccia a chi.lla terrà mente.
>
> (ll. 9-12)[6]

The case, admittedly, is a particular one in that it is a question here of advice for whores, the whole thing, therefore, having about it a meretricious aspect. Nonetheless,

---

[3] E. de Bruyne, *Études D'Esthétique Médiévale: L'Époque Romane* (Brugge: Tempelhof, 1946), vol 2, p. 183.

[4] The representation of Eve in figure 3 shows her to conform to the general theories of female beauty outlined here. We notice her slim build, her long limbs, her small breasts and her pale skin. She appears as a symbol of womanhood and the pinnacle of earthly beauty.

[5] 'Fatti di Cesare' in *L' Intelligenzia*, edited by V. Mistruzzi (Bologna: Carducci, 1928).

there are some general considerations. Women should always strive for elegance. They are advised to walk with their backs neither too straight nor too stooping, posture thus being a principle of pleasure.

Another way of characterising beauty in a woman is to consider its opposite, the ugly. In the *Enneads,* Plotinus suggests that the soul of an observer shrinks away from what is ugly.[7] This notion is echoed in the *Novellino*. In, for example, the eighth story of the collection there is an incident involving a pilgrim who committed an offence and had to pay a fine, or, as punishment, he would be blinded. The pilgrim, unable to pay, was blindfolded and taken away. As he was led through the town a wealthy woman noticed him. Finding him handsome, she agreed to pay his fine on condition that he became her husband. The pilgrim agreed to these terms, and was brought before the woman where his blindfold was removed:

> Il pellegrino quando vide la donna così laida, disse a coloro che lo avieno sfasciato perch'egli vedesse la donna: Rinbende! Rinbende! Ché meglio è non vedere mai, che vedere sempre cosa che gli spiaccia.[8]

Seeing the ugliness of the woman, the pilgrim pleaded for the blindfold to be replaced and the punishment resumed, so he would not have to look upon her ugliness. Ugliness, therefore, is objectionable, a state of affairs confirmed later on in the tale as the lord of the town, hearing what has come to pass, absolves the pilgrim and sets him free. But what are properties of ugliness? Instructive here is the *Milione* of Marco Polo, where, in Chapter CLXXII, he describes the women of Zachibar. We are told first of the general appearance of the inhabitants, and then, specifically, what the women look like:

---

[6] 'Il Fiore', in *Il Fiore e il Detto d'Amore: attribuibili a Dante Alighieri*, edited by G. Contini (Milan: Mondadori, 1984).
[7] M. R. Miles, *Plotinus on Body and Beauty: Society, Philosophy and Religion in Third Century Rome* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), p. 38.
[8] 'Novelle Adespote dei primi del Trecento', in *Novellino e Conti del Duecento* edited by S. lo Nigro (Turin: UTET, 1963).

> E sono tutti neri e vanno ignudi, se non che ricuoprono loro natura; e sono i loro capegli ricciuti. Egli hanno gran bocca, e 'l naso rabuffato in suso, e le labbra e le nari grosse ch'è maraviglia, ché chi gli vedesse in altri paesi parebbono diavoli [...] Qui si ha le più sozze femmine del mondo, ch'elle hanno la bocca grande, e il naso grosso e corto, e le mani grosse quattro cotanti che l'altre.[9]

Physically, the women described are considered to be the antithesis of the European notion of female beauty. The inhabitants of Zachibar are black, contrasting to the purity associated with white skin; they have large mouths and their noses are described as flat, short and wide. This last feature stands in contrast to the chiselled appearance or 'naso afilato' (ll. 59) of Nature in the *Tesoretto*.[10] Characteristic also of the female inhabitants of Zachibar is the size of their hands, which are four times larger than those of European women as indicated at the end of the passage.[11] Marco Polo suggests, that people such as this, were they observed elsewhere, would be thought of as devils.

In the *Ars Versificatoria* (58) there is another – this time detailed – account of the ugly. It is an account based on the physical appearance of Beroe, advanced by Matthew of Vendôme as the antithesis of Helen of Troy, who embodies everything that is deformed, disproportionate and generally unattractive in nature. Commenting on her appearance he says:

> Corpore terribilis, contactu feda, quietas
> Cervicis scabies rigido servata galero,
> Debita deesse sibi pabula musca dolet.
> Pelle, pilis capud est nodum, ferrugo rigescit
> Fronte minax, turpis, lurida, sorde fluens.
>
> (ll 5-9)[12]

---

[9] *Marco Polo: Il Milione*, edited by R. M. Ruggieri, Biblioteca dell' 'Archivum Romanticum', serie 1, vol. 200 (Florence: Olschki, 1986). All references to the *Milione* will be from this edition unless otherwise stated.

[10] *Brunetto Latini: Il Tesoretto*, edited by M. Ciccuto (Milan: Rizzoli, 1985).

[11] There is some discrepancy over the meaning of the term 'mani' used here. I have translated it as 'hands' however, it can also be understood to mean 'breasts'.

[12] *Matthei Vindocinensis: Opera, Ars Versificatoria*, edited by F. Munari, vol. 3 (Rome: Storia e Letteratura, 1988).

Here we are told that Beroe had a body which was dirty and repulsive to touch. Her neck and head were covered with itching sores, and she was without hair. Her skin was parched, resembling rust, and her brow was filthy and pale. The passage goes on to detail every aspect of her unsightly, obnoxious and aged body that no longer functions as it once did. Her skin has none of the smoothness associated with that of beautiful women and its colour is concealed under grime and sores. The head, often depicted as the crowning glory of any beautiful woman, is bald. Everything here stands over against the elegance, comeliness and sweet functionality of the body as celebrated by the lover and the poet. Ugliness is always an offence to the kind of harmony and gentle radiance customarily associated by the poet or lover with his lady.

Youth

Youth is fundamental to descriptions of beauty because it affects every physical aspect of the female form. In many cases, the celebration of youth occurs indirectly, or is implicit within descriptions of beautiful women, where its presence is felt but not necessarily confirmed explicitly. This occurs in descriptions of, for example, smooth skin, a freshness of the face, and a well-proportioned and erect frame. In the sonnet, *Avete 'n vo' li fior' e la verdura* by Cavalcanti, we read:

> Avete 'n vo' li fior' e la verdura
> E ciò che luce ed è bello a vedere;
> Risplende più che sol vostra figura:
> Chi vo' non vede, ma' non pò valere.
>
> (ll. 1-4)[13]

The woman's youth is confirmed as the poet compares her with the greenness of the fields in spring. This greenness is said to be resplendent and shines more brightly

[13] *Guido Cavalcanti: Rime, con le Rime di Iacopo Cavalcanti*, edited by D. de Robertis (Turin: Einaudi, 1986). All poems by Cavalcanti will be referenced from this edition.

than the sun. Comparable in this sense is Alan of Lille's account of Nature in *De Planctu Naturae*. She is described as having:

> Mamillarum pomula gratiose juventutis maturitatum
>
> spondebant.
>
> (282. C)[14]

Nature, Alan says, has apple-like breasts indicative of her youthfulness. De Bruyne, in his analysis of Hugh of St Victor on this matter, discusses the importance of youth. Hugh's own floral analogy is used to demonstrate the point in time when women appear most beautiful: 'Seule la tièdeur du printemps pare (la terre) de la beauté des fleurs: ainsi c'est la seule jeunesse qui donne aux femmes l'éclat de la grâce. Comme la fleur est brûlée par le gel ou détruite par le frimas, ainsi la beauté de la femme est menacée par la maladie et anéantie par la vieillesse.'[15] Youth and beauty, therefore, belong absolutely together in a woman. This is the position too in Cavalcanti's *Fresca rosa novella,* where the poet delights in the same combination:

> Fresca rosa novella,
> Piacente primavera,
> Per prata e per rivera
> Gaiamente cantando
> Vostro fin pregio mando – a la verdura.
>
> (ll. 1-5)

Here the beauty of the poet's lady, Primavera by name, is shown to come from the freshness of her youth, which is depicted as a new spring rose. Primavera's beauty – the beauty of youth – is often the focus of Cavalcanti's attention and praise, her very name bearing, precisely, on the notions of youth and renewal.

---

[14] 'Liber de Planctu Naturae', in 'Alanus de Insulis: Doctoris Universalis, Opera Omnia', in *Patrologia Latina*, edited by J. P. Migne, vol. 210 (1855).
[15] De Bruyne, II, p. 197.

But what exactly does *youth* mean here? What sort of age has the poet in mind? In sonnet CCIII of the *Fiore* we discover a clue. We are told of the moment that Durante is at last rewarded:

> Quand' i' udì' l'oferta che facea,
> Del fatto mi' credett' es[s]er certano:
> Allor sì volli al fior porre la mano,
>
> Che molto ringrossato mi parea.
>
> (ll. 1-4)

This passage describes the final moments of Durante's adventures, the moment at which he is given permission to pluck the rose. At this point he notices that the rose has blossomed and has thus grown from the time it first appeared as a bud, at the beginning of the text. These verses can be understood as an indication of physical maturity. The rose, hitherto still young – a child – has now reached puberty. Although there is every indication that the rose was attractive while still (so to speak) an infant, it is not actually plucked until it has blossomed. Age and maturity are also an issue in relation to the character Jeunesse, of the *Roman de la Rose*. She appears as follows:

> Jeunesse au visage clair et riant,
> Qui n'avait pas encore dépassé de beaucoup,
> Je crois, l'âge de douze ans.
>
> (ll. 1258-60)[16]

Jeunesse is said to be not quite twelve years old, which is normal for the onset of puberty. Her face is described as clear and full of laughter, and then, at a later stage in the passage, we are told of her purity and innocence. She is shown as a character full of childlike qualities, still young enough to play games and have few cares. Beauty, then, – optimally – belongs to a woman on the verge of her womanhood, as possessing, that is

[16] *Guillaume de Lorris et Jeun de Meun : Le Roman de la Rose*, edited by A. Lanly (Paris: Librairie Honoré Champion, 1971), vol. 1.

to say, the essential characteristics of a woman while yet maintaining the innocence and purity of a child.

A further link between female beauty and youth is to be found in the discourse of the Vecchia in sonnet CXLVI of the *Fiore*, where she explains the importance of these two things as a means of quick profit. The Vecchia is an aged whore who laments the loss of her beauty. She complains that she now lives in poverty, a direct result of her ageing, as her beauty had been her only source of income. She laments her failure to take full advantage of her beauty when she was young, since at the time she did not realise how profitable the game of love could be:

> Se del giuoco d'amor i' fosse essuta
> Ben sag[g]ia quand' i' era giovanella,
> I' sare' ric[c]a più che damigella
> O donna che.ttu ag[g]ie og[g]i veduta:
>
> Ch' i' fu' sì trapiacente in mia venuta
> Che per tutto cor[r]ëa la novella
> Com' i' era cortese e gente e bella;
> Ma.cciò mi pesa, ch' i' non fu' saputa.
>
> (ll. 1-8)

Conspicuous here is the link between beauty and youth, and, beneath this, between beauty and innocence. Only in her decrepitude is the old *entremetteuse* aware of beauty's openness to exploitation, age impinging, in her view, to cloud its simplicity and radiance. The basic equation of youth and beauty is, in this sense, plain to see.

This same equation is open to contemplation in the context of the social situation of women in this period, when the harsh demands of ordinary living, indeed of ordinary survival, would often cause the body to deteriorate quickly. Peasant women and those of the lower classes were aged and disfigured by hard physical labour and by a lack of those creature comforts enjoyed by the upper classes. All women changed after having children: 'The ideal woman was very young. At twenty five, most women had already been through several pregnancies, so that they were marked for life. "At thirty five, they

are old and worn, and can only show themselves if they are wearing make-up," says the thirteenth century troubadour Adam de la Halle.'[17] The transience of beauty is, in fact, confirmed in sonnet CL of the *Fiore,* which again expresses the situation of the Vecchia. She says:

> Vec[c]hia increspata mi facean chiamare
> A colù' solamente che giadisse
> Più carnalmente mi solea amare.
>
> (ll. 12-14)

Those who previously desired her, see the Vecchia now only as a wrinkled old woman. As Plato said, beauty, in the world around us, is never static or unchanging.[18] Every living thing waxes and wanes, and, in the same way, beauty blossoms and fades. The same is clear from Guillaume de Lorris's description of Vieillesse in the *Roman de la Rose*:

> Ensuite était représentée Vieillesse,
> Qui avait bien perdu un pied de la taille
> Qu'elle avait autrefois,
> Si bien qu'à peine aurait-elle pu s'alimenter,
> Tant elle était vieille et tombée en enfance.
> Sa beauté ètait fort altérée
> Elle était devenue bien laide.
> Sa tâte était entièrement chenue
> Et blanche si elle eût été fleurie.
> Si elle était morte, ce n'eût pas été une perte très sensible.
>
> (ll. 339-48)

Vieillesse is described as having lost a foot in height as she has aged. Her head is covered in white hair and if she were to die, the poet says, it would be no great loss.[19] Here as throughout, ugliness is associated with age, beauty, in life as in literature, being a matter of youthful freshness.

---

[17] J. Walgrave, *Het Labo van de Verleiding: Geschiedenis van de Make-up; The Laboratory of Seduction: History of Make-up* (Antwerp: Koningin Fabiolazaal, 1998), p. 93.
[18] See again *Plato: The Republic*, edited and translated by D. Lee (London: Penguin, 1987), VII, ii, 479 a and b.

The hair

Prominent among the features making for beauty in a woman is her hair. The hair is the crowning glory of any woman, and the way it appears confirms her beauty, her wealth and her social status. In some cases, the hair is shown to demonstrate aspects of the woman's personality, morality and wisdom. Its colour and length and how it is worn, parted and adorned, indicates a certain nobility and moral excellence. Nature's head, in the *Tesoretto*, is described in this way:

> Il capel de la testa,
> Sì ch'io credea che 'l crino
> Fosse d'un oro fino,
> Partito sanza trezze.
>
> (ll. 246-49)

Brunetto Latini's description of Nature in this passage coincides in this sense with Émile Mâle's description of the statues of the fourteen beatitudes found in the north porch at Chartres Cathedral: 'These fourteen beatitudes are fourteen queens with crowns and halos. They have an air of nobility and freedom. Their unbounded hair flows to their shoulders; their full robes fall into straight folds and mould the pure lines of their noble bodies.'[20] Here, as in the *Tesoretto*, the woman in her beauty is iconic, and suggestive in her iconicity of virtue generally, of the fourteen gifts of the soul. Her hair is especially eloquent in this respect. Long and falling freely on the shoulders, it not constrained or tied back in any way. As such, it is a symbol of femininity and decisive both for her goodness and for her beauty. Here, indeed, it suggests surpassing excellence in these things.

---

[19] See figure 4 for an illustration of Vieillesse. Her hair and body are completely covered in an attempt to hide the ravages of time upon her form. Her face is wrinkled and she is bent over.

[20] É. Mâle, *Religious Art in France: The Thirteenth Century, A Study of Medieval Iconography and its Sources*, Bollingen Series XC (2) (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 387. See figure 5 for a general illustration of the beatitudes at Chartres Cathedral. See also figure 6 for a depiction of Concord, one of the beatitudes. We clearly see her unbounded hair, her crown and her shield.

Another feature of note is the link between beauty and blondeness. This is the case in, for example, texts such as the *Roman de la Rose.* Much of Guillaume's part of the narrative involves personifications of various kinds of virtue and vice, physical as well as spiritual. Beauté, as her name suggests, is an ideal image of everything fair and becoming. Every part of her form is supremely beautiful, and especially notable is her fair hair:

> Elle avait des cheveux blonds et longs
>
> Qui venaient battre ses talons [...]
>
> (ll. 1007-08)

Here again beauty is evident in the length and colour of the lady's hair which is described as long and blonde, reaching, in fact, down to her heels.[21] Another description of hair is to be found in the ballata *In un boschetto trova' pasturella* by Cavalcanti beginning in this way:

> In un boschetto trova' pasturella
> Più che la stella – bella, al mi' parere.
>
> Cavelli avea biondetti e ricciutelli,
> E gli occhi pien d'amor, cera rosata.
>
> (ll. 1-4)

This poem celebrates the poet's love for a girl with curly blonde hair. This passage is in fact particularly interesting in that in most cases the beautiful women praised by the poet are either iconic or otherwise exemplary, as in the case of Nature in the *Tesoretto,* or else belong to the upper echelons of society. Although Cavalcanti maintains the style and thematics of praise poetry generally, this piece, by contrast, is concerned with a woman of modest status.

[21] The image of the grieving Mary Magdalene in figure 7 demonstrates clearly the beauty of blonde hair. We see that her hair is long, reaching down to her waist, and full with gentle waves. Her hair-line begins high on her head allowing for a broad brow and an unobstructed view of her face. The colour of her hair appears all the more vibrant by the paleness of her skin, the blush of her cheeks and the radiance of her halo.

At the end of the ballata *Questa rosa novella* by Lapo Gianni we find another hymn to fair hair:

> Ballata giovenzella,
> Girai a quella c'ha la bionda trezza,
> Ch'Amor per la su' altezza
> M'ha comandato i' sia servente d'ella.
>
> (ll. 25-28)[22]

In this passage the lady is said to have blonde plaited hair, plaits being a commonplace of contemporary coiffure. They were especially fashionable for European women during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and were often turned with gold threads, beads, and different types of ribbon. The hair would be parted in one or two plaits and was kept long, often never being cut at all.[23] Other fashions encouraged the use of head-dresses such as wimples. They were worn to frame the face, and formed part of an elaborate hairstyle. Wimples were worn by all women, young and old, though married women would wear veils over them.[24]

Blonde hair, in southern parts of Europe, was a rarity during the medieval period, especially in the Mediterranean where people were naturally darker. It was only after the travels of the Romans to northern Europe that blonde hair became a commonsight and began to be appreciated. In fact, blonde hair became so desirable among Roman women that they often took to wearing wigs.[25] We also find evidence to this effect in earlier civilisations, in ancient Greece for example, in the works of the Greek poet Menander.[26] We are told that the women used ointments to bleach their hair,

---

[22] *Poeti del Duecento*, edited by G. Contini, vol. 2 (Milan: Ricciardi, 1960). All references to the poetry of Lapo Gianni are taken from this edition.
[23] See in this respect figure 8, where we find that the hair has been parted and arranged into a single braid and a head-dress has been added to enhance its general appearance.
[24] E. Ennen, *The Medieval Woman*, translated by E. Jephcott (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), pp. 218-19.
[25] R. T. Lakoff and R. L. Scherr, *Face Value: The Politics of Beauty* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), p. 35.
[26] Walgrave, p. 61.

and that this was enhanced by the use of hair pieces and other adornments. Blondeness, with the passing of time, thus entered into the general sense of female beauty.

To return to the Middle Ages and to the period and texts under discussion, a further example is found in Giacomo da Lentini's canzone *Maravigliosamente*. The poet addresses the song he has written and tells it to present itself

> [...] a la più bella,
> Fiore d'ogn'amorosa,
> Bionda più ch'auro fino.
>
> (ll. 58-60)[27]

Comparable is the canzone *Quando vegio rinverdire* by Giacomo Pugliese. The poet states:

> Donna, per vostra 'noranza
> Sicurastemi la vita,
> Donastemi per amanza
> Una treccia d'auro ponita
> Ed io la porto a membranza.
>
> (ll. 32-36)[28]

There are many similarities between these women and Nature in *De Planctu Naturae*. Fair hair is throughout acknowledged as a sign of beauty. The word *gold* was often used to describe blonde hair and thus extends the meditation to worth and to specifically moral excellence. Gold is also both costly and rare, making it difficult to obtain. In the same way, women with blonde hair are understood to have a particularity, rarity and desirability, thus being objects of special pursuit. Another aspect of blonde hair, in its association with gold, is that it is seen to reflect or to represent light. In this case, we are reminded of the Neoplatonic idea of light as a symbol of truth. Beauty in these circumstances becomes almost transcendent, a showing-forth of the pure idea in all its special splendour. All in all, then, 'blondeness', as Lakoff and Scherr put it, 'is [...]

---

[27] *Giacomo da Lentini: Poesie*, edited by R. Antonelli (Rome: Bulzoni, 1979). All references to the poetry of Giacomo da Lentini are taken from this edition unless otherwise stated.
[28] *La Poesia Lirica del Duecento*, edited by C. Salinari (Turin: UTET, 1951). All references to the poetry of Giacomo Pugliese are taken from this edition.

the quintessence of the utterly feminine. Therefore, the perfect blonde should capture in herself all that is stereotypically desirable in a woman. Blondeness is itself a sort of passivity: the fairness of the hair, eyes and skin of the perfect blonde is parchment, the proverbial *tabula rasa* to be written upon, to absorb and reflect the ideals and illusions of those who look upon her.'[29] It is all, then, a matter of association, of what goes on in the mind of the poet as he contemplates his lady and what, in a variety of different senses, she seems to him to symbolise by way both of phantasy and of perfection.

The face

The face is important because it is the focal point of the body, and thus figures prominently in the portrayal and celebration of female beauty. Dante, in the *Convivio* (III. viii. 7-8), notes the importance of this:

> Onde vedemo che nella faccia dell'uomo, là dove fa più del suo officio che in alcuna parte di fuori, tanto sottilmente intende, che, per sottigliarsi quivi tanto quanto nella sua materia puote, nullo viso ad altro viso è simile: perché l'ultima potenza della materia, la quale [è] in tutti quasi dissimile, quivi si riduce in atto. E però che nella faccia massimamente in due luoghi opera l'anima – però che in quelli due luoghi quasi tutte e tre le nature dell'anima hanno giurisdizione – cioè nelli occhi e nella bocca, quelli massimamente adorna e quivi pone lo 'ntento tutto a fare bello, se puote.
>
> (ll. 36-45)[30]

It is here in the face, he says, that the individual registers pleasure or displeasure. It is here that the otherwise hidden experience of the soul is expressed and reflected. And it is here, in the eyes and the mouth especially, that we glimpse the inner beauty of the soul, this in turn bringing pleasure to the observer. Here, then, is an aesthetic matter of the first importance.

---

[29] Lakoff and Scherr, p. 35.
[30] *Dante Alighieri: Convivio*, edited by F. B. Ageno, 2nd edn (Florence: Le Lettere, 1995).

In *Fiori e vita di filosafi ed altri savi ed imperadori* (XXVIII) the questions asked by the Emperor explore precisely this issue. The philosopher is asked:

"Che è fronte?" "La fronte è immagine de l'animo."[31]

The brow, comes the reply, is said to show forth the soul. The idea is commonplace both in Dante and among medieval poets and philosophers generally, for whom to celebrate the beauty of the face is to celebrate the beauty of the soul. In the writings of Cassiodorus on aesthetics, as De Bruyne tells us, we find: 'Dans le corps, la tête est la partie la plus belle: dans la tête, rien n'est plus beau que le visage. Or le visage est le miroir de la vie affective et de l'activité libre de l'âme. C'est dans le visage que se manifestent les signes de intelligence pratique [...].'[32] To contemplate the beauty of the face is to ponder the deeper characteristics of the soul. Shape, size, colour, texture of skin and general proportion all matter here. In his poem *Oïmè lasso, quelle trezze bionde*, Cino da Pistoia has the following:

Oïmè lasso, quelle trezze bionde
Da le quai riluciéno
D'aureo color li poggi d'ogni intorno;
Oimè, la bella ciera e le dolci onde,
Che nel cor mi fediéno,
Di quei begli occhi al ben segnato giorno;
Oimè, 'l fresco ed adorno
E rilucente viso,
Oimè, lo dolce riso
Per lo qual si vedea la bianca neve
Fra le rose vermiglie d'ogni tempo.

(ll. 1-11)[33]

Here we are told that the woman has blonde hair that has been divided into two golden braids which brighten everything that surrounds them. She has a beautifully adorned face which shines forth, creating an image apt henceforth to dwell in the heart

[31] 'Fiori e vita di filosafi ed altri savi ed imperadori', *La Prosa del Duecento*, edited by C. Segre and M. Marti (Milan: Ricciardi, 1959).
[32] *Études D'Esthétique Médiévale: De Boèce a Jean Scot Erigène*, (Brugge: Tempelhof, 1946), vol 1, pp. 72-3.
[33] *Poeti del Duecento*, edited by G. Contini, vol. 2 (Milan: Ricciardi, 1960). All references to the poetry of Cino da Pistoia will be from this edition.

of the lover. Her lips smile and her teeth, white as snow, are set about by her rose-red lips. Another such account of the face and its proper beauty is to be found in the canzone *De la mia disïanza* by Federico II, who writes as follows:

> Ma tanto m'asicura
> Lo suo viso amoroso
> E lo gioiso riso e lo sguardare
> E lo parlar di quella criatura
> Che per paura mi face penare
> E dimorare: tant'è fina e pura.
>
> (ll. 22-27)[34]

The passage says that the beauty of his lady's face derives from her joyful smiles and glances, and from the way she speaks. Beauty is based not merely on the static features of the face, caught in a moment of time, but is also observed whenever the woman smiles, speaks and glances around her. Other features often described include those of the colour and the clarity of the woman's complexion. In the discordo *Donna, per vostro amore* by Giacomo Pugliese we hear the poet praise his lady as follows:

> La vostra gran belleze
> Messo m'ha in ismagamento;
> Donami allegreze,
> Chiarita in viso più ch'argento.
>
> (ll. 86-89)

Particularly enticing, we are told, is the radiance of her countenance, which is said to shine like silver, something suggesting the beauty of pure white skin and of an unblemished complexion – features frequently compared with beauty of the moon, of the sun, and of precious metals, suggesting between them something both rarefied and extremely precious.

The eyebrows and eyes

With this, we come now to the details of physiognomy. The eyes are of special importance. There are three things to consider here. First, there is the beauty of the eye in and for itself; secondly, there is the beauty of their movement; and thirdly, there is the notion of the beauty of the eyes reflecting that of the soul. A description of the beauty of the eyes (and of eyebrows) in and for itself is to be found in the anonymous poem *Mare amoroso*. The lady is referred to as having:

> Igli occhi, belli come di girfalco,
> Ma son di bavalischio, per sembianza,
> Che saetta il veleno collo sguardo;
> I cigli bruni e sottili, avolti in forma d'arco
> Ma saettano al cor d'una saetta.
>
> (ll. 93-97)[35]

The eyes are said to be as beautiful as those of a falcon and as poisonous as those of a basilisk.[36] The eyebrows are thin, brown and are curved into an arch. Similarly, in the canzone *La gioia e l'alegranza* by Chiaro Davanzati we are given this description:

> Li suoi cavei dorati
> E li cigli neretti
> E vòlti com'archetti,
> Con due occhi morati.
>
> (ll. 25-28)[37]

Here the poet states that his lady's eyebrows are black and arched and the eyes brown in colour. The eyes and eyebrows are in this sense understood to stand out against the background of her golden hair and pale skin. The eyebrows, being arched and darker than the hair makes of them a kind of prelude to the beauty of the eyes

---

[34] *Federico II di Svevia* edited by L. Cassata (Rome: Quiritta, 2001). All references to the poetry of Federico II will be from this edition.
[35] 'Il Mare amoroso', in *Poeti del Duecento*, edited by G. Contini, vol. 1 (Milan: Ricciardi, 1960).
[36] The myths surrounding the nature of both the falcon and the basilisk and their comparison to women are discussed more fully in the second chapter of this study.
[37] *La Poesia Lirica del Duecento*, edited by C. Salinari (Turin: UTET, 1951). All references to the poetry of Chiaro Davanzati are taken from this edition.

below.[38] They in effect frame the eyes, like a painting whose splendour is enhanced by its surround.

In the *Fatti di Cesare* (207) section of the *Intelligenzia* we are given a description of the Egyptian queen Cleopatra. The shape and appearance of the brow, eyebrows and eyes are described in this way:

> La fronte avea lucente ed ampia e piana
> E sovraccigli sottili e ben volti;
> Dell'altre donne belle è la sovrana,
> Con li occhi vaghi coi cape' risolti.
> Neente vide chi laudò Morgana.
>
> (ll. 1-5)

Cleopatra's brow, we are told, is wide and radiant. Her eyebrows are thin and arched, and her eyes are seductive. Her beauty is shown to be greater than that of Morgan le Fey, a fairy of Arthurian legend famed for her beauty. Here, remarkably, there is no further reference to the eyes and their particular colouring. It is as if the description of the eyebrows is sufficient to express Cleopatra's beauty and the effect it has upon the lover. A further account of the brows is to be found in *De Planctu Naturae*, where we are told:

> Supercilia aureo stellata fulgore, non in silvam evagantia, nec in nimiam demissa pauperiem, inter utrumque medium obtinebant. Oculorum serena placiditas amica blandiens claritate, gemelli praeferebat sideris novitem.
>
> (282, B-C)

The eyebrows are arched and of fine shape, texture and size, all of which shows off the eyes to great effect. Their femininity lies in the avoidance of the extremes, for they are neither too bushy nor too thin. They are neither over-emphasised nor understated. The eyes themselves, by contrast, sparkle like the stars. They are like celestial bodies in themselves, and similarly impressive as objects of contemplation. In

[38] See figure 9 for an illustration of the Virgin Mary. Here we see that the Madonna's eyebrows are thin, arched and slightly darker in colour than her hair which is just visible beneath the veil. The arch of the

the sonnet *Io guardo per li prati ogni fior bianco* by Cino da Pistoia we find another account and celebration of the eyes, as always an encouragement to love. Busy in search of flowers apt to remind him of his lady, the poet goes on:

> E' mi rimembra della bianca parte,
> Che fa col verdebrun la bella taglia,
> La qual vestìo Amore
> Nel tempo che, guardando Vener Marte,
> Con quella sua saetta che più taglia
> Mi die' per mezzo il core.
>
> (ll. 4-9)

Love, Cino says, has dressed himself in the same colours as those of the eyes of Selvaggia, his lady, and has once more, therefore, struck the poet with his arrows of love. More precisely, the white of Love's garment recalls the whites of her eyes, and the greens and browns of that same garment, her irises and pupils. Eyes, therefore, with their formal properties duly registered, are central to the poet's love-meditation.

The beauty of the eyes is not only evident in their physical appearance, but it is also found in their mobility, in the pleasure of the glance. This is frequent to the point of 'topicality' among the poets. In Guido delle Colonne's canzone *Amor che lungiamente m'hai menato* we are told:

> Oi dolze cera con guardi soavi,
> Più bella d'altra che sia in vostra terra.
>
> (ll. 14-15)[39]

This extract describes the woman as more beautiful than any other because of her sweet face and gentle glances. It is not so much form as motion that matters here. Stillness gives way to animation and interaction as a principle of beauty. In other texts we find the idea that women's eyes are beautiful when they smile. They are appreciated because smiling eyes bestow on the face a certain radiance, expressive of inner

---

eyebrows follows a continuous and curving line to the nose thus framing the eyes.

[39] *Poeti del Duecento*, edited by G. Contini, vol. 1 (Milan: Ricciardi, 1960). All references to the poetry of Guido delle Colonne are taken from this edition.

refinement and civility. In, for example, Giacomo da Lentini's canzone *Poi non mi val merzé né ben servire,* the poet remarks:

> [...] non agio abento, – tanto 'l cor mi lanza
> Co li riguardi degli occhi ridenti.
>
> (ll. 44-45)

This passage expresses the lover's lament that he is victim to his lady's looks and laughing eyes. The idea that the eyes smile and, in smiling, contribute to a woman's beauty is also found in the *Roman de la Rose* in the description of the character Liesse:

> Elle avait un beau front, plein, sans rides,
> des sourcils bruns et arqués,
> des yeux gais et si enjoués
> que, par une sorte d'accord,
> ils riaient toujours avant la petite bouche.
>
> (ll. 842-46)

Liesse is said to have a brow free from wrinkles. Her eyebrows are brown in colour and arched, and her eyes are said to show laughter before even her lips move. Laughter in the eyes is once again an expression of inner joy and decorum. The same idea is registered in *Fiori e vita di filosafi ed altri savi ed imperadori* (XXVIII), where the question asked by the Emperor defines the function of the eyes and subsequently defines their beauty. 'Che sono li occhi?', the philosopher is asked, to which he replies 'Li occhi sono guide del corpo, vaselli di lume, mostratori de animo.' The eyes, he thinks, have three functions. First, they 'guide' the body, surveying and regulating its presence and activity. Secondly, they bear light, like a beacon of understanding and integrity. And thirdly, they manifest the soul in its inner and otherwise secret condition. Again, therefore, they are, in their special kind of beauty, spiritually revelatory and confirmatory. They speak well of the spirit.

The nose and mouth

Almost equal in importance as *loci* of beauty are the nose and the mouth, though here, at least as far as the nose is concerned, there is less in the texts to go on. This is partly due to that fact that the nose especially seems not to have been as crucial, aesthetically, as either the eyes or the mouth. Its beauty is for the most part a matter of discreet shape, size and proportionality. Even so, the nose and the mouth are understood to constitute between them the beauty of the lower face, as in the portrayal of Cleopatra in the *Fatti di Cesare* sequence in the *Intelligenzia* (207):

> I suoi labbri grossetti e bene accolti,
> Naso affilato, e bocca picciolella,
> E i denti minutelli e bianchi in ella,
> E i gai sembianti ch'ha nel viso effolti.
>
> (ll. 6-9)

Here we are told that Cleopatra has a small mouth with full and proportionate lips. Her nose is well formed and her teeth are small and white. The nose in particular is also described in the *Tesoretto,* where Nature is said to have:

> [...] lo naso afilato
> E lo dente argentato.
>
> (ll. 258-59)

Here we learn that her nose is straight and that her teeth shine like silver. This description reminds us of Helen of Troy in the *Ars Versificatoria* (I. 56) of Matthew of Vendôme, where the beauty of the lower part of her face is registered thus:

> Linea procedit naris non ausa inacere
> Aut inconsuluto luxuriare gradu.
>
> (ll. 21-22)

Here the nose is proportionate and is shown to be finely chiselled, neither too flat nor set at too great an angle.[40] As with the eyebrows in respect of the eyes, the nose

[40] See figure 10 for another depiction of the Virgin Mary. Her nose is straight, symmetrical, and in proportion to the rest of her face.

acts as a prelude to beauty of the mouth. It draws the eyes downwards preparing the observer for the beauties that lie below.

The mouth, by contrast, has an important part to play aesthetically. As with the eyes, its beauty is evident both in itself and in its mobility, and here too it is understood to be morally and spiritually revelatory. In the *Mare amoroso* we find this description of the lady's mouth:

> La bocca, piccioletta e colorita,
> Vermiglia come rosa di giardino,
> Piagente ed amorosa per basciare.
>
> (ll. 98-100)

The mouth is small with lips red like a rose – a delight, the poet says, to kiss. In the *Roman de la Rose* we are given a comparable account of Dame Oiseuse's mouth:

> Pour séduire les hommes un peu écervelés,
> Elle avait l'haleine douce et parfumée,
> Le visage blanc et teinté de rose,
> La bouche petite, assez charnue,
> Et au menton une fossette.
>
> (ll. 532-36)

The poet describes Dame Oiseuse's mouth as small and pleasing, with, to boot, sweet breath apt to please a man.[41] He emphasises too the importance of the mouth as part of the general appearance of the face. The red lips are prominent against his lady's fair complexion. The redness of the lips, like the striking colour of the eyes, causes the mouth to become the focal point of the face.

Descriptions of the nose and mouth in these poems are generally a matter of literary commonplace, as we see from de Bruyne's remarks on these issues: 'Le nez ne dépasse pas la droite ni au delà ni en deça; le teint n'est ni rouge ni pâle mais mélangé comme il convient; la bouche splendide est comme un petit demi – cercle d'où s'élèvent

[41] See figure 11 for an illustration of Dame Oiseuse. Her mouth is small, her lips are full and red in colour and she greets the lover with a smile.

les lèvres ni trop minces ni trop épaisses, les dents de neige sont toutes égales.'[42] Here too, it is all a question of shape, size, evenness, and colour. The nose is straight and the mouth petite. Important too is the evenness of the girl's teeth and the fact that her lips are neither too big nor too small. Finally, her teeth are as white as snow, and her complexion neither too pale nor too ruddy. The beauty of the lower part of the face arises in this sense from the unity of its parts, the whole having about it an ordered perfection.

As far as teeth are concerned, it is all a matter of colour, size, shape and evenness. Symmetry and proportion are everything. Beautiful teeth, a feature of youth, are ideally even, straight, not too large, and, most importantly, white. To the point in this sense is Chiaro Davanzati's *La gioia e l'alegranza*, where *madonna* is described as having

> Li denti minotetti
> Di perle sono serrati;
> Labbra vermiglia, li color' rosati:
> Cui mira par che tutte gioie saetti.
>
> (ll. 29-32)

The teeth are said to be small and similar to pearls, as well as properly proportioned to a small mouth – a small mouth, as we saw earlier being preferable. The teeth here are likened to pearls on account of their whiteness, and thus, like pearls, were especially to be prized. Similar in spirit is this passage about Nature from *De Planctu Naturae.* She is said to have

> Dentes quadam sui coloris consonantia eboris faciem exemplabant.
>
> (282, B)

[42] De Bruyne, II, p. 182-3.

If we put these two passages alongside those describing Helen of Troy in the *Ars Versificatoria* and Nature in the *Tesoretto,*[43] then we find a sustained emphasis on regularity and evenness of colour. Colour especially is beautiful partly because it suggests precious pearls and metals and partly because it confirms youth and health, poor teeth being an affliction of age and infirmity. Beautiful teeth also enhance a smile, a matter taken up by Ovid in his *Ars Amatoria.* He suggests that a woman whose teeth are too large, uneven or black in colour should never laugh. These, he thinks (III. 279-80), are things to be covered up.[44] In general, white teeth complement red lips, colour, either in its contiguity or contrast, thus having about it a particular vitality and delight.

The beauty of a woman's mouth is not purely a visual experience but appeals to various senses. The mouth is considered beautiful for its wonderful smile, its joyful laughter, its perfumed breath, its captivating speech, and its sweet kisses. In Giacomo da Lentini's sonnet *Lo viso – mi fa andare alegramente* it is the smile in particular that preoccupies the poet:

> Chi vide mai così begli ochi in viso,
> Né sì amorosi fare li sembianti,
> Né boca con cotanto dolce riso?
>
> (ll. 9-11)

The smile is significant because it gives expression to a certain inner beauty. Offsetting the notion of beauty as a matter purely of form and thus of superficiality, the smile opens up the landscape of the spirit in its more intimate beauty.

Important as the smile is, the more robust activity of laughter is not necessarily to be encouraged. Laughter is celebrated because, like smiling, it is an expression of inward joy. However, truly beautiful women should be careful to show restraint in

[43] Helen of Troy in the *Ars Versificatoria* (LVI. 27-8) is said to have teeth that are white, straight and even which appear to be appropriate in relation to the mouth as a whole. Nature in the *Tesoretto* (ll. 260) is said to have teeth that shine like silver.

laughing, making sure they do not become over-excited. This, at any rate, is Francesco da Barberino's view in part I of his *Reggimento e costumi di donna.* His advice to women includes recommendations on how to laugh:

> E se d'alcun sollazzo ridere le convegna, non gridi: a! a!, né con simili voci, però che ciò faria monstrar li denti, che non è cosa conta; ma, sanza alcun romore, sembranza faccia d'alcun allegrezza. Ché voi save' ch'é scritto che lo riso sta nella bocca de' matti; e qui s'intende di riso sfrenato e del continovato, non miga della faccia rallegrare e temperato riso rado e a lungo e a tempo suo.[45]

They should, he says, refrain from laughing too loudly. They should ensure that their mouths do not open widely as this – for good or ill – will show all their teeth. Women who are composed are beautiful. However, the passage goes on to state that laughter has its place. Those who do not laugh have a cruel and selfish heart – a position anticipated by Ovid in the third book of the *Ars Amatoria*, where he counsels women on how to laugh appropriately:

> Sint modici rictus parvaeque utrimque lacunae,
> Et summos dentes ima labella tegant.
> Nec sua perpetuo contendant ilia risu,
> Sed leve nescio quid femineumque sonent.
>
> (ll. 283-86)

Lips, Ovid says, should part only slightly so as to reveal the teeth. Laughter, he goes on, should not be loud or ugly, but, rather, soft and feminine. The passage also warns against untoward noises and unsightly contortions of the face. Soft-spokenness and a gentle movement of the mouth are of the essence. The idea is that laughter should be proportionate, delicate, and soft in its manifestation.

Fresh breath too matters, something we see in tale LXXIII in Marco Polo's *Milione*. In one of his many travels Marco Polo visits the kingdom of Great Khan,

---

[44] *Ovidi Nasonis: Ars Amatoria*, edited by F. W. Lenz (Turin: In Aedibus Io. Bapt. Paraviae et Sociorum, 1969).

where he spends much time in observing its social *moeurs*. He gives an account, among other things, of how new concubines for Great Khan were chosen. Young and beautiful women were sought from all over the kingdom and brought to the palace where they underwent a rigorous selection process. In the later stages of this process

> egli le fa guardare a donne del palagio, e falle giacere appresso lui in u' letto per sapere s'ella hae buono fiato, e per sapere s'ella è pulcella, e bene sa d'ogni cosa.

The passage puts on record that these same girls were put under the supervision of the women of the palace to make sure that they were suitable for Great Khan. Among the various examinations they underwent, one was to determine whether they had fresh breath, beauty, therefore, pre-eminently a visual experience, thus having about an olfactory aspect as well. Comparable in this sense is the canzone *Gioiosamente canto* of Guido delle Colonne, who similarly pauses over *madonna*'s breath:

> E la bocca aulitosa
> Più rende aulente aulore
> Che non fa d'una fera,
> C'ha nome la pantera,
> Che 'n India nasce ed usa.
>
> (ll. 16-20)

Here the lady's mouth is described as perfumed and her breath sweet. It is said to be similar to that of the panther whose roar bore about it a certain fragrance.[46] The same concern – betokening as it does a certain intimacy between the lover and his lady – is there too in Book III of the *Ars Amatoria* where Ovid says:

> Cui gravis oris odor, numquam ieiuna loquatur
> Et semper spatio distet ab ore viri.
>
> (ll. 277-78)

A woman should never speak, Ovid insists, if her stomach is empty, as this is a cause of bad breath; and she is advised in these circumstances to keep a distance from

---

[45] *Francesco da Barberino: Reggimento e Costumi di Donna*, edited by G. E. Sansone (Turin: Loescher - Chiantore, 1957), p.

her friends in case she causes offence. Here too, therefore, the olfactory aspect of the question looms large in the mind (as in the nostrils) of the author.

Not unrelated to this is the question of *madonna*'s speech habits. Inghilfredi, in his poem *Audite forte cosa che m'avene* is exemplary:

> Sua caunoscenza e lo dolze parlare
> E le belleze e l'amoroso viso,
> Di ciò pensando fami travagliare.
>
> (ll. 9-11)[47]

The woman is praised, not only for her wisdom and for her beautiful countenance, but for the sweetness of her speech. Similarly, in the canzone *La gioia e l'alegranza* by Chiaro Davanzati, we learn that

> La bocca e 'l dolco riso
> E 'l parlare amoroso,
> Che d'altro paradiso
> Non saria mai voglioso.
>
> (ll. 75-78)

Here the poet states that his lady's mouth, her sweet smile and her amorous speech makes him want to put off paradise itself. He believes he would be happier here than there, in presence of his beloved. Various aspects of her beauty are registered in these lines, but prominent above all is her 'parlare amoroso', her elegant articulation. Thus speech contributes in no small way to a woman's overall beauty. It is through her speech that she exhibits her true nature, her wisdom and her beauty, these between them captivating absolutely her lover. In the *Mare amoroso* we are told:

> E lo parlar, tuttora anzi pensato,
> Sag[g]io e cortese e franco e vertudioso [...]
>
> (ll. 114-15)

---

[46] The myth surrounding the nature of the panther is discussed more fully in the second chapter of this study.

[47] *La Scuola Poetica Siciliana: Le Canzoni dei Rimatori Nativi di Sicilia,* edited by B. Panvini, vol. 2 (Florence: Olschki, 1958). All references to the works of Inghilfredi will be from this edition.

Here *madonna*'s words are carefully weighed. She thinks before speaking, and this only adds to her charm. When she does speak, what she says is wise, courteous, noble and virtuous. However, *what* she says is not all that matters. Quite as important is the *how* of her speech, delivery playing an important part in the impression she creates. In Part 1 of his *Reggimento e costumi di donna* Francesco da Barberino elaborates:

> E s'ella è domandata o mandata a parlare, rispondi e parli temperatamente; e 'l suo parlare sia basso, colle sue mani e l'altre membra ferme, ché 'l movimento e il mutar della membra significa in fanciulla troppi vezzi, e nella grande mutevole core.
>
> (p. 10)

Here we are told that girls who are predisposed to talking should exercise restraint and speak softly. They are also advised not to move their hands or any other part of their body, for this speaks ill of a woman. As always, therefore, moderation plays an important part, everything, including habits of speech, having about it an ideal proportion and symmetry. Nothing, in respect either of what she says or of the way she says it, should be ill-considered.

The skin

Skin is a matter usually of its colour, texture, and evenness, and is generally considered in relation to the face, neck, and hands. Ideally – and with the exception of the cheeks, which should have a pink or red hue – it should be white, but at the same time with a radiance suggestive of youth and health; so, for example, Bonagiunta Orbicciani in his ballata *Donna, vostre belleze*:

> Gigli e rose novelle
> Vostro viso aportate
> Si smirato e lucente.
>
> (ll. 28-30)[48]

[48] *La Poesia Lirica del Duecento*, edited by C. Salinari (Turin: UTET, 1951). All references to the poetry of Bonagiunta Orbicciani are taken from this edition.

Here we are told that the lady's skin is white like a lily, and the blush of her cheeks is equivalent to the redness of a rose.[49] The flower imagery is important, since it at once summons up the idea of delicacy and freshness. Petals especially display colour and finesse, together with smoothness and delicacy of construction; so, for example, Alan of Lille in *De Planctu Naturae* describes Nature's face:

> Frons vero in amplam evagata plantiems, lacteo liliata colore,
> lilio videbatur contendere.
>
> (282, B)

Her brow, he says, is beautiful because it is smooth and youthful, and it has an even white colour celebrated by way of the lily. At a later stage in *De Planctu Naturae* (313, D) there is a comparable description of Chastity in whose complexion the rose and the lily vie delicately one with another: 'sed rosam cum lilo disputatem in facie'. The one complements and offsets the other.

It is not always, however, a matter of the face alone. Dante, in chapter XIX of the *Vita nuova*, doubtless with Beatrice's face principally in mind, is even so not specific:

> Color di perle ha quasi, in forma quale
> Convene a donna aver, non for misura:
> Ella è quanto de ben pò far natura:
>
> Per essemplo di lei bieltà si prova.
>
> (ll. 47-50)[50]

Here we are told that her skin is the colour of pearls, a colour evidently deemed appropriate by Dante for women. She is in this sense, as indeed in every other sense,

[49] The Madonna of figure 9 is shown to have delicate white skin which is visible in her face, neck and hands. Her cheeks, however, are given a subtle pink glow. The rose held by the child enhances the appearance of the Madonna's skin in an attempt to highlight its gentle hues, its delicacy and its freshness.
[50] 'Vita nuova', in *Dante Alighieri: Opere Minori*, edited by D. de Robertis and G. Contini, La Letteratura Italiana, vol. 1, pt. 1 (Milan: Ricciardi, 1984).

exemplary in her beauty, and a point of reference for all beauty.[51] As always, formal purity is suggestive of spiritual purity, the one being symbolic of the other. This general position, though, is not without precedent. In the *Roman de la Rose,* Beauté is described thus:

> En elle il y avait toutes les bonnes qualités:
> ce n'était pas une brune au teint sombre,
> mais elle brillait comme la lune
> devant qui les autres étoiles
> semblent de petites chandelles.
>
> (ll. 994-98)

We are told that she possessed every good quality. Her skin was neither tanned nor sombre, but, rather, is dazzling in its whiteness. Its brightness is compared with that of the moon in its resplendence. Marco Polo too, who, in his *Milione,* often describes the appearance, customs and traditions of men and women he encounters in his travels, considers the appearance of the women of the kingdom of Erguil in chapter LXIV. Their beauty, he says, is very much down to their white skin:

> Le donne non hanno addosso pelo niuno, in niuno luogo, salvo che nel capo; ella hanno molto belle carni e bianche, e son ben fatte di loro fattezze, e molto si dilettano con uomeni.

The women of Erguil are well formed, he says, with white skin, his too, therefore, being a sense of this as normative and ideal.

It is, however, a matter, as far as skin is concerned, not only of colour, but of texture and of a generally healthy appearance. Radiance goes hand in hand with health, and this is a matter of recurrent concern. Take, for example, Francesco da Barberino in Part XVI of his *Reggimento e costumi di donna*, where it is a question of a woman's rejoicing – too much, in fact – in her robust complexion:

> Mal in donna sta superba,
> E la gente ha vita acerba
> Che conversa e sta con quelle

[51] The illustration of Beatrice, figure 12, demonstrates the tones of her skin visible in her face, neck and hands.

C' hanno rigogliosa pelle:
Vivi dunqua umilmente,
Ch'aggi buona grazia in gente.

(p.183-84)

For all her fair aspect – her beautiful skin – she should, in fact, be more modest, accepting her good fortune with humility, as this will redound to her credit. Aesthetically, however, the position is unambiguous. Humble or otherwise, a fair and delicate skin is always to be deemed an asset. Whatever its circumstances, it always makes for beauty.

The neck

Physical descriptions of the neck and throat are rarer in the literature we are considering, for they were not thought as important, aesthetically, as the eyes, the mouth, or the hair. However, references do from time to time occur, as, for example, in the *Tesoretto* where Nature is described as having

La gola biancicante
E l'altre biltà tante
Composte ed assettate
E 'n su' loco ordinate.

(ll. 261-4)

Among Nature's many beauties, then, the skin of her neck is especially notable for its whiteness. In the first line of the sonnet *Viso mirabil, gola morganata* by Dante da Maiano,[52] the woman's throat is said to be comparable only to that of Morgan le Fey in point of radiance, while in Chapter XVI of the *Reggimento e costumi di donna* the lover praises his lady saying:

La vostra gola candida mi tiri
Ai baci e all'amor delle virtuti.

[52] *Dante da Maiano: Rime*, edited by R. Bellarini (Florence: Le Monnier, 1969). All references to the poetry of Dante da Maiano are taken from this edition.

The resplendence of what he sees, he says, encourages the lover to still greater virtue, the term 'candida' being operative on both planes. In the *Detto d'amore* the colour of the lady's neck is described in this way:

> La gola sua, e 'l petto,
> Sì chiar' è, ch'a Dio a petto
> Mi par esser la dia
> Ch'i' veg[g]io quella dia.
> Tant' è bianca e lattata,
> Che ma' non fu alattata
> Nulla di tal valuta.
>
> (ll. 207-13)[53]

Here we are told that the woman's neck is white like milk, and just as resplendent, causing the poet to feel that he is in the presence of God, formal beauty thus once again having its part to play in his spiritual elevation. Elsewhere, this general notion is subject to further elaboration and refinement. In *De Planctu Naturae*, Nature is described as having

> Colli non injusta proceritas sub gracilitate moderata, cervicum maritari humeris non sinebat.
>
> (282, C)

Here, the beauty of her neck derives from its slenderness and its moderate length. It confirms in this way the proportionality of the whole. Length, moreover, relates to posture. If the neck is too short then it makes the shoulders seem hunched, definitely detrimental to a woman's appearance. In the *Roman de la Rose* we are given a long description of Dame Oiseuse. Each aspect of her physical appearance is catalogued and hymned accordingly. Her neck is described thus:

> Son cou était de bonne dimension,
> La chair en était plus douce qu'une toison
> Et il n'y avait ni mal ni bouton:
> On n'aurait trouvé jusqu'à Jérusalem
> Femme qui eût un plus bon cou:
> Il était lisse et doux au toucher.
> Sa gorge était aussi blanche

[53] 'Il Detto d'amore', in *Il Fiore e il Detto d'Amore: attribuibili a Dante Alighieri*, edited by G. Contini (Milan: Mondadori, 1984).

Que la neige fraîche sur la branche
Quand il vient de neiger.

(ll. 537-45)

Her neck, we are told, was of good proportion. It was, moreover, white like snow and soft like fleece.[54] Though not, therefore, a focal point of attention, the shape and structure of the neck, as well as its general complexion, enter significantly into the overall account of beauty.

The arms and hands

Next in *descriptio mulieris* we come to the arms and hands. As with other parts of the body, it is a question here both of appearance and of movement. From the point of view of appearance – the static aspect of the matter – beauty lies once again in size, proportion, shape and colour. Eloquent in general is the following passage from the *Mare amoroso*:

Le man' più belle d'erba palmacristo,
L'unghie, sottili, dritte ed avenanti;
E in forma passate ogne figura
Scolpita nella pietra camaina.

(ll. 130-33)

The lady's hands are more beautiful than the caster oil plant. Fingers and nails are slim and straight, like the leaves of the plant in question. They are as if sculpted from stone, and are subject to the same kind of appraisal as a work of art – of, in this case, Nature's work of art. De Bruyne gives this account of how arms and hands should ideally look. A woman, he reports, should be tall and elegant, with 'épaules ni tombantes ni carrées, adaptées à l'ensemble par une loi musicale d'harmonie, aux bras délicats et longs terminés par des doigts effilés.'[55] Arms should be long, delicate and

[54] Figure 13 is the second illustration of Dame Oiseuse and it gives a clear view of her neck. We find that it is long and well proportioned while her skin appears youthful and white in colour.
[55] De Bruyne, II, p. 183.

ending in tapered fingers[56] – evidence for which is afforded by, among other things, Part VI of the *Reggimento e costumi di donna* where we are given a long description of the widow Costanza and all her excellent qualities, including this on the hands:

> Vedi le man dilicate e gentili,
> Che soglion tutto riposo trovare.
>
> (p. 96)

Her hands, therefore, are refined, gracious, and fashioned for a life of ease – all of which points once more to the sociological dimension of the issue, the absolving of the women in question from every kind of domestic or otherwise abrasive activity.

Movement too has a part to play in all this, arms being made, precisely, for the embrace. Giacomo Pugliese's poem *Donna, per vostro amore* is in this sense exemplary:

> [...] che m'avete priso;
> Or m'abraza
> A tuo' braza,
> Amorosa
> Dubitosa.
>
> (ll. 32-36)

This description of his lady's arms is reminiscent of Nature in *De Planctu Naturae*, who is described as having

> Brachia ad gratiam inspectoris prospicua, postulare videtantur
>
> amplexus.
>
> (282, C)

The idea is present too in the *Detto d'amore* where *madonna* is described thus:

> Mani à lunghette e braccia,
> E chi co.llei s'abraccia
> Giamai mal nonn-à gotta
> Né di ren' né di gotto.
>
> (ll. 219-22)

[56] For depictions of beautiful hands and arms see figures 1 and 13. Figure 1, depicting the Madonna's hands, shows her fingers to be long and straight and are similar to the hands of Dame Oiseuse of figure 13. In the second illustration we see long, slender arms ending in slim tapering fingers.

Long and slender hands and arms are thus ideal, between them having, not only beauty, but, by way of the embrace, a power of pleasuring and even of healing.

The lower part of the body

Within the literature under consideration, very little concerns the lower parts of the body. This was partly a matter of the garments worn by medieval European women that did not allow the hips, legs and feet to be seen,[57] and partly a matter of modesty. The erotic suggestivity of legs and feet is confirmed in tale XVIII of Marco Polo's *Milione*. In the narrative of the *Miracollo di Baldacho* he relates the situation of the worthy cobbler, beginning thus:

> Or avene uno dì che una zovene dona, la qual era molto bella, vene a chaxa de questo chalzolar per chonprar do chalzari, e 'l volesse veder el pe' alla dona per sapere che chalzari ella voleva. La dona iera deschalza e mostrò-li el pe' e lla ganba, e 'l dimonio tentò questo chalzolar sì ch'el ave dilleto de veder el pe' e lla ganba de questa dona.[58]

The passage gives an account of the cobbler's temptation when a beautiful woman entered his shop. In order for him to judge the type of shoes suitable for her, he needed to see the woman's feet, whereupon she shows him her foot and leg. Stimulated by the sight, he quickly thought better of it and sent her away unfitted. Here, then, it is matter pre-eminently of carnal possibility, there being here – as with the eyes and the mouth, for example – no hint of lofty idealism or thoughts of spiritual ascent.

---

[57] See figures 14, 15 and 16 for depictions of the type of garments worn by women throughout the Middle Ages. The dresses are long, reaching the ground, which limit the view of the legs and feet. Similarly, the sleeves are long and close fitting, or long and cut lengthwise from the elbow, which gives a good indication of the length, size and shape of the arms. Garments generally have a wide neck-line which allows a clear view of the neck.

[58] *Marco Polo: Il Milione Veneto, ms. CM 211 della biblioteca Civica di Padova*, edited by A. Barbieri, A. Andreosa and others (Venice: Marsilio, 1999).

Although descriptions of the lower part of the body are limited, some texts offer guidance as to ideal shape, size and proportion. In, for example, *De Planctu Naturae,* Nature is described in this way:

> Laterum æquata convallatio, justæ moderationis impressa sigillo totius corporis speciem ad cumulum perfectionis eduxit.
>
> (282, C)

Nature's hips were moderate in size, and their perfection is all of a piece with the beauty of the whole. Similarly, de Bruyne, discussing the works of Geoffroi de Vinsauf, speaks of the 'jambes légères appuyées sur un petit pied, telle apparait au poète la jeune fille'.[59] Beauty here, then, is a question of lightness and delicacy, of slender legs balanced on small feet.[60]

Movement too comes in at this point. The way a woman walks can also contribute to her beauty. In the *Detto d'amore* we are told:

> E quando va per via,
> Ciascun di lei à 'nvia
> Per l'andatura gente.
>
> (ll. 234-6)

She is praised for the refinement of her gait. We are given no details of how she walks or why she is, in this respect, so appealing, but this too clearly enters into the estimation of beauty. More specific is Francesco da Barberino in Part XVI of *Reggimento e costumi di donna* when he states:

> Bella e conta è l'andatura
> Che fa i passi con misura;
> Ma non può bei passi fare
> Chi vuole a vanità guardare.
>
> (p. 184)

---

[59] De Bruyne, II, p. 183.

[60] For an illustration of the lower part of the body see figure 3. Eve has a small waist, slender, but well rounded, hips and long slim legs.

A woman, he says, should walk with even and moderate steps, and anything to the contrary is vanity. Beauty here, in what amounts to something closer to a moral than to an aesthetic treatise, is predominantly a matter of virtue. What is required, therefore, for the beauty of the soul to shine through, is a proper degree of elegance and restraint. Any extravagance and the testimony of form to the spirit is at once destroyed.

The illusion of beauty: the use of dress, cosmetics and adornments

So far we have been concerned with natural beauty, but attention is sometimes given to the ways in which nature might be artificially improved. If, then, a woman perceives herself as unattractive, due to physical imperfections, then she can alter her natural state; hence the use of cosmetics in the name of improvement and illusion. The colour and type of cloth used in a garment, for example, as well as its style and cut, can all play a part in creating and sustaining an impression. The importance of dress and adornment is stressed in, for example, tale XXVI of the *Novellino*, where we are told that

> Uno borgese di Francia avea una sua moglie molto bella. Un giorno era a una festa con altre donne de la villa; aveavi una molto bella donna, la quale era molto sguardata da le genti. E la moglie del borgese dicea infra se medesima: "S'io avesse così bella cotta com'ella, io sarei altressì isguardata com'ella, perch'io sono altressì bella come sia ella."[61]

The author speaks of a burgher's wife who, anxious for attention and preening herself, attended a party. Another woman, however, elegantly attired, drew universal attention, and the former, though in her own eyes quite as beautiful, went unnoticed. Natural beauty, therefore, stands to be complemented by proper adornment, the latter reinforcing and, so to speak, facilitating the former in its perception and enjoyment. Dress, however, can at the same time be a matter of false pride and vanity, something

[61] Here it is important to note that the focus of this tale is on kindness and the question of dress plays only a small part.

according to the *Reggimento e costumi di donna* not to be encouraged. In Part XVI, women are advised on appropriate dress and the use of adornments:

> Sta bene a donna d'aver bella vesta
> E anco tutta la sua ornatura,
> Ma non convien ch'ella passi misura.
>
> (p. 180)

Fine clothes and adornment, therefore, are well and good, but discretion is called for. Later, in Part XVI, the author advises:

> Non si conviene alle donne più basse
> Usar le veste e l'altezze e le spese
> Delle maggior che son in suo paese.
>
> (p. 181)

Here he says that women of lower social spheres should not wear clothes, or anything else for that matter, designed for the women of higher rank. A woman, he believes, should dress according to her status and with a sense of modesty. A woman should show restraint and not seek attention. She should never aspire to be something, or someone, she is not.

Apparel, however, can be deceptive, and deliberately so. This idea is nicely illustrated in sonnet CII of the *Fiore* in the description of the character Costretta-Astinenza, whose nature is always to disguise her true appearance and intention:

> Ella si fa pinzochera e badessa
> E monaca rinchiusa e serviziale,
> E fassi sopriora e prioressa.
>
> Idio sa ben sed ell'è spritale!
> Altr' or si fa noviz[z]a, altr' or professa;
> Ma, che che faccia, non pensa c[h]'a male.'
>
> (ll. 9-14)

She is always, therefore, changing her attire, often appearing as an abbess or a nun or whatever she wishes. Her clothes are intended to conceal her evil-mindedness, her dress and adornment functioning in this sense as a mask. Taken together with a number of passages in the *Ars Amatoria,* this serves to indicate the power of dress as a

principle of deception, true beauty, throughout, being a matter of nature and of unadornedness.

In the *Convivio* (I. x. 13) Dante discusses the issue in a literary context, comparing the beauty of the line to that of a woman in her unadorned state:

> Onde chi vuole ben giudicare d'una donna, guardi quella quando solo sua naturale bellezza si sta con lei, da tutto accidentale adornamento discompagnata.

Beauty in language, he says, like the beauty of a woman, can only truly be appreciated when they appear unadorned. Later in the *Convivio* (III. iv. 7), Dante warns against praising beauty of any kind, for it is, after all, but a gift of nature. Praise or censure, therefore, should not be directed to the beautiful or the ugly, for it is not within their power to be otherwise:

> Onde noi non dovemo vituperare l'uomo perché sia del corpo da sua nativitade laido, però che non fu in sua podestà farsi bello; ma dovemo vituperare la mala disposizione de la materia onde esso è fatto, che fu principio del peccato de la natura. E così non dovemo lodare l'uomo per biltade che abbia da sua nativitade ne lo suo corpo, ché non fu ello di ciò fattore, ma dovemo lodare l'artefice, cioè la natura umana, che tanta bellezza produce ne la sua materia quando impedita da essa non è.

Nature as the creator of beauty bestows her gifts as she wishes, and only she should be praised for the beauty of her creatures. As for man, Dante then suggests, he should spend his time improving his character, not his appearance. Similarly, Beauté in the *Roman de la Rose* is praised and appreciated for her natural appearance:

> Elle avait la chair tendre comme la rosée,
> Elle était candide comme une épousée,
> Blanche comme une fleur de lys
> Et avait le visage doux et lisse;
> Elle était mince et bien droite,
> N'était ni fardée ni manquillée
> Car elle n'avait pas besoin
> De parures et d'artifices.
>
> (ll. 999-1006)

In this passage Beauté's face is described as being as soft as a rose, as fresh as a bride, as white as a lily, and both sweet and smooth, all this requiring of her no further artifice or embellishment.

So far in this study, we have been concerned mainly with European expectations in the field of beauty. However, there is at the same time much acknowledgement of others customs and ideals. In the writings of Marco Polo, we find a number of tales expressing differing notions of beauty in different countries. In Chapter XXXIX, for example, we are told of the sumptuary habits of the noble women of Balascam. Although the author does not commit himself on this issue or give his own opinion as to whether he finds these women beautiful, he concedes that they are perceived as such by their menfolk:

> E le grandi donne e le gentili portano brache, che v'ha ben cento braccia di panno lino sottilissimo, ovvero di bambagia, e tale quaranta e tale ottanta: e questo fanno per parere ch'abbiano grosse le natiche, perché li loro uomeni si dilettano in femmine grosse.

Details abound. These women, he says, have a type of trouser which contains vast amounts of material gathered together making the lower part of the body appear bigger. Their men, he says, like large women, fashion, then, – and in a manner strikingly at odds with what goes on at home – meeting a social preference.[62] Again, in the *Milione*, Marco Polo discusses an alternative form of dress at variance with European practice. In chapter CXII we learn that in the province of Caugigu

> I maschi e le femmine si dipingono tutti a uccelli e a bestie e ad aguglie e ad altri divisamenti; e dipongosi il volto e le mani e 'l corpo e ogni cosa. E questo fanno per gentilezza, e chi più n'ha di queste dipinture più si tiene gentile e più bello.

The inhabitants of the country paint images of birds and animals all over themselves, this, it was thought, being a mark of nobility. This type of decoration,

[62] Walgrave, pp. 89-93.

obscuring as it does natural hues, contrasts with the European ideal of plain white skin. Acknowledging that this would not much commend itself to European taste, Marco Polo generously registers that it is appreciated elsewhere, dress and adornment having about them, in this sense, a certain cultural and aesthetic relativity.

Cosmetics are often used to make a woman appear beautiful by hiding or correcting physical faults. Take, for example, sonnet CLXVI of the *Fiore* where we see the Vecchia – an old whore, we must remember – offering advice on self-advertisement:

> E s'ella nonn-è bella di visag[g]io,
> Cortesemente lor torni la testa,
> E sì lor mostri, sanza far aresta,
> Le belle bionde treccie d'avantag[g]io.
> Se non son bionde, tingale in erbag[g]io
> E a l'uovo, e po'vada a noz[z]e e a festa,
> E quando va, si muova sì a sesta
> C[h]' al su' muover nonn-ab[b]ia punt' oltrag[g]io.
>
> (ll. 1-8)

The Vecchia suggests that if a woman lacks a beautiful face, then she should make sure her head is turned in order to display only her hair.[63] This too, though, is, in the event, an object of attention. If she is not naturally blonde, then the Vecchia advises dying the hair, her advice, as always, having about it something of the coarsely pedestrian. Much the same had been suggested in the *Ars Amatoria*, everywhere present in the background of the *Fiore*. Here too, cosmetics and adornment are the order of the day, this being the way of triumph in love:

> Sictis et inducta candorem quaerere creta:
> Sanguine quae vero non rubet, arte rubet.
> Arte supercilii confinia nuda repletis,
> Parvaque sinceras velat aluta genas.
>
> (ll. 199-202)

Ovid suggests that it is important to enhance eyebrows, hide blemishes and use rouge to improve the complexion, this, everywhere, being an exigency of love.

[63] See figure 8 once again for an indication of how hair was arranged and adorned.

Cosmetics render the whole thing more exciting, he thinks, artificial adornment being throughout a – or indeed *the* – principle of desirability. Natural beauty, though, remains for most authors in the Middle Ages the ideal; so, for example, Francesco da Barberino in Part V of the *Reggimento e costumi di donna*, considers the story of a man from Provence, who,

> volendo ben provare la bellezza di sua donna, dice che nella sua faccia mai altra acqua che naturale non puosa, e in sulla sua testa non venne mai per ornato altro che quel che natura la diede, e che veste già non la covria per più bella far lei, ma perché così comandava onestade.
>
> (p. 73)

Oddly, perhaps, the man attempts to prove the beauty of his lady by offering an account of her toilette. She never uses anything on her face, he says, other than plain water. She never adorns her hair, and never wears clothes designed to make her appear more beautiful than she really is. She does this because her only wish is honesty. Beauty, then, is a matter of natural endowment and of unconcealment, and its upkeep a matter of simple strategy, her make-up being nature's own. Famously, St Ambrose, in the first book of his *De Verginitate*, praises the modesty of virgins anxious to eschew the vanity of married women, only ever intent, by whatever means, on pleasing their husbands. Married women, he insists (I, vi, 28), are only ever preoccupied with artificial adornment:

> Hic illa nascuntur incentivita vitiorum, ut quæsitis coloribus ora depingant, dum viris displicere formidant, et de adulterio vultus meditantur adulterium castitatis. Quanta hic amentia effigiem mutare naturæ, picturam quærere, et dum verentur moritale judicium, podere suum! Prior enim de se ponuntiat, quæ cupit mutare quod nota est. [64]

Cosmetics, Ambrose believes, have something of the blasphemous about them. They deny nature and are an affront to God. In staining their faces, he says, such women

[64] 'De Virginitate Liber Unus', in 'Sancti Ambrosii Mediolanensis Episcopi: Opera Omnia', in *Patrologia Latina*, edited by J. P. Migne, vol. 16 (1880). p. 219.

stain their souls, and if a woman is naturally beautiful, then she should have nothing to do with mere adornment. If she is not, then she should not falsify herself, this, in truth, being a matter, well-nigh, of blasphemy.

Care of the body

With this, it remains only to consider the methods of care and preservation. Cleanliness is of special importance because it makes such things as teeth and skin appear radiant and healthy. It confirms the natural colouration of each part of the body in terms of its vibrancy and resplendence. In Part V of the *Reggimento e costumi di donna*, Francesco da Barberino goes into this in some detail:

> Che quando a sé fa lavar testa,
> Guardisi bene e proveggia davanti
> Chi è colei che le de' lavar gli occhi
> E la sua gola e la faccia col collo,
> E ch'ella sia della mente e del corpo
> Molto ben sana questa cotale;
> Ché non ben lava chi non è ben netta.
>
> (p. 86-87)

The head, he says, must be properly washed, including the eyes, face and neck. This, he thinks, is a matter, not only of physical, but of mental wellbeing. Spiritual health is a matter in part of bodily health – a notion reiterated in Part XVI when he says that delight in the cleanliness of a woman is in large degree delight in the cleanliness of her soul. Cleansing of the body, though, can in certain situations be bad for it. He advises against the use of various herbs and other substances while bathing since they can have a detrimental effect. Water, moreover, should not be too hot or too cold, and it is not good practice to use wine, vinegar and such like on the skin. Bathing in warm water, however, though not too often, keeps the skin looking both healthy and fresh:

> E lavar col vino e col ranno
> E i bagni dell'acqua solforee
> E di vinaccia e ogni lavar di mosto,

> Dimagra, annera e innaspra la pelle.
> Et i bagni delle dolci acque tiepide
> In camera non troppo spessi
> Mantengon[o] giovane e fresca la pelle.
>
> (p. 196-97)

All this, in fact, goes back to the Bible, with its account of different cleansing rituals. In *Esther* we are told that when King Ahasuerus wanted to make Esther his wife, she was sent away to be made clean:

> Cum autem venisset singularum per ordinem puellarum ut intrarent ad regems expletis omnibus quae ad cultum muliebrem pertinebant mensis duodecimus vertebatur ita dumtaxat ut sex menses oleo unguerentur myrtino et aliis sex quibusdam pigmentis et aromatibus uterentur.
>
> (II. 12)[65]

The cleansing process, we are told, took a whole year. The first six months were spent being cleansed with myrrh and the next six months using perfumes. The process was seen as both a physical and a spiritual cleansing, as a purification apt to set Esther apart from other women. Returning, however, to our period, the importance of cleanliness is also found in chapter CXXXV of the *Milione,* in the tale concerning the inhabitants of Quisai with their particular enjoyment of baths:

> E ancora vi dico che questa città hae bene tremilia istufe, ove prendono gran diletto gli uomeni e le femmine; e vannovi molto ispesso, però che vivono molto nettamente di loro corpo, e son i più belli bagni del mondo e i più grandi, ché bene vi si bagnano insieme cento persone.

Cleansing, then, was an aesthetic imperative, though one linked in this case, as Marco Polo confirms, to a life of pleasure, luxury and endless bathing.

Cleansing, however, is only one part of physical upkeep. Quite as important is the use of oils and perfumes. Francesco da Barberino, for example, describes the various treatments used by women generally, and, for his own part, advised against the

---

[65] *Biblia Sacra: Iuxta Vulgatam Versione I, Genesis - Psalmi*, edited by R. Weber (Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstatt, 1969).

application of oils and ointments on the skin. In Part XVI of the *Reggimento e costumi di donna*, he says:

> Ma tanto dico, che l'usare unguenti
> Sustanziosi e grossi
> Fanno le donne e donnezelle non nette,
> E fa lor disinor lo caldo e 'l sole
> E fanno i denti neri e le labri verdi
> E molto invecchian, a chi gli usa, la pelle.
>
> (p. 197)

He believes that using ointments makes a woman's skin oily and unclean. It also makes her teeth black and her lips green, its general effect being to make the skin age. This notwithstanding, however, the use of oils and ointments on the body as part of the cleansing ritual is well documented throughout history. Among the Egyptians, for example, the use of cosmetics – and thus the development of the cosmetics industry – was, as Walgrave confirms, profuse: 'The process of perfume distillation had not yet been invented, so all perfumes were prepared on the basis of oils obtained from sesame seeds, almonds, olives, or castor oil. These delightful scents must therefore also have made the users' bodies very smooth and shiny.'[66] First, then, came cleansing, and then oiling with a view to softening the skin. This softness appealed to the senses of sight and touch, while the oils appealed to the sense of smell.

[66] Walgrave, p. 61.

Chapter 2

The Poetic Problem: Image and Analogy in the Celebration of Female Form

Introduction

The celebration of womanly beauty among the poets and lovers of the Duecento and Trecento is often by way of analogy and of other kinds of formal comparison. That beauty is often either equated to, or said to surpass, the beauty, for example, of the earthly and celestial spheres, or of flowers, or of precious stones. Thus *madonna*'s beauty is both confirmed in its extraordinary character, and, from the point of view of its description, extended beyond the *descriptio mulieris* by way of a variety of more or less esoteric images. The present chapter, designed to explore this imagery, is divided into five sections according to image-type: floral imagery, astronomical imagery, animal imagery, lapidary imagery, and, finally, parallels with mythological characters. While concerned mainly with the literature of the Italian Duecento and Trecento, we shall from time to time appeal also to its provenance in other areas of Romance vernacular literature and in antiquity.

Floral imagery

Flowers, and especially roses and lilies, provide a rich source of analogy for female beauty, for not only do flowers appeal to several senses (visual, tactile and olfactory), but they are suggestive too of youth, proportion, symmetry, size, shape and colour. However this may be, sensuousness is generally to the fore. In, for example, the sixth sonnet of the *Fiore* it is fragrance that matters, perfume having about it a certain irresistibility:

> Allor mi venni forte ristrignendo
> Verso del fior, che.ssì forte m'ulìo,
> E per cu' feci homag[g]io a questo dio,
> E dissi: "Chi mi tien, ched i' no' l prendo?"
>
> Si ch'i' verso del fior tesi la mano,
> Credendolo aver colto chitamente [...].
>
> (ll. 5-10)[1]

Another instance of the irrestibility of fragrance is to be found in the contrasto of Cielo d'Alcamo, of which the first line reads: 'Rosa fresca aulentissima ch'appari invêr la state.'[2] Here the woman herself is a fragrant, fulsome flower. Similarly, in the canzone *Donna, per vostro amore* Giacomo Pugliese describes his lady by saying:

> Voi siete la mia donna a tutt'ore,
> Aulente rosa col fresco colore,
> Che 'nfra l'altre ben mi pare la fiore.
>
> (ll. 40-42)[3]

Here, *madonna* is considered by her lover to be a flower among women, a perfumed rose with a fresh complexion. In terms both of form and of fragrance the analogy is complete. A similar strategy is to be found in Guido delle Colonne's canzone *Gioiosamente canto*, where again the poet proceeds by way of rose imagery:

> Ben passa rose e fiori
> La vostra fresca ciera

---

[1] 'Il Fiore', in *Il Fiore e il Detto d'Amore: attribuibili a Dante Alighieri*, edited by G. Contini (Milan: Mondadori, 1984).
[2] *Il Contrasto di Cielo d'Alcamo*, edited by G. Cottone (Alcamo: Sarograf, 1988). All references to the poetry of Cielo d'Alcamo are taken from this edition.
[3] *La Poesia Lirica del Duecento*, edited by C. Salinari (Turin: UTET, 1951). All references to the poetry of Giacomo Pugliese are taken from this edition.

Lucente più che spera.

(ll. 13-15)[4]

His lady's beauty, the poet says, actually surpasses that, not only of roses, but of all flowers. In the *Roman de la Rose*, moreover, we are told that the lover was drawn to the rose precisely by her perfume, which he describes thus:

Son parfum tout autour se répandait;
La douceur qui en venait
Emplissait tout le lieu;
Quand je le sentis s'exhaler ainsi
Je n'eus plus envie de m'éloigner
Mais je m'en approchai pour le prendre
[et je l'aurais fait] si j'avais osé tendre les mains.

(ll. 1666-72)[5]

The lover, he says, was at once intoxicated by the rose's perfume. Its sweet smell, pervading the whole enclosure, was so alluring that he could not tear himself away. It was only through a lack of courage that he did not stretch out his hand there and then to take it. Elsewhere, as in Cavalcanti's sonnet *Avete 'n vo' li fior' e la verdura*, youth or 'greenness' too enters into the analogy, these between them constituting an efficient cause of moral worth in the one who looks on:

Avete 'n vo' li fior' e la verdura
E ciò che luce ed è bello a vedere;
Risplende più che sol vostra figura:
Chi vo' non vede, ma' non pò valere.

(ll. 1-4)[6]

The imagery here is of green fields of spring and conveys a sense of the joyfulness of youth and of innocence. Every aspect of *madonna* appears fresh as a blossoming flower which glows, unspoilt in its vibrancy and newness, the poem as a

[4] *Poeti del Duecento*, edited by G. Contini, vol. 1 (Milan: Ricciardi, 1960). All references to the poetry of Guido delle Colonne are taken from this edition.
[5] *Guillaume de Lorris et Jeun de Meun: Le Roman de la Rose*, edited by A. Lanly (Paris: Librairie Honoré Champion, 1971), vol. 1.
[6] *Guido Cavalcanti: Rime, con le Rime di Iacopo Cavalcanti*, edited by D. de Robertis (Turin: Einaudi, 1986). All poems by Cavalcanti will be referenced from this edition.

whole, however, suggesting a sense of the brevity and fragility of all this beauty. Female beauty, the poet seems to intuit, like that of flowers, is passing and soon lost.

Other texts too, such as the *Roman de la Rose* and the *Fiore*, offer examples of a woman's being described as a flower, floral beauty being in every sense ideal and everywhere to be commended. In the *Roman de la Rose,* we find the following passage:

> [...] une teinte l'illuminait
> Qui était aussi vermeille et délicate
> Que Nature peut en faire.
> Il y avait quatre paires de pétales
> Que Nature, avec grand art,
> Y avait placés les uns au-dessus des autres,
> régulièrement;
> La tige était droite comme un jonc
> Et au bout reposait le bouton
> Sans pencher ni retomber.
>
> (ll. 1657-65)

The rose, the poet says, is a brilliant red colour with four pairs of petals. The stem and head are straight, and it has a sweet scent. Its delicacy is evident above all in its petals, in its well proportioned and symmetrical formation, and its specific tones and colours. Its analogical function in respect of the beloved needs no comment. The delicacy and proportion of the blossom are those, precisely, of Bel-Acueil in the poem.

In Canto XXIII of the *Paradiso*, Dante describes the Empyrean, the dwelling place of the blessed, with the Virgin Mary at its highest point, as taking the form of a rose,[7] which is, in fact, how the Virgin herself is described:

> Quivi è la rosa in che 'l verbo divino
> Carne si fece [...]
>
> (ll. 72-73)

Here the Virgin Mary is depicted as a rose in which the word of God was made flesh.[8] In keeping with an established iconography in the Middle Ages, she was, in fact,

---

[7] 'Paradiso', in *Dante Alighieri: La Divina Commedia*, edited by N. Sapegno, La Letteratura Italiana Storia e Testi, vol. 4 (Milan: Ricciardi, 1957).

[8] See figure 17 for an illustration of the Virgin Mary seated at the centre of the Rose.

often described as a rose without thorns,[9] because she was free from the stain of original sin. There were also legends of her tomb being filled with roses and lilies after the Assumption.[10] Here, then, the rose expresses notions of virginity, virtue, love and salvation, and its perfume denotes purity and incorruptibility.[11] An often sensuous image is thus understood, hereabouts, in terms of spirituality, of its suggestiveness on the plane of nobility.

Sensuous or spiritual, however, the rose always occupies a special place in the floral hierarchy. This, in Giacomo da Lentini, becomes explicit. In the canzone *Donna, eo languisco e no so qua' speranza*, we read the following:

> Donna, gran maraviglia mi donate,
> Che 'n voi sembrate – sono tanto alore:
> Passate di bellezza ogn'altra cosa,
> Come la rosa – passa ogn'altro fiore.
>
> (ll. 21-24)[12]

His lady, the poet tells us, is truly exceptional. She is, in short, like a rose, more beautiful than any other flower. The idea goes back a long way, for in both Greece and Rome the rose was revered more than any other flower. In the myths, it was always the flower most appreciated by the gods;[13] so, for example, Gaea, goddess of the earth, after her birth was called upon by Jupiter to present her offerings on Mount Olympus. She 'modestly offered a green branch bearing a tiny bud. When some of the deities smiled at the insignificant offering, Jupiter commanded that the bud be sprinkled with nectar. Thereupon it slowly opened before the feasting gods and goddesses and became a full-blown white rose in all its regal splendour. Its delicious perfume is accounted for by the

---

[9] M. Warner, *Alone of all her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin* Mary (New York: Vintage, 1983) p. 307.
[10] K. Beals, *Flower Lore and Legend*, (New York: Holt, 1917), p. 121.
[11] Warner, p. 99.
[12] *Giacomo da Lentini: Poesie*, edited by R. Antonelli (Rome: Bulzoni, 1979). All references to the poetry of Giacomo da Lentini are taken from this edition.
[13] J. Goody, *The Culture of Flowers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 56.

story that Cupid, at the same feast, overturned a bowl of nectar, which, falling on the open flower, imparted to it the fragrance it still retains.'[14] The surpassing beauty of the rose is in this sense legendary, and amply open to documentation.[15] Coming down into the Middle Ages, if we consider the sculptures of the fourteen beatitudes at Chartres Cathedral, we see that the figure representing beauty holds a shield upon which images of roses are depicted.[16] Once again, therefore, the rose, aesthetically, is paramount. Its beauty excels that of every other blossom.

Lilies too, however, had their part to play. As we have already seen in the first chapter, they were often used in conjunction with the rose to describe the colour of the lady's skin. In the ballata *Donna, vostre belleze* of Bonagiunta Orbicciani we read:

> Gigli e rose novelle
> Vostro viso aportate
> Sì smirato e lucente.
>
> (ll. 28-30)[17]

The woman's skin is said to be white in colour, like the lily, her overall complexion only being enhanced by the red flush of the rose. This flower was revered, in mythology, almost as much as the rose for its beauty. One of the Greek legends explained how Jupiter wanted his son, Hercules, to be immortal like the other deities. He therefore deceived Juno into drinking a sleeping draught. 'The queen immediately fell into a deep sleep, and while she slept Jupiter placed the infant at her breast that he might absorb the celestial nourishment which would insure immortality. The babe was hungry and drew the lacteal fluid faster than he could swallow it. Some drops fell to earth, and

---

[14] Beals, pp. 113-14.
[15] For a general view of the various legends associated with roses see Beals, pp 113-29.
[16] É. Mâle, *Religious Art in France: The Thirteenth Century, A Study of Medieval Iconography and its Sources*, Bollingen Series XC (2) (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984), p. 388.
[17] *La Poesia Lirica del Duecento*, edited by C. Salinari (Turin: UTET, 1951). All references to the poetry of Bonagiunta Orbicciani are taken from this edition.

there sprang up the white flower, which was ever after to rival the rose.'[18] The lily too, then, had a secure place in the literary repertoire as a means of describing and celebrating a woman's beauty.

Like the rose, the lily was associated with the Virgin, often symbolising her purity and majesty 'When a lily is held in the hand of the Virgin it is her attribute, but if it appears alone it is her emblem; when it represents the concept of purity it becomes her symbol', says one historian.[19] It was also said that St Thomas being doubtful of the Virgin's assumption opened her tomb only to find it filled with roses and lilies.[20] 'According to an ancient Christian legend the first lily "sprang from the tears of Eve as she went forth from Eden." However, long before Christianity the white lily was held in the highest esteem by the Greeks and Romans, and was one of the flowers incorporated in the couch of Juno and Jupiter.'[21]

The sun, moon and stars

Prominent too are celestial analogies, the equation, that is to say, of the beauty of *madonna* and the beauty of the stars. Here, it is a question, pre-eminently, of light and splendour. Women are often described as beautiful because they are resplendent like the sun; they shine like the moon or sparkle like the stars. Indeed, their beauty is said often enough to surpass all the beauties in the celestial sphere; so, for example, in Giacomo da Lentini's sonnet *Madonna à 'n sè vertute con valore*, the poet speaks of his lady thus:

> Più luce sua beltate e dà sprendore
> che non fa 'l sole né null'autra cosa;
> de tut[t]e l'autre ell'è sovran'e frore,

[18] Beals, p. 132.
[19] Eric Maple, *The Secret Lore of Plants and Flowers*, (London: Hale, 1980), p.23.
[20] Ibid., p.76.
[21] Ibid.

che nulla apareggiare a lei non osa.

(ll. 5-8)

She is, he says, more splendid than the sun. Her beauty is like its light, irradiating everything in the vicinity. Indeed, her beauty surpasses that of the sun, and is sovereign in the universe. Just as the sun dominates the sky during the day, she too reigns supreme. Similarly in the *Detto d'amore*, we read:

Tant'à piacente aviso;
Ed à sì chiara luce
Ch'al sol to' la sua luce,
E l'oscura e l'aluna
Sì come il sol la luna.

(ll. 186-90)[22]

Madonna's beauty, we are told, obscures that of the sun, just as the light of the sun obscures that of the moon. Figuratively, she is, herself, another sun, a principle of universal illumination.

Prominent too is specifically lunar imagery. In the canzone *Ben mi credea in tutto esser d'Amore* of Bonagiunta Orbicciani we read the following:

Tant'è lo suo splendore
Che passa il sole, di vertute spera,
E stella e luna ed ogn'altra lumera.

(ll. 22-24)

His lady's beauty, he says, surpasses both the splendour of the sun and the radiance of the stars and the moon, a notion conspicuous also in Rinaldo d'Aquino's canzone *Amorosa donna fina*, where the lover praises his love thus:

Amorosa donna fina,
Stella che levi la dia
Sembran le vostre belleze;
Sovrana fior di Messina,
Non pare che donna sia
Vostra para d'adorneze.

(ll. 1-6)[23]

[22] 'Il Detto d'amore', in *Il Fiore e il Detto d'Amore: attribuibili a Dante Alighieri*, edited by G. Contini (Milan: Mondadori, 1984).

Here *madonna's* beauty is that of a star brilliant, not only by day, but by night also. The heavens themselves are in effect eclipsed by her radiance. Historically, the situation needs no comment, the stars being celebrated in one way or another throughout antiquity and the Middle Ages for their marvellous radiance. Sunlight in particular is throughout a principle both of beauty and of regeneration, an essential condition of new life. This, then, as far as womankind is concerned, is imagery of extraordinary power and suggestivity, imagery apt to suggest the deep continuity of the cosmic and the microcosmic on the plane of the aesthetic.

Animals

Animal imagery abounds at this point. The choice was large, many species being well known and documented – in respect, too, of their mythological properties – in the high Middle Ages. Exemplary in this sense is Guido delle Colonne's canzone *Gioiosamente canto*, where he says of his love:

> E la bocca aulitosa
> Più rende aulente aulore
> Che non fa d'una fera,
> C'ha nome la pantera,
> Che 'n India nasce ed usa.
>
> (ll. 16-20)

His lady's breath, we are told, is superior to that of the Indian panther, an image which recurs in Inghilfredi's canzone *Audite forte cosa che m'avene*, where we read:

> A la mia vita mai non partiragio
> Sua dottrina m'afrena,
> Così mi trage a lena
> Come pantera le bestie salvage.
>
> (ll. 29-32)[24]

---

[23] *La Poesia Lirica del Duecento*, edited by C. Salinari (Turin: UTET, 1951). All references to the poetry Rinaldo d'Aquino are taken from this edition.

[24] *La Scuola Poetica Siciliana: Le Canzoni dei Rimatori Nativi di Sicilia,* edited by B. Panvini, vol. 2 (Florence: Olschki, 1958). All references to the works of Inghilfredi will be from this edition.

Here the poet tells us that he is enticed by his lady in the same way the panther lures its prey. Of use here, by way of getting at the exact significance of the image, are the medieval bestiaries. One particular text, contemporary with the canzone and entitled *Libro della natura degli animali*, runs as follows:

> La pantera si è una bestia molta bella, ed è negra e bianca macchiata, e vive in cotal guisa che della sua [bocca] esce sì grande olimento che quando ella grida tutte le bestie che sono in quello contorno trae a sé, salvo che li serpenti fuggeno; e quando le bestie sono tutte a lei, ed ella prende di quelle più li piaceno e mangiale.[25]

The panther, we are told, is a fine creature. Its mouth is said to produce a type of perfume which, when it roars, attracts every nearby creature. It would then select one as its victim. Similarly, the woman in the poem is said to have fragrant breath which lures her lover and in effect ensnares him. He, like the panther's prey, is a victim. He is henceforth in her power and cannot escape.

Another notable comparison is the falcon. In the *Mare amoroso* we read as follows:

> Igli occhi, belli come girfalco,
> Ma son di bavalischio per sembianza,
> Che saetta il veleno collo sguardo.
>
> (ll. 93-95)[26]

Here we are told that the lady's eyes are as beautiful as the bird's. Her glances release arrows of poison which pierce the poet constraining him to love – all the more powerful in that, in the moral bestiaries of the time, falcons were said to represent evil spirits, malign forces. In chapter XXXVIII of *Bestiario moralizzato di Gubbio*, the falcon is described thus:

> Lo pretioso arbore è la Croce,
> Li falconcelli li spiriti malengni,
> E le colonbe so' li omini santi

[25] 'Libro della natura degli animali', in *La Prosa del Duecento*, edited by C. Segre and M. Marti, (Milan: Ricciardi, 1959), p. 307.
[26] 'Il Mare amoroso', in *Poeti del Duecento*, edited by G. Contini, vol. 1 (Milan: Ricciardi, 1960).

Per li quali, cor[r]endo, mecto voce;
Vedendo loro li potenti segni,
Gire lo' apresso poi non sono osanti.

(ll. 9-14)[27]

The falcon is said to whirl above the trees, which represent God, and try to entice the doves – good souls – away from them. It is, therefore, a spirit of temptation, a principle of distraction and ambush all of which are properties duly extended to *madonna*.

The poem *Mare amoroso* as we have seen in the first chapter of this study also makes a similar reference:

Igli occhi, belli come di girfalco,
Ma son di bavalischio, per sembianza,
Che saetta il veleno collo sguardo;
I cigli bruni e sottili, avolti in forma d'arco
Ma saettano al cor d'una saetta.

(ll. 93-97)

Though seen as temptation the woman is also shown to have a deadlier aspect expressed in her comparison to the basilisk. The lady's eyes are like a basilisk launching arrows of poison, with her glances, directly to her lover's heart. The same imagery is used by Stefano Protonotaro in his poem *Assai mi placeria*. We read:

Poi che m'appe legato,
Co li occhi sorrise,
Si ch'a morte mi mise
Como lo badalisco
Ch'aucide che gli è dato;
Co li occhi m'aucise.
(ll. 40-45)[28]

The poet is bound to his lady because of her smiling eyes and it is these eyes, like those of the basilisk, that kill him. The nature of the basilisk was well documented

[27] 'Bestiario moralizzato di Gubbio', edited by A. Carrenga, in *Le Proprietà degli Animali*, edited by G. Celli (Genoa: Costa & Nolan, 1983), p. 111.
[28] *Poeti del Duecento*, edited by G. Contini, vol. 1 (Milan: Ricciardi, 1960). All references to the poetry of Stefano Protonotaro are taken from this edition.

throughout the Middle Ages and it is said that it had the ability to kill a man with just one glance.[29]

To return to the *Mare amoroso*, we find yet another animal image:

> E lo parlar, tuttora anzi pensato,
> Sag[g]io e cortese e franco e vertudioso
> Sì come ispecchio che non sa mentire,
> Anzi raporta dritta simiglianza,
> Mi fa isvegliar di son[n]o doloroso
> Sì come lo leon lo suo figliuolo.
>
> (ll. 114-19)

His lady, the poet says, is wise, courteous, noble and virtuous, features apt to rouse the lover from sleep in the way that the lion wakes its cub. Again, the explanation is in the bestiaries. In chapter XXIII of the *Libellus de Natura Animalium* we are told that the lion has four main characteristics, of which the second is of importance here:

> Secunda proprietas leonis est ista quia nascitur mortuus et iacet tribus deibus mortuus et postea venit pater eius et mittit magnum rugitum in ore eius vivificans ipsum et tunc capit quinque sensus.[30]

The lion cub, the author says, is born dead and remains so for three days. Then its father roars in its mouth and it is brought to life. In resembling a lion, then, the woman herself becomes a life-giving principle. Her virtue, everywhere reflected in her appearance and her speech, is catalytic and regenerative. It breathes new life into the lover's soul.

In a final example, *madonna* is equated to religious and mythical beings. In the *Detto d'amore* the lover praises his lady saying:

> E quand parla a gente,
> Sì umilmente parla
> Che boce d'angelo par là.
> Il su' danzar e 'l canto
> Val vie più ad incanto
> Che di nulla serena,

[29] *A Medieval Book of Beasts: Pierre de Beauvais' Bestiary*, edited by G. R. Mermier (Lampeter: Mellen Press, 1992), p. 93.
[30] 'Libellus de Natura Animalium', edited by P. Navone, in *Le Proprietà degli Animali*, edited by G. Celli (Genoa: Costa & Nolan, 1983), p. 260.

Ché.ll' aria fa serena.

(ll. 236-42)

Here we are told that when the lady speaks it is as though she were an angel in her humility and sweetness. Her dancing and singing are described as more enchanting than that of a siren. Sirens in particular are discussed in the *Libro della natura degli animali*, where they are said to have three features. The first, and most well known, is that they are part woman and part fish. The second is that they are part woman and part bird, like a harpy. The third is that they are part woman and part horse. Only one thing matters here, though, for we are told in relation to the first of these hybrid forms that:

> Quella che è [mezzo] pesce sì ha sì dolce canto, [che] qualunque omo l'ode sì è misteri che se li apressime; odendo l'omo questa voce, sì si adormenta, e quando ella lo vede adormentato sì li viene spora e uccidelo.

The siren is said to sing so sweetly that she causes men to slumber, whereupon she slays them. So it is, then, with *madonna*. She has the power to give new life and she also has the power to take it away. Her enchantment, the lover suggests (a shade ruefully), can at the same time be deadly.[31]

Precious metals and gems

In much of the poetry we are considering, women are compared to precious metals and gems. One prevailing theme is the likening of blonde hair to gold in expressing female beauty. A case in point is Nature of the *Tesoretto* when the poet speaks of her hair saying:

> Il capel de la testa,
> Sì ch'io credea che 'l crino
> Fosse d'un oro fino

[31] For an image of the siren see figure 18. She is depicted as half woman and half fish with long flowing hair.

Partito sanza trezze.

(ll. 250-53)[32]

Similarly, in Giacomo da Lentini's canzone *Meravigliosamente, madonna* is described thus:

Fiore d'ogn' amorosa,
Bionda più c'auro fino.

(ll. 58-59)

Her blonde hair, the poet says, surpasses gold in brightness. The significance of gold and other precious metals is simply stated. In antiquity it was prized for its brilliance, its reflective qualities, its rarity and its value. In ancient Egypt, gold, often associated with the sun, was used to make crowns and ornaments for the pharaohs and represented the gods in their glory. Pliny the Elder, in the *Naturalis Historia* (XXXIII, xix, 60), also confirms the special significance of this metal:

> Primum autem bonitatis argument quam difficillime accendi. Praeterea mirum, prunae violentissimi ligni idomitum palea citissime ardescere atque, ut purgetur, cum plumbo coqui. Altea causa pretii maior, quod minimi usus deterit, cum argento, aere, plumbo lineae praeducantur manusque sordescant decidua materia.[33]

Gold, he says, is a hardy metal. It is resistant to fire, rust and wear. It can be purified and is easily worked. Men, he goes on, hunger for gold because of greed. Never satisfied with resources found on the earth's surface, they find it necessary to plunder the earth for her hidden wealth. Comparing women with gold, then, means several things. It confirms at one and the same time their value, their desirability and their purity. Like precious metals, they are to be prized above all things. Like gold in particular, they are to be sought out and possessed.

---

[32] *Brunetto Latini: Il Tesoretto*, edited by M. Ciccuto (Milan: Rizzoli, 1985).
[33] *C Plini Secundi: Naturalis Historiae, Libri XXXVII*, edited by C. Mayhoff, vol. 5 (Lipsiae: In Aedibus, B. G. Teubneri, 1906).

Silver is another precious metal with a part to play here. The beauty of silver lies in its clarity and reflectiveness. In Giacomo da Lentini's *Dolce coninzamento* he celebrates the beauty of his lady when he tells us:

> Ed io baciando stava
> in gran diletamento
> con quella che m'amava,
> bionda, viso d'argento.
>
> (ll. 21-24)

In his discordo *Donna, per vostro amore*, Giacomo Pugliese praises his lady using similar imagery:

> La vostra gran belleze
> Messo m'ha in ismagamento;
> Donami allegreze,
> Chiarita in viso più ch'argento.
>
> (ll. 86-89)

His beloved's face is described as beautiful because it is clear and shines like silver – properties (as far as the tradition is concerned) explored by Pliny in his *Naturalis Historiae* (XXXIII, xix, 58) when he states:

> Praecipuam gratiam huic materiae fuisse arbitror non colore, qui clarior in argento est magisque diei similis, ideo militaribus signis familiarior, quoniam longius fulget, manifesto errore eorum, qui colorem siderum placuisse in auro arbitrantur, cum in gemma aliisque rebus non sit praecipuus.

Silver, he says, was used in military standards because, being so reflective, it made them visible from afar. *Madonna* too, therefore, becomes a beacon of purity and of light.

Precious gems too formed part of the repertoire of praise. Greatly prized for their beauty and brightness, as well as for their medical and other spiritual values,[34] they were brought back to Europe in vast quantities by merchants and crusaders alike.[35] De

[34] J. Evans, *Magical Jewels of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance particularly in England* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1922), p. 38.
[35] G. F. Kunz, *The Curious Lore of Precious Stones* (London: Lippincott, 1913), p. 66.

Bruyne, with his specifically aesthetic interest in this matter (he is speaking here of Heraclitus in particular), addresses the matter in this way: 'Tout ce qui brille, comme le verre, l'or, la pierre précieuse, tout ce qui est poli est beau. La couler doit flamboyer comme le feu, briller comme l'air illuminé, rutiler comme le soleil.'[36] Precious stones, he goes on, were valued in terms of their brilliance and reflectiveness, between them lighting up everything in the vicinity. Eloquent in this sense, then, are poems such as Giacomo da Lentini's sonnet *Diamante, né smiraldo, né zafin*:

> Diamante, né smiraldo, né zafino,
> Né vernul'altra gema preziosa,
> Topazo, né giaquinto, né rubino,
> Né l'aritropia, ch'è sì vertudiosa,
>
> Né l'amatisto, né 'l carbonchio fino,
> Lo qual è molto risprendente cosa,
> Non àno tante belezze in domino
>
> Quant'a in sé la mia donna amorosa.
>
> (ll. 1-8)

In a familiar poetic ploy, Giacomo lists a series of gems, and then suggests that their beauty cannot compare with that of *madonna*. She is more worthy, he says, than the heliotrope and more resplendent than the onyx. Her beauty surpasses that of them all. Similar in mood, or rather in strategy, is the sonnet *Madonna à 'n se vertute con valore* by Giacomo da Lentini, who praises his lady thus:

> Madonna à 'n sé vertute con valore
> Più che nul'altra gemma preziosa:
> Che isguardando mi tolse lo core,
> Contant'è di natura vertudiosa.
>
> (ll. 1-4)

Here too the poet's lady exceeds every precious stone in point of beauty. She is herself described as a miracle of nature. Jacopo Mostacci, in his poem *Amor ben veio che mi fa tenire* is of the same opinion:

---

[36] E. de Bruyne, *Études D'Esthétique Médiévale: De Boèce a Jean Scot Erigène*, (Brugge: Tempelhof, 1946), vol 1, p. 298.

Or canto, ché mi sento megliorato,
Ca, per bene aspettare,
Sollazzo ed allegrare – e gioi' mi venni
Per la più dolze donna ed avenante
Che mai amasse amante,
Quella ch'è di bieltate
Sovrana in veritate,
C'ognunque donna passa ed ave vinto,
E passa perle, smeraldo e giaquinto.

(ll. 16-24)[37]

His lady's beauty, the poet says, surpasses that of all women. This beauty is precisely that of pearls and other gems. Pearls, in fact, were understood to be sovereign here for their rarity and individual uniqueness (both in shape and colour), and for this reason figure from time to time in descriptions of a woman's teeth and skin. In the canzone *La gioia e l'alegranza*, for example, by Chiaro Davanzati his lady is described as having

Li denti minotetti
Di perle sono serrati.

(ll. 29-30)[38]

Her teeth are small and the colour of pearls. In chapter XIX of the *Vita nuova* there is an account of Beatrice whose skin is similarly described:

Color di perle ha quasi, in forma quale
Convene a donna aver, non for misura:
Ella è quanto de ben pò far natura:
Per essemplo di lei bieltà si prova.

(ll. 47-50)[39]

These two extracts were in fact discussed earlier, in the first chapter, in relation to colour and complexion generally. However, pearls are, and were, suggestive of more

[37] *La Poesia Lirica del Duecento*, edited by C. Salinari (Turin: UTET, 1951). All references to the poetry of Jacopo Mostacci are taken from this edition.
[38] *La Poesia Lirica del Duecento*, edited by C. Salinari (Turin: UTET, 1951). All references to the poetry of Chiaro Davanzati are taken from this edition.
[39] 'Vita nuova', in *Dante Alighieri: Opere Minori*, edited by D. de Robertis and G. Contini, La Letteratura Italiana, vol. 1, pt. 1 (Milan: Ricciardi, 1984).

than this. 'The ancients were greatly puzzled', one historian tells us,[40] 'to account for the presence of the pearl in the oyster, but they finally arrived at a satisfactory conclusion. The oyster, at certain seasons, opens to receive the dew, and the pearl was the offspring of this union. The pearl was large or small, and more or less pure and beautiful, according to the size and purity of the dew-drop the oyster had received in its bosom.' Pearls were thus steeped in myth and popular suggestivity. Colour, neatness and symmetry go hand in hand with mystery. Pearls, used in connection with women then suggest something of the exotic.

Mythical figures

In much medieval literature women are compared with mythological characters as a means of emphasising their beauty. In, for example, Guido delle Colonne's *La mia gran pena e lo gravoso affanno*, the lady's beauty is said to exceed that of Morgan le Fey of Aurthurian provenance:

> Sovr'ogne amante m'ave più 'norato:
> Ch'ag[g]io aquistato – amar la più sovrana,
> Ché se Morgana – fosse infra la gente,
> Inver madonna non paria neiente.
>
> (ll. 33-36)

His lady's beauty, the poet says, surpasses even hers. The same analogy appears in the sonnet *Viso mirabil, gola morganata* by Dante da Maiano:

> Viso mirabil, gola morganata,
> Non ho trovata – tua par di bellezze:
> Al mondo no 'nde fu nessuna nata,
> Che somigliata – fosse a tue fattezze.
>
> (ll. 1-4)[41]

[40] M. de Barrera, *Gems and Jewels, their History, Geography, Chemistry and Ana: From the earliest age down to the present time* (London: Bentley, 1860), p. 116.

[41] *Dante da Maiano: Rime*, edited by R. Bettarini (Florence: le Monnier, 1969). All references to the poetry of Dante da Maiano are taken from this edition.

Here again the woman in question is said to have a face and a neck similar to that of Morgan le Fey. Women are also from time to time compared with Helen of Troy, another mythical figure, as, for example, in the *Detto d'amore* attributed by some to Dante, where we read the following:

> La bocca e 'l naso e 'l mento
> À più belli, e non mento,
> Ch'unque nonn-eb[b]e Alena.
>
> (ll. 195-97)

Here we are given a description of the lower part of the lady's face – of her nose, mouth, and chin, all more beautiful, the poet says, than Helen's. Another reference to this figure is found in the sonnet [*O*]*i Siri Deo, con forte fu lo punto* by Filippo da Messina, where we read:

> Poi non son meo ma vostro, amor meo fino,
> Preso m'avete como Alena Pari,
> E non amò Tristano tanto Isolda
> Quant'amo voi, per cui penar non fino.
>
> (ll. 9-12)[42]

The poet tells us that he was captured by his lady's beauty in the same way that Paris was enslaved by Helen of Troy's. In all these cases the poet taps into a common literary consciousness for the purposes of making her beauty – and thus his passion – intelligible. Her beauty takes on, in fact, a legendary status of its own. Like that of the image or analogy it takes on its own special kind of mystery and timelessness.

[42] 'Filippo da Messina' in *Duecento: La Poesia Italiana dalle Origini a Dante*, edited by F. Bonomi <http://www.silab.it/frox/200/ind_scu.htm> [accessed 3 September 2004]. All references to the poetry of Filippo da Messina are taken from this edition.

Chapter 3

Perception and Pleasure: Aspects of Aesthetic Subjectivity

Introduction

From questions of form *ex parte obiecti*, we now pass to questions of perception and appreciation *ex parte subiecti*. Having, in other words, explored aspects of form in and for itself, we come now to beauty as seen and celebrated by the one who looks on – by the more or less ardent lover. And the first thing to note is the exquisite *letterarietà* of it all, the celebration of *madonna's* beauty as part of a literary game or contrivance. Little of what the lover says, that is to say, can be taken at face value, for, quite consciously, he is working with a literary topos, with a stock-in-trade collection of motifs. The ideal exists prior to, and irrespective of, the lady's historical presence. With this in mind, we shall, in what follows, consider two things: first, the perception and contemplation of beauty in the lover or beholder, where it will be a question of psychological reaction and response to what he sees beyond him, as well as the mechanisms of retention and inner projection (the image inscribed on the heart and summoned up in imagination). The second section discusses the influence of beauty upon the observer. It explores the various reactions caused by the perception of *madonna*'s beauty as a whole and in its specific parts. Here it will be a question of

praise, love, joy, and reassurance on the one hand, and of desire and suffering on the other.

All reactions experienced and displayed by the lover begin with the act of perception, together, psychologically, with a registration of excitement and of stimulation; so, for example, the following two passages consider the effect of beauty as experienced first by the eyes, then by the mind and heart. The first passage is from Cino's sonnet, *Una gentil piacevol giovanella*, where the poet says:

> Ella m'aparve agli occhi tanto bella,
> Che per entr' un penser al cor venute
> Son parolette, che dal cor vedut'è
> Abbia 'n vertù d'esta gioia novella;
>
> La quale ha presa sì la mente nostra
> E [l'ha] coverta di sì dolce amore,
> Ch'ella non può pensar se non di lei.
>
> (ll. 5-11)[1]

The lady's beauty, once perceived, straightaway commends itself for its excellence. The mind then sends a message to the heart which, while rejoicing in it, is immediately captive to it, resulting in a state of obsession. The second passage is from the canzone *Quando appar l'aulente fiore* by Bonagiunta Orbicciani. Here the poet says:

> Per quella che m'ha in balía
> E m'ha d'amore conquiso
> Vo pensoso nott'e dia,
> Per quella col chiaro viso:
> Co' riguardi e dolce riso
> M'ha lanciato e mi destringe
> La più dolze criatura.
>
> (ll. 11-17)[2]

The lover, he says, has been conquered by his lady and made captive to love. He constantly thinks of her limpid countenance, of her sweet smile, and of the eyes which

[1] *Poeti del Duecento*, edited by G. Contini, vol. 2 (Milan: Ricciardi, 1960). All references to the poetry of Cino da Pistoia will be from this edition unless otherwise stated.

have wounded him and bind him to her. Here, then, is a preliminary account of the psychology – of the more or less tyrannical psychology – of perception, with its dominant imagery of wounding, captivity and fixation.

Observing beauty

Looking more closely at this set of ideas and preoccupations, we may begin with the experience of seeing, and, more particularly, with the experience of the eyes which are throughout considered to be portals to the heart and mind. Exemplary in this sense is Giacomo da Lentini's sonnet *Amore è un desio che ven da core*, where he expresses the function of the eyes as the prior condition of, and point of departure for, an inner process of imagining and of rejoicing:

> Ché gli occhi rapresentano a lo core,
> D'onni cosa che veden, bona e ria,
> Cum'è formata naturalmente;
>
> E lo cor, che di zo è concipitore,
> Imagina e qual place quel desia:
> E questo amore regna fra la zente.
>
> (ll. 9-14)[3]

Here, then, is the mechanism of perception and conveyance. The function of the eyes is to present everything they see to the heart, whether it is worthy or not (the 'bona e ria' of l. 10). In the heart, which turns back upon and considers the image (the 'concepitore' of l. 12), a desire is conceived which brings the lover pleasure, and it is this pleasure that dominates him. The eyes relay the image in its totality (the 'D'onni cosa che veden' of l. 10) and pleasure is only found when what is seen is appreciated and desired by the heart. In short, the experience of the eyes is internalised and 'imaged' (a sort of imaginative intentionalisation) by the heart, and it is this that causes the

[2] *La Poesia Lirica del Duecento*, edited by C. Salinari (Turin: UTET, 1951). All references to the poetry of Bonagiunta Orbicciani are taken from this edition.

lover's yearning. Eyes as the means of conveyance also figure prominently in Guido delle Colonne's canzone, *Amor che lungiamente m'hai menato*, where we find the following:

> Gli occhi a lo core sono gli messaggi
> De' suoi incominciamenti per natura.
>
> (ll. 59-60)[4]

Here the eyes act as messengers tending to precipitate or to inaugurate love. They are, in this sense, the preliminary instruments of love, the means of its inception. Another text which confirms the notion of the ideas as inaugurating love is the canzone *L'uom che conosce tengo ch'aggi ardire* by Cino da Pistoia. Here we witness the sequence of events that follows perception:

> Quando li occhi rimiran la bieltate
> E trovan lo piacer, destan la mente,
> L'anima e 'l cor lo sente,
> E miran dentro la propïetate,
> Stando a veder sanz'altra volontate.
> Se lo sguardo si giugne, immantenente
> Passa nel core ardente
> Amor, che pare uscir di chiaritate.
>
> (ll. 15-22)[5]

Once the eyes observe beauty then the mind, the soul and the heart find pleasure. The eyes are obsessed (the 'Stando a veder sanz'altra volontate' of l. 19), and with this Love enters unopposed into the heart. Dante has much the same idea in the *donna gentile* episode (XXXVII) of the *Vita nuova*. He states that the love he feels for this woman is caused by the pleasure his eyes have in observing her:

> Io venni a tanto per la vista di questa donna, che li miei occhi si cominciaro a dilettare troppo di vederla; onde molte volte me ne crucciava nel mio cuore ed aveamene per vile assai.[6]

---

[3] *Poesia del Duecento e del Trecento*, edited by C. Muscetta and P. Rivalto (Turin: Einaudi, 1956).
[4] *Poeti del Duecento*, edited by G. Contini, vol. 1 (Milan: Ricciardi, 1960). All references to the poetry of Guido delle Colonne are taken from this edition.
[5] *Le Rime di Cino da Pistoia*, edited by G. Zaccagnini (Geneva: Olschki, 1925).
[6] 'Vita nuova', in *Dante Alighieri: Opere Minori*, edited by D. de Robertis and G. Contini, La Letteratura Italiana, vol. 1, pt. 1 (Milan: Ricciardi, 1984).

Conscious of his allegiance to Beatrice, he condemns the fickleness of his eyes as the means of perception and thus of his waylaying. It is through them that beauty enters his heart and causes him to love. Beatrice has died and Dante seeks to recover something of her historical presence by way of a fresh act of sense perception. Having confirmed in chapters XVIII and XIX of the *Vita nuova* that his happiness would come about through praising Beatrice, he seeks now, for all his earlier re-thinking of the issue, to recapture by way of the eyes something of the sensuous delight he once enjoyed in her presence.

Contemplating beauty

The contemplation of beauty and the psychology of this are matters often registered by the poets. Contemplation is understood as the stage that follows sense perception and is significant as it marks the point of psychological transformation. It is no longer a question now of the phantasm or original impression, but this now takes its place in the mind and heart intentionally – as an ideal image and exemplary presence. This is best understood in terms of the kind of epistemology according to which the perception of anything in the world beyond self is subject to abstraction or intentionalisation, at which point its historical presence becomes secondary to the image created and deposited in the mind or heart. As far then as *madonna* is concerned, she becomes, once intentionalised, an icon of beauty and, well nigh, a tyrannical presence in the soul; so, for example, the fearful reaction of Mazzeo di Ricco in his poem *Lo gran valore e lo pregio amoroso*:

> Così, pensando a la vostra bieltate,
> Amor mi fa paura,
> Tanto sete alta e gaia ed avenente:

E tanto più ca voi mi disdegnate.

(ll. 11-14)[7]

Love, as the poet thinks on his lady, makes him fearful. To contemplate her presence in the world is to see and to rejoice in her beauty and nobility. But it is simultaneously to be plunged into a state of agitation. Another example of this is found in Bonagiunta's canzone *Novellamente amore*, where, celebrating his lady, he states:

La beltà, che mantene,
Se pare in nulla parte,
Ogn'altra beltà dispare:
Chi più mente la tene,
Più fatta par per arte,
Tuttora più bella pare.
E lo suo risguardare – gaio e gente,
Cui colpa, cuoce e sente
Di sì dolce ferita
Che 'nde cresce gioia e vita.

(ll. 15-24)

Her beauty, he says, is unparalleled, and contemplation merely enhances that beauty. He speaks too of her glances, joyful and gentle, which, again as he contemplates her presence, target the heart and mind with sweet wounds and bring him joy. The contemplation of beauty thus intensifies the poet's original state of mind and concentrates his feelings. Installed within, in the heart and mind, she reigns over him emotionally and directs and refines his every reaction to her. It is not the immediate impact of the perception of beauty that brings this about, but his continuing intentional contemplation and iconisation of her and of the excellence she represents.

The process of iconisation itself of *madonna*, and as a result the captivated lover, is registered in, for example, Giacomo da Lentini's canzone *Meravigliosamente*, where he says:

Com'om, che pone mente
In altro exemplo, e pinge
La simile pintura,

[7] *Poeti del Duecento*, edited by G. Contini, vol. 1 (Milan: Ricciardi, 1960). All references to the poetry of Mazzeo di Ricco are taken from this edition.

Cosí, bella, facc'eo,
Che 'nfra lo core meo
Porto la tua figura.

(ll. 4-9)[8]

Here we are told that the poet paints a beautiful image of his lady, similar to the original, which he carries in his heart. Another instance of this is to be found in Cino's sonnet *Signor, e' non passò mai peregrino*. Here the poet complains that his lady's beautiful appearance, installed now, iconically, in the mind, has laid hold of him obsessively and inescapably, exercising a more powerful grip on him than her original presence:

[...] coll'altra nella [mia] mente pinge
A simil di piacer sì bella foggia,
Che l'anima guardando se n'estringe.

(ll. 9-11)

He is, in effect, captivated by the image itself and this determines his basic state of mind. To the fore here as throughout, then, is the notion of an image installed at the pinnacle of the mind, whence it exercises its benign and oppressive influence by turns – indeed at times simultaneously. *Madonna* is, in effect, contemplated at a remove, by way of her installation, and henceforth dominant presence, within the inner forum of awareness.

Praise

A starting point for an understanding of the subjective aspects of beauty must begin with the notion of praise. Praise stands at the beginning and end of almost every reaction the lover expresses once he has seen a beautiful woman. It is praise which compels the lover to write of his lady and it is praise which encourages him to explore

[8] *Giacomo da Lentini: Poesie*, edited by R. Antonelli (Rome: Bulzoni, 1979). All references to the poetry of Giacomo da Lentini are taken from this edition unless otherwise stated.

his every state of mind as her devotee. Even when she is a cause of his suffering his basic mood and inclination is that of praise, all of this, however, forming in the poem itself part of its specifically literary undertaking, and having to this extent, therefore, no necessarily profound, genuinely autobiographical or confessional substance. Something of this basic disposition to praise come what may can be seen in, for example, Guido delle Colonne's canzone *Gioiosamente canto*, where the poet is constrained, he says, to a eulogy of his lady's beauty:

> La vostra gran bieltate
> M'ha fatto, donna, amare,
> E lo vostro ben fare
> M'ha fatto cantadore.
>
> (ll. 49-52)

Her beauty and good deeds leave him, he says, no alternative but to sing her praises. Why she is beautiful we are not told, the precise properties of beauty remaining in this case part of the tacit stock-in-trade of literary assumptions. Elsewhere, though, as, for example, in Giacomo Lentini's sonnet *Lo viso mi fa andare alegramente*, it is a matter of her countenance and complexion, of her radiant face:

> [L]o viso mi fa andare alegramente,
> Lo bello viso mi fa rinegare;
> Lo viso mi conforta ispesament[e],
> l'adorno viso che mi fa penare.
>
> Lo chiaro viso de la più avenente,
> L'adorno viso, riso mi fa fare:
> Di quello viso parlane la gente,
> Che nullo viso [a viso] li pò stare.
>
> Chi vide mai così begli ochi in viso,
> Né sì amorosi fare li semblanti,
> Né boca con cotanto dolce riso?
>
> Quand'eo li parlo moroli davanti,
> E paremi ch'i' vada in paradiso,
> E tegnomi sovrano d'ogn'amante.

The beauty of her face lies in its resplendence as a whole, in her eyes and in her sweet smile. The lover's intimate reactions are recorded one by one and include feelings

of joy, renewed hope, comfort and (paradoxically) pain. Her beauty is such as to precipitate both pain and pleasure, intuitions, in effect, both of life and of death. Elsewhere, it is expression that counts – a movement of the eyes, a smile on the lips or a blush on the cheeks, these things serving both to complement and to complete her beauty. In, for example, Bonagiunta Orbicciani's ballata *Donna, vostre belleze* the poet says:

> Donna, vostre belleze,
> Ch'avete col bel viso,
> Mi fan d'Amor cantare.
> Tante avete adornezze,
> Gioco, sollazo e riso,
> Che siete fior d'amare.
>
> (ll. 5-9)

Here, joy and laughter as registered in *madonna*'s countenance are correlates and indeed efficient causes of her beauty. Her expression not only adds to her formal beauty, but it confirms the intimate beauty of her soul. This is a notion advanced, in fact, by Dante when in the *Convivio* (III, viii, 7-8) he dwells on the function of the eyes and mouth as reflections of the soul:

> Onde vedemo che ne la faccia de l'uomo, là dove fa più del suo officio che in alcuna parte di fuori, tanto sottilmente intende, che, per sottigliarsi quivi tanto quanto ne la sua materia puote, nullo viso ad altro viso è simile; perché l'ultima potenza de la materia, la qual è in tutti quasi dissimile, quivi si riduce in atto. E però che ne la faccia massimamente in due luoghi opera l'anima – però che in quelli due luoghi quasi tutte e tre le nature de l'anima hanno giurisdizione – cioè ne li occhi e ne la bocca, quelli massimamente adorna e quivi pone lo 'ntento tutto a fare bello, se puote. E in questi due luoghi dico io che appariscono questi piaceri dicendo: ne li occhi e nel suo dolce riso.[9]

Beauty, Dante suggests, has about it a hidden grace – an almost sacramental value.

But beauty is to be found in, and duly praised for, other, more abstract qualities too. We are often told of *madonna's* wisdom, understanding, and spiritual bearing

[9] *Dante Alighieri: Convivio*, edited by F. B. Ageno, 2nd edn (Florence: Le Lettere, 1995).

generally; so, for example, in the context of loss and possible bereavement, Giacomo Pugliese, in the canzone *Morte perché m'hai fatta sì gran guerra,* has the following:

> Ov'è madonna e lo suo insegnamento,
> la sua belleza e la gran canoscianza,
> lo dolze riso e lo bel parlamento,
> gli oc[c]hi e la boc[c]a e la bella sembianza,
> e lo suo adornamento – e cortesia?
>
> (ll. 31-35)[10]

Physical beauty, certainly, is part of it, but there is also a range of other, more specifically spiritual and even cerebral characteristics involved here. What he misses about his lady, the poet says, is as much her spiritual grace as anything else. Much the same may be said of the sonnet *Donna del Poeta* in the *Intelligenzia* (9) where the poet's lady is celebrated for a similar range of qualities:

> Bella, savia e cortese, in veritate,
> Sovrana d'adornezze e di valenza,
> Piagente e dilettosa donna mia.
> Gia mai nessuna cosa il cor disia,
> Altro ch'aver di lei sua benvoglienza.
>
> (ll. 5-9)[11]

Once again, *madonna* is praised for her wisdom, courtesy and general graciousness, all of which bring blessing on the poet. Again, it is all exquisitely literary in mode and hyperbolic in manner, everything tending towards an ideal or iconic projection of womanhood. But, for all that, the catalogue of virtues to be praised is nonetheless extensive to the point of exhaustive, and the aesthetic meditation broad to the point of comprehensive.

---

[10] *La Poesia Lirica del Duecento*, edited by C. Salinari (Turin: UTET, 1951). All references to the poetry of Giacomo Pugliese are taken from this edition.

[11] 'Donna del Poeta' in *L' Intelligenzia*, edited by V. Mistruzzi (Bologna: Carducci, 1928).

The captivated lover

Compulsion forms an important part of the psychology of praise generally. The poet is at every point captivated by his lady's beauty, and henceforth hostage to it. This notion is everywhere in the tradition. Cino's sonnet *Avegna che crudel lancia 'ntraversi*, for example, is a study in emprisonment and captivity:

> Avegna che crudel lancia 'ntraversi
> Nel mi' cor questa gioven donna e gente
> Co' suo' begli occhi, [e] molto foco versi
> Nell'anima che m'arde duramente,
>
> No starò di mirarla fisamente,
> Ch'ella mi par sì bella in que' suo' persi,
> Ch'i' non cheggio altro che ponerla mente,
> Po' di trovarne rime e dolci versi.
>
> (ll. 1-8)

The influence of the lady's eyes here is threefold. First, they pierce the lover with cruel arrows. Secondly, their beauty inflames his soul so that it burns more than ever ardently. Thirdly, her eyes enthral him, leaving him no alternative but to hymn her beauty. The lover, compelled by the phantasm, cannot but write of his lady. Similarly eloquent in this sense is Cino's sonnet *Oïmè lasso, quelle trezze bionde*, where hair and eyes are the agents of captivity:

> Oïmè lasso, quelle trezze bionde
> Da le quai riluciéno
> D'aureo color li poggi d'ogni intorno;
> Oimè, la bella ciera e le dolci onde.
>
> (ll. 1-4)

Her hair, Cino says, is long and blonde and has been parted and arranged into two attractive braids – cords, in effect, which bind the poet to her. A parallel text is to be found in Part VI of Francesco da Barberino's *Reggimento e costumi di donna*, where again it is a question beautiful tresses and their power to captivate:

> Le trezze vostre gioiose amorose

Leghin la vita mia da vizi e mali.

(p. 104)[12]

The lady's joyful locks preserve him, he says, from all that is evil and immoral – all in all a sweet captivity.

The compelling power of beauty in *madonna* is from time to time subject to detailed, step-by-step psychological analysis; so, for example, is the case of Achilles as he first gazes upon Polyxena in chapter CCCLVII of the *Roman de Troie*:

> Acchilles rimirava tutta fiata la damigella che molto gli sembrava di gran beltà piena: così era ella senza fallo, che più bella di lei non fu mai veduta, né egli non la crede mai sì bella vedere, né non farà elli senza nullo fallo.[13]

First, the author says, comes the apprehension of beauty and the sensation, and conviction, of something incomparable. Then comes an account of the psychology of it all; a chain reaction is set up within the heart and mind of the beholder by what he sees:

> Acchilles, ch'era ripreso dell'amore de la damigella, così com'io v'ho detto, quando vidde ch'ella se n'andava, elli non rimuta suoi occhi sopra lei tanto come la pote vedere e riguardare, ché non chedeva mai muovarsi de la piazza tanto com'elli la vedesse: elli rimira sovente suo colore. Quando ne la vidde così andare, che una fiata era elli più vermeglio che grana, altra fiata era sì pallido come se fusse morto, altra fiata era ghiaccio e freddo come nieve tremava come verga al vento, altra fiata sprende e arde come fuoco.

Achilles is, in effect, spellbound, one psychosomatic reaction following hard on the heels of another. First his face turns red, then pale like death, then cold like snow, then trembling like the grass blown in the wind – a series of reactions exploring the symptomatology of captivity in love. In the canzone *Pir meu cori allegrari* by Stefano Protonotaro we find a similar pathology, explored now in terms of the mythological captivity of the tiger to its own reflection:

> Preju è valenza e jujusu pariri,
> E di billizzi cutant'abundanza,

[12] *Francesco da Barberino: Reggimento e Costumi di Donna*, edited by G. E. Sansone (Turin: Loescher - Chiantore, 1957), p. 104.
[13] 'Roman de Troie', in *Volgarizzamenti del Due e Trecento*, edited by C. Segre (Turin: UTET, 1953).

Chi illu m'è pir simblanza,
Quandu eu la guardu, sintir la dulzuri,
Chi fa la tigra in illu miraturi.

(ll. 20-24)[14]

The myth explaining the habits of the tiger is found in the *Libro della Natura degli Animali* (Chapter IX):

> Lo tiro si è una bestia che è più currente che nulla bestia che omo [conosca, ed] è de tal natura ch'elli si deletta de mirare indel specchio, sì che quando lo savio cacciatore vae per prendere li suoi figlioli a la tana, si porta con seco molti specchi, e vasene a la tana del tigro, e quinde li soi figlioli trae e partese con essi.[15]

The tiger is said to delight in, and to be held fast by, its own reflection, so much so that when hunters seek to capture its cubs they bring with them mirrors as a means of distraction. The poet, like the tiger, is enchanted by his lady and suffers no distraction from her. She is for ever present in his thoughts and because of this he cannot escape. She stands at the pinnacle of his mind and dominates his existence. Another example of beauty as a principle of compulsion is found in Part VI of the *Reggimento e costumi di donna*, where we read:

Poi tutta vostra statura mi stringa
Sì al piagere e dilettar di voi
Che, fuor che Dio, tutt'altre cose lassi,
Però che siete colei che creata
Nella mente divina
Foste davanti all'altre creature.

(p. 104)

The poet feels compelled by his lady's physical presence. He says that he has put aside everything, other than God, for her because she is one of the first fruits of divine creativity and stands above all creatures. Giacomo da Lentini demonstrates the same idea in *Guiderdone aspetto avere*. His lady's beauty lays hold of him despotically:

---

[14] *Poeti del Duecento*, edited by G. Contini, vol 1 (Milan: Ricciardi, 1960). All references to the poetry Stefano Protonotaro are taken from this edition.
[15] 'Libero della Natura degli Animali', in *La Prosa del Duecento*, edited by C. Segre and M. Marti, (Milan: Ricciardi, 1959), p. 307.

Le bellezze che 'n voi pare
Mi distringe, e lo sguardare
de la cera;
La figura piacente
Lo core mi diranca:
Quando voi tegno mente,
Lo spirito mi manca – e torna in ghiaccio.

(ll. 46-52)

Her face and expression plunge him into suffering. When he thinks of her his spirit deserts him, in effect freezing his existence. So also, along these lines, the canzone *Novellamente amore* by Bonagiunta Orbicciani:

Per lo piacer m'ha vinto,
Per lo parlar distretto,
Per l'operare conquisto,
Per la beltà m'ha cinto,
Che 'l core da lo petto
Pare che mi sia diviso.

(ll. 29-34)

The lover confesses to the triumph of his lady's beauty over him and to the completeness of her conquest. He has, he says, no choice but to surrender, a situation that he both desires and laments. In Giacomo da Lentini's canzone *Madonna, dir vo voglio*, pride, the poet says (his lady's pride), is the victor:

Madonna, dir vo voglio
Como l'amor m'à priso,
Inver' lo grande orgoglio
Che voi bella mostrate, e no m'aita.

(ll. 1-4)

The poet addresses his lady telling her that he is captivated by her beauty and compelled by her pride and sovereignty, a situation paralleled in Guido delle Colonne's canzone *Amor, che lungiamente m'ài menato* where we find the following:

Non dico ch'a la vostra gran bellezza
Orgoglio non convegna e stiale bene,
C'a bella donna orgoglio ben convene,
Che si mantene – in pregio ed in grandezza.
Troppa alterezza – è quella che sconvene;
Di grande orgoglio mai ben non avene.

(ll. 27-32)

Pride, however, properly proportioned, is acknowledged as a proper adjunct of beauty, albeit at one and the same time as a principle of oppression.

Love

Beauty throughout is a catalyst of love, its main cause and point of departure, though love is a matter as much of pain as of pleasure. In the *Vita nuova* (XIV. 5), Dante tells us of his experience upon seeing Beatrice at a wedding party. He begins to tremble, he says, and goes on:

> Allora fuoro sí distrutti li miei spiriti per la forza che Amore prese veggendosi in tanta propinquitade a la gentilissma donna, che non ne rimasero in vita piú che li spiriti del viso; e ancora questi rimasero fuori de li loro istrumenti, però che Amore volea stare nel loro nobilissimo luogo per vedere la mirabile donna.

Seeing Beatrice, he says, he loses just about every faculty of mind and body. Throughout, a beautiful face is enough to precipitate love; so in, for example, Guido delle Colonne's canzone *Ancor che l'aigua per lo foco lassi* we read the following:

> Or mi son bene accorto,
> Quando da voi mi vienni,
> Che, quando mente tenni
> Vostro amoroso viso netto e chiaro,
> Li vostri occhi piagenti
> Allora m'addobraro,
> Che mi tennero menti
> E diedermi nascoso
> Uno spirto amoroso
> Ch'assai mi fa più amare
> Che non amò null'altro, ciò mi pare.
>
> (ll. 66-76)

The lover, in approaching *madonna*, is compelled by the beauty of her face, which is described in the poem as pure and resplendent. The prospect of her eyes remains fixed in his mind arousing a hidden flame of love, the poet's intention here, therefore, being psychological rather than physical. Indeed, physical description can be done away with altogether in pursuit of the psychological. In, for example, Rinaldo

d'Aquino's canzone *Amorosa donna fina*, it is the impact of the lady's beauty rather than its appearance that matters:

> Or dunque no è maraviglia
> Si fiamma d'amor m'apiglia
> Guardando lo vostro viso,
> Che l'amor mi 'nfiamma in foco.
>
> (ll. 7-10)[16]

The poet marvels at his own reactions, the fire of love engulfing him in the moment he looks upon his lady's face. The preoccupation is, in fact, universal, all these poets being concerned as much with responsiveness as with formality, with passion engendered by beauty as much as with beauty itself in its objective aspect.

Dante, more than ordinarily systematic in his attempt to account for love's coming about in the lover, suggests, in the canzone *Donne ch'avete intelletto d'amore* of the *Vita nuova* (XIX. 12), that love emanates from the lady's eyes:

> De li occhi suoi, come ch'ella li mova,
> Escono spirti d'amore inflammati,
> Che feron li occhi a qual che allor la guati,
> E passan sí che 'l cor ciascun retrova.
>
> (ll. 51-54)

When Beatrice moves her eyes, he says, burning spirits of love radiate from them. These spirits in turn wound the eyes of those who look upon her and penetrate into the heart. Cavalcanti, in the sonnet *O tu, che porti nelli occhi sovente*, has the same notion:

> O tu, che porti nelli occhi sovente
> Amor tenendo tra saette in mano,
> Questo mio spirto che vien di lontano
> Ti raccomanda l'anima dolente,
>
> La quale ha già feruta nella mente
> Di due saette l'arciere soriano;
> A la terza apre l'arco, ma sì piano
> Che non m'aggiunge essendoti presente.
>
> (ll. 1-8)[17]

[16] *La Poesia Lirica del Duecento*, edited by C. Salinari (Turin: UTET, 1951). All references to the poetry of Rinaldo d'Aquino are taken from this edition.

Love, in this personified form, is said to reside in his lady's eyes and is described as carrying three arrows in his hand: the first inspires love, the second provokes hatred, and the third extinguishes passion. The poet, he says, has already been wounded by the first two arrows, and the third is ready to strike him. However, it is (paradoxically) his lady who protects him from its ravages, a whole love *casistica* turning in this sense upon the notion of the eyes as principles of love, as that whereby love is both generated and sustained.

Speech too is enough to engender a movement of love in the attentive lover. In the *Detto d'amore*, the poet praises his lady thus:

> Q[u]ando la boca lieva,
> Ogne nuvol si lieva
> E l'aria riman chiara.
> Per che 'l me' cor sì chiar' à
> Di non far giamai cambio
> Di lei a nessun cambio;
> Ch' ell' è di sì gran pregio
> Ch'i' non troveria pregio
> Nessun, che mai la vaglia.
>
> (ll. 243-51)[18]

The clarity of her utterance is the basis of her beauty, and it is in this respect – in respect of her eloquence – that she surpasses all others. Her words, the poet says, are limpid. They banish every cloud of uncertainty and cause the poet to love. In the canzone *Dolce coninziamento* by Giacomo da Lentini, by contrast, it is *madonna's* radiance that causes the poet to love:

> O stella rilucente
> Che levi la matina!
> Quando m'apar davanti,
> Il suo' dolzi sembianti
> M'incendon la corina.
>
> (ll. 6-10)

---

[17] *Guido Cavalcanti: Rime, con le Rime di Iacopo Cavalcanti*, edited by D. de Robertis (Turin: Einaudi, 1986). All poems by Cavalcanti will be referenced from this edition.

[18] 'Il Detto d'amore', in *Il Fiore e il Detto d'Amore: attribuibili a Dante Alighieri*, edited by G. Contini (Milan: Mondadori, 1984).

Her appearance, he says, is resplendent. Her beauty, surpassing as it does that of the spheres, causes the lover's heart to burn ardently within him, beauty, under the aspect of resplendence thus functioning as a principle of affection.

Joy

But to love is to rejoice in love, joy also, therefore, being part of the poetic programme. Joy, in effect, stands at the beginning and end both of love and of praise; so, for example, in the *Detto d'amore*, we read the following:

La sua piacente ciera
Nonn-è sembiante a cera,
Anz' è sì fresca e bella
Che lo me'cor s'abella
Di non le mai affare
Tant' à piacente affare.

(ll. 171-76)

Here we learn that, far from being pallid or wan, *madonna*'s face is fresh and beautiful, all this bringing joy to the poet's heart. Her radiant complexion brings pleasure to her lover which, satisfying him as it does, causes him to forsake all others. Thus the formalities of beauty are accompanied in the text itself by a whole psychology of reception, by an account of the pleasure it generates in the beholder. Not only complexion, however, but the details of physiognomy – brows, for example – are able to afford pleasure in the attentive spirit; so, again, in the *Detto d'amore*:

La sua fronte, e le ciglia,
Bieltà d'ogn' altr'eciglia:
Tanto son ben voltati
Che ' mie' pensier' voltati
Ànno ver' lei, che gioia
Mi dà più c[h]'altra gioia
In su' dolze riguardo.

(ll. 177-83)

Her eyebrows, the poet says, are unparalleled in their beauty. Neatly arched he cannot but contemplate them, and, in contemplating them, rejoice in them. Her sweet

glances too fill him with joy, completing his contentment. But the argument needs to be deepened, since external beauty of this kind points to the still more ravishing beauty of the soul. Eloquent here is the discordo, *Dal core mi vene* by Giacomo da Lentini, where the poet's praise runs as follows:

> Vostro valure
> C'adorna ed invia
> Donne e donzelle,
> L'avisaturi
> Di voi, donna mia,
> Son gli ochi belli:
> Pens'a tutore
> Quando vi vedia
> Con gioi novelli.
>
> (ll. 43-51)

Here, *madonna*'s beauty is evidently external but at the same time bears witness to something internal. It encourages other women along the same path, each alike, therefore, holding out the prospect of joy to those who look on. This, at any rate, is Cavalcanti's theme as he celebrates his love in the ballata *Veggio negli occhi della donna mia*. The lover praises the woman by describing the joy he experiences upon beholding her eyes:

> Veggio negli occhi de la donna mia
> un lume pien di spiriti d'amore,
> Che porta uno piacer novo nel core,
> Sì che vi desta d'allegrezza vita.
>
> (ll. 1-4)

Beauty here is understood to be both of physical appearance and of spiritual disposition, each alike affording the lover new joy. Something of this is also present in his sonnet *Veder poteste, quando v'inscontrai* where, having noted the pain of his captivity by love, the poet then registers the sense of relief and of comfort – joy, perhaps, is going too far in this case – that he derives from the beauty of his lady's eyes:

> Ma po' sostenne, quando vide uscire
> Degli occhi vostri un lume di merzede,

Che porse dentr' al cor nova dolcezza.

(ll. 9-11)

In his lady's eyes, he says, is the light of mercy. This, amid his suffering, sustains the lover and brings a new sweetness to his heart.

Joy and reassurance in the perception of beauty, however, are not always divorced from the anxiety of love, one state of mind often enough subsisting alongside its polar counterpart. Comfort and reassurance, for example, might linger on alongside fear and perplexity. An example of this is to be found in Federico II's canzone *De la mia disïanza*, a study in the admixture of all these things:

Ma tanto m'asicura
Lo suo viso amoroso
E lo gioioso riso e lo sguardare
E lo parlar di quella criatura
Che per paura mi face penare
E dimorare: tant'è fine e pura.

(ll. 22-27)[19]

The lover is reassured by his lady's amorous face, her joyful smile, her glances and her words. Still, however, he is fearful, this being the contradiction generated by her perfection and purity. The psychological landscape is in this sense endlessly variegated, one state of mind constantly shading off into another within the economy of the whole.

Moral goodness and reassurance

The moral and morally reformative element of all this is prominent everywhere. Goodness throughout is regarded as a correlate of beauty – a matter, in fact, for further discussion in the next chapter. For the moment, it is enough to note that beauty in a woman is understood to elicit, not simply love and joy, but also rectitude and a noble

[19] *Federico II di Svevia* edited by L. Cassata (Rome: Quiritta, 2001). All references to the poetry of Federico II will be from this edition.

state of mind in the lover. Often enough the lady is seen as a moral guide, as exemplary, not only in beauty, but in goodness; so, laconically, the author of the *Reggimento e costumi di donna* (Part VI), as he praises, under its moral aspect, the beauty of his lady:

> Li vostri labri amabili e vermigli
> Narrino a me la via del camin retto.
>
> (p. 104)

The physical goes hand in hand with the moral, or, more exactly, with moral guidance. Not only, in other words, does the lady manifest goodness, but she encourages it in all those fortunate enough to encounter her. Even her hands – meaning by this, perhaps, her gestures – are enough, he says, to inculcate good manners and right-mindedness:

> Le vostre man mi disegnin la via
> Per la quale possa in be' costumi andare.
>
> (p. 104)

Even her feet, he goes on (in an unexpected emphasis), are, once glimpsed, sufficient to banish every villainy:

> Li vostri piedi spenghino in me tutta
> La vanità e li pensier villani.
>
> (p. 104)

What matters here, then, is the morally exemplary and reformative aspect of the issue, the moral and the aesthetic being but two facets of the same question. To behold *madonna* in respect of any of her features is to be renewed morally, to be spiritually refreshed. The aesthetic path is also a moral path, a journey into heightened moral awareness. To this extent, *madonna* can be, for the lover, a principle of reassurance and deep stability. Eloquent expression of this comes in Jacopo Mostacci's canzone *Amor ben veio che mi fa tenire*, where, by way of her adamantine presence, she becomes, in effect, the rock and foundation of his existence:

> E voi mi siete, gentil donna mia,

Colonna e forte braccio,
Per cui sicuro giaccio – in ogne lato.
[...]
E voi mi siete, bella, rocca e muro:
Mentre vivo per voi starò sicuro.

(ll. 40-48)[20]

She is in every sense a source of comfort for him, the means of his spiritual strengthening. A further example of this comes in the *Mare amoroso*, where his lady's embrace is the source of his every security and wellbeing:

Le vostre braccia mi fanno tal cerchio,
Quando voi mi degnaste d'abracciare,
C'assai mi tengo più sicuro e franco
Che 'l negromante al cerchio de la spada.

(ll. 126-29)[21]

The lover, in his lady's arms, feels safe, her role, in this sense, being that of guardian or tutor or mentor – all these things rolled into one.

Erotic desire

Most dramatic and urgent of all, however, is the specifically erotic yearning engendered in the lover by the spectacle of *madonna*'s beauty. Here, it is all a question of desire and anticipation. Exemplary in this sense is Guinizzelli's sonnet *Chi vedesse a Lucia un var capuzzo*, where the sight of her face is enough to engender a desire for – in this case violent – possession, her unwillingness (the 'ultra su' grato' of l. 9) being part of the pleasure:

Ah! prender lei a forza, ultra su' grato,
E bagiarli la bocca e 'l bel visaggio
E li occhi suoi, ch'èn due fiamme de foco!

(ll. 9-11)[22]

[20] *La Poesia Lirica del Duecento*, edited by C. Salinari (Turin: UTET, 1951). All references to the poetry of Jacopo Mostacci are taken from this edition.
[21] 'Il Mare amoroso', in *Poeti del Duecento*, edited by G. Contini, vol. 1 (Milan: Ricciardi, 1960).
[22] *Guido Guinizzelli: Rime*, edited by L. Rossi (Rome: Giulio Einaudi, 2002). All references to the poems of Guinizzelli are from this edition.

Another example of erotic anticipation, explored here under the aspect of wish-fulfilment, comes in Bonagiunta's *Io non son degno donna di cherere*:

> La vostra dolce bocca ed amorosa
> D'uno baciar mi desse sicuranza;
> Poi la mia vita ne sarà gioiosa.
>
> (ll. 12-14)

In keeping with what we have already seen, it is the mouth which acts as a principle of enticement. Giacomo da Lentini, in his canzone *Dolce coninciamento*, has the same motif:

> Ed io basciando stava
> In gran dilettamento
> Con quella che m'amava,
> Bionda, viso d'argento.
>
> (ll. 21-24)

As regards the function of other parts of the body as a principle of erotic delight there is less to go on. Marco Polo, in chapter XVIII of the *Milione* has the tale of the cobbler, who, having to inspect a woman's feet to make his professional judgement, is overcome by a sudden delight in the prospect:

> La dona iera deschalza e mostrò-li el pe' e lla ganba, e 'l dimonio tentò questo chalzolar sì ch'el ave dilleto de veder el pe' e lla ganba de questa dona.[23]

In the event his temptation is too much for a humble cobbler and so he sends the woman away. For the most part subtly and discreetly articulated, the erotic strength of the question is in this sense almost always discernible just beneath the surface of the line.

Pain and torment

[23] *Marco Polo: Il Milione*, edited by R. M. Ruggieri, Biblioteca dell' 'Archivum Romanticum', serie 1, vol. 200 (Florence: Olschki, 1986). All references to the *Milione* will be from this edition unless otherwise stated.

Pain, often that of separation or remoteness (and thus of deprivation in respect of *madonna*'s beauty), is itself, frequently enough, testimony to that beauty and to its hold over the lover's soul. Something of this is discernible in Giacomo da Lentini's canzone *S'io doglio non è maraviglia*, where he proceeds as follows:

> Odio e invidio tale affare,
> Che con lei non posso stare
> Né veder la sua figura.
> Sovente mi doglio e adiro,
> Figgir mi fa allegrezze;
> Tuttavia raguardo e miro
> Le suoe adornate fattezze,
> Lo bel viso e l'ornamento
> E lo dolze parlamento,
> Occhi, ahi, vaghi e bronde trezze.
>
> (ll. 26-35)

Suffering here is a consequence of estrangement. He will not be happy, the lover says, until such time as he can look once more upon his lady and contemplate her exquisite features. These features are duly enumerated: her beautiful face, her grace, her eyes and her blonde plaits. Again, this is, in truth, nothing but a further series of *topoi*, but the love-at-a-distance motif is worth noting all the same as part of the established repertoire. A further instance of this is Cino's poem *La dolce vista e 'l bel guardo soave*, a lament upon the loss of the lady and all that follows by way of grief. The pain the lover expresses is intensified by his reference to the joy that was once his in contemplating his lady:

> Quando per gentile atto di salute
> Ver' bella donna levo gli occhi alquanto,
> Sì tutta si disvia la mia virtute,
> Che dentro ritener non posso il pianto,
> Membrando di mia donna, e cui son tanto
> Lontan di veder lei:
> O dolenti occhi miei,
> Non morrete di doglia?
>
> (ll. 28-35)

With her departure he is completely enervated, and cannot stem his tears. He will, he says, die of his pain, all this having about it a characteristic vein of Cinian

melancholy. Similar in mood is Giacomo Pugliese's canzone *Morte, perché m'hai fatta sì gran guerra*:

> Morte, perché m'hai fatta sì gran guerra,
> Che m'hai tolta madonna, ond'io mi doglio?
> La fior de le belleze mort'hai in terra,
> Per che lo mondo non amo né voglio.
>
> (ll. 1-4)

This canzone is a lament occasioned by bereavement. Death, the poet maintains, has left the world bereft of beauty. Nothing now holds any attraction for him. Only grief remains.

But it is not only separation and bereavement that bring pain. If anything more critical in this respect is rejection, often registered in the context of praise; so for example, Guittone, in the sonnet *Ai lasso, como mai trovar poria*, an exploration, precisely, of the opposition between sweet lips and cruel words, has this to say:

> Deo! come può sua dolce bocca dire
> Parola amara sì crudelemente
> Che fammi crudel morte sofferire?
>
> (ll. 9-11)[24]

Her mouth is described as sweet and all that proceeds from it acrimony. Beauty, by no means diminished in these circumstances, is nonetheless conducive only to pain – simply another aspect of its complex presence to the lover. Suffering figures prominently too in Inghilfredi, whose *Audite forte cosa che m'avene* is but another expression of grief as a by-product – indeed as *the* product – of love:

> Da lei neente vogliomi celare:
> Lo meo tormentar [cresce],
> Como pien è, dicresce,
> E vivo in foco come salamandra.
>
> Sua caunoscenza e lo dolze parlare
> E le belleze e l'amoroso viso,

[24] *Rime di Guittone D'Arezzo,* edited by N. Bonifazi (Urbino: Argalia, 1950). All references to the poems of Guittone d'Arezzo are from this edition.

Di ciò pensando fami travagliare.

(ll. 5-11)[25]

The very thought of *Madonna*, he says, is enough to plunge him into woe, he himself living on in the midst of pain just as the salamander lives on in the midst of fire.[26]

One final example of the lover's torment is found in the poem *Angel di Deo simiglia in ciascun atto* by Cino da Pistoia. He says:

Ogni parola sua sì dolce pare,
Che là 've posa torna
Lo spirito, che meco non soggiorna.

(ll. 7-9)

Here as throughout, honied words are nothing but a principle of anxiety and suffering. Everything, to be sure, is literary and hyperbolic, but everything even so testifies to the range and subtlety of the love issue in the mind of the poet and to his wish to explore its every subjective nuance and inflexion.

[25] *La Scuola Poetica Siciliana: Le Canzoni dei Rimatori Nativi di Sicilia,* edited by B. Panvini, vol. 2 (Florence: Olschki, 1958). All references to the works of Inghilfredi will be from this edition.

[26] Chapter XXVII of 'Bestiario moralizzato di Gubbio', edited by A. Carrega, in *Le Proprietà degli Animali*, edited by G. Celli (Genoa: Costa & Nolan, 1983), p. 281, has this description of salamanders: 'Propietas et natura salamandre talis est quod vivit de solo igne.'

Chapter 4

Beauty and Goodness: the Transcendentals of Female Form

Introduction

Our topic in this thesis is the substance and psychology of female beauty in Italian literature from 1230 to 1330. In the first two chapters we considered the physical representations of beauty and the analogies and comparisons employed in its celebration. The third chapter examined the issue from a psychological point of view, in respect, that is to say, of the effect of beauty thus understood and celebrated upon the observer, how beauty encouraged love, and the states of mind this tended to engender. This chapter goes on to consider the relationship in *madonna* between beauty and goodness. Now is not the time to consider the early Italian lyric tradition in its totality (a tradition that moves with a variety of ideological and stylistic inflexions from the *Scuola siciliana* through the Tuscan or transitional school headed by Guittone to the *dolce stil nuovo*), but it is important to note from the outset that innovation affects everything within this tradition by each subsequent contributor, and especially by Dante in the *Vita nuova*; the inaugural canzone of his 'new praise style' (*stilo de la loda*), namely *Donne ch'avete intelletto d'amore* offers a remarkable ontological and even theological intensification of traditional material. Beatrice, in other words, becomes

now, not simply an object of erotic celebration, but a showing forth of divine goodness, a special miraculous presence on earth (*Tanto gentile e tanto onesta*, ll. 8-9). In fact it is with *Donne ch'avete intelletto d'amore* that we may begin this part of our study, for here Dante is concerned precisely with the association in his lady of moral and aesthetic excellence:

> Madonna è disiata in sommo cielo:
> Or voi di sua virtú farvi savere.
> Dico, qual vuol gentil donna parere
> Vada con lei, che quando va per via,
> Gitta nei cor villani Amore un gelo,
> Per che onne lor pensero agghiaccia e pere;
> E qual soffrisse di starla a vedere
> Diverria nobil cosa, o si morria.
>
> (ll. 29-36)[1]

The poet here speaks of Beatrice as desired in heaven on account of her virtue. He says that all noble women should walk at her side. As she makes her way, Love himself strikes a chill in those with base hearts and causes every cruel thought to perish. Any man who looks upon her either becomes ennobled or else perishes. Beatrice thus embodies both beauty and moral goodness, and in consequence of this inspires both love and – in a properly ethical sense of the term – nobility. And it is often, in fact, this combination of beauty and goodness that initiates and sustains the lover's passion for her. A glance at the speculative tradition in which this stands will confirm the strength of the union, in the contemporary mind, of the aesthetic and the moral, of beauty and goodness as ontological correlatives (as twin aspects, that is to say, of being in act). Exemplary in this sense (and probably familiar to Dante himself) is the following passage from Aquinas' commentary on the *Divine Names* of the Pseudo-Dionysius, where we are given an account of love as co-involving both beauty and goodness,

[1] 'Vita nuova', in *Dante Alighieri: Opere Minori*, edited by D. de Robertis and G. Contini, La Letteratura Italiana, vol. 1, pt. 1 (Milan: Ricciardi, 1984).

indeed as uniting them as reciprocal aspects of things inasmuch as they are and thus as co-extensive in consciousness:

> Ab audientibus autem recte divina in eadem virtute, recte ordinatur a sanctis Theologis dilectionis et amoris nomen, secundum divinas manifestations; et est hoc virtutis untivae et coniunctivae et differenter concretivae in pulchro et bono, propter pulchrum et bonum praeexistentis, et ex pulchro et bono propter pulchrum et bonum tributae et continentis coordinate, secundum communicativam alteram habitudinem, moventis autem prima ad subiectorum providentiam et collocantis minus habentia in superioribus per conversionem.
>
> (IV, xii, 167)[2]

Love, in effect, Thomas sees Dionysius as saying, both proceeds from, and unites, beauty and goodness in a single movement of the spirit. As the twin basis of every affective movement in creation, the one cannot exist without the other. They are the twin and indispensable facets of one and the same reality. This sense of the union of goodness and love in creation, suitably modulated according to its fresh literary circumstances, is everywhere discernible in the lyric poetry of the high Middle Ages. In, for example, Guinizzelli's canzone *Al cor gentil rempaira sempre amore*, the poet gives an account of love in terms of its relationship with other virtues. The canzone – proceeding by way, for the moment, of the lover rather than the beloved – begins thus:

> Al cor gentil rempaira sempre amore
> Come l'ausello inselva i.lla verdura;
> Né fe' amor anti che gentil core,
> Né gentil core anti ch'amor, Natura.
>
> (ll. 1-4)[3]

Love, Guinizzelli maintains, like a bird in a forest, always dwells within a noble heart. Nature herself created them simultaneously, affirming as she did so their inevitable and indispensable union. Nobility here is emphatically ethical rather than

---

[2] *S. Thomae Aquinatis: In Librum Beati Dionysii de Divinis Nominibus Expositio*, edited by C. Pera, (Rome: Marietti, 1950).

[3] *Guido Guinizzelli: Rime*, edited by L. Rossi (Rome: Giulio Einaudi, 2002). All references to the poems of Guinizzelli are from this edition.

social in conception, nobility in the latter sense bearing no necessary or intrinsic relationship at all with goodness:

> Fere lo sol lo fango tutto 'l giorno:
> Vile reman, né 'l sol perde calore;
> Dis' omo alter, "Gentil per sclatta torno;"
> Lui semblo al fango, al sol gentil valore:
> Ché non dé dar omo fé
> Che gentilezza sia fòr di coraggio,
> In degnità d' ere',
> Se da vertute non à gentil core,
> Com' aigua porta raggio
> E 'l ciel riten le stelle e lo splendore.
>
> (ll. 31-40)

Just as the sun will shine all day upon the mud without in any sense elevating it, so love is forever lost on the ignoble – in the sense of morally bereft – spirit, making no difference there at all. Love, instead, is inherent in the (morally) noble heart as light in water and stars in the sky. Thus the two are inextricably united in the noble lover. Elsewhere in Guinizzelli, however, and in relation now to *madonna* as the object of his love, the equation is extended to include beauty. In, for example, the sonnet *Io voglio del ver la mia donna laudare,* he explores his lady's goodness by way, precisely, of – among other things – her comeliness:

> Io voglio del ver la mia donna laudare
> Ed asembrarli la rosa e lo giglio:
> Piú che stella diana splende e pare,
> E ciò ch'è lassú bello a lei somiglio.
>
> Verde river' a lei rasembro e l'âre,
> Tutti color' di fior', giano e vermiglio,
> Oro ed azzurro e ricche gioi per dare:
> Medesmo Amor per lei rafina meglio.
>
> Passa per via adorna, e sí gentile
> Ch'abassa orgolio a cui dona salute,
> E fa 'l de nostra fé se non la crede;
>
> E' no lle pò apressare om che sia vile;
> Ancor ve dirò c'à maggior vertute:
> Null'om pò mal pensar fin che la vede.

Praise, in the first part of the sonnet, attaches precisely to physical appearance. *Madonna*'s complexion is said to be like that of roses and lilies, and her radiance to

surpass the brilliance of the morning star and all the beauties found in the sky. Her youth is celebrated by way of a comparison with green meadows and the clear air, while her beauty generally is assimilated to that of flowers and precious gems. The second part of the sonnet explores the effect of all this on the bystander or onlooker. Her effect here is uniformly benevolent and creative. Her virtue and nobility encourage humility in those she greets, purging them as they do so of every evil thought. Thus beauty and goodness are at every point intertwined in the poet's perception and celebration of his lady. These attributes irradiate the world round about her and are observed and appreciated both in her physical form and in her character, each alike tending to ennoble the lover as he stands in her presence.

Dante, for his part (and doubtless with Guinizzelli's dialectic in mind) develops the argument along similar lines, though in a manner, admittedly, which reaches beyond the specifically erotic *tematica* of *Al cor gentil rempaira sempre amore*. The argument is worth following through step by step. Nobility, he says in the *Convivio* (IV, xix, 4-5), must be understood to comprehend virtue, just as the sky as a whole comprehends the stars by which it is adorned:

> E qui si vuole sapere che, sì come scritto è in Ragione e per regola di ragione si tiene, in quelle cose che per sé sono manifeste non hanno mestiere di pruova: e nulla n'è più manifesta che nobilitade essere dove è vertude, [ché] ciascuna cosa volgarmente vedemo, in sua natura [virtuosa], nobile esser chiamata. Dice adunque: "sì com'è 'l cielo dovunqu'è la stella," e non è questo vero e converso, cioè rivolto, che dovunque è cielo sia la stella, così è nobilitade dovunque è vertude, e non vertude dovunque nobilitade: e con bello e convenevole essemplo, ché veramente [nobilitade] è cielo nello quale molte e diverse stelle rilucono.[4]

Thus wherever virtue is, there also is nobility, its ground and first principle. The same passage (5) then goes on:

> Riluce in essa le intellettuali e le morali virtudi; riluce in essa le buone disposizioni da natura date, cioè pietade e religione,

[4] *Dante Alighieri: Convivio*, edited by F. B. Ageno, 2nd edn. (Florence: Le Lettere, 1995).

> [e] le laudabili passioni, cioè vergogna e misericordia e altre molte; riluce in essa le corporali bontadi, cioè bellezza e fortezza e quasi perpetua valitudine.

Here Dante praises Lady Philosophy and her properties, among which are the intellectual and moral virtues, piety, religion, modesty, mercy and ... beauty, a formal aspect of nobility in its actualisation. Of the essence, therefore, for Dante too is the mutual immanence of the moral and the aesthetic. The latter constitutes, in practice, a mode of the former. It is an aspect of its showing forth or positive manifestation. Something of this equation informs the praise sonnet *Tanto gentile e tanto onesta pare* in Chapter XXVI of the *Vita nuova*, where it is by way of Beatrice's beauty (the 'piacente' of l. 9) that her goodness (supremely, her humility) is imparted to the world:

> Tanto gentile e tanto onesta pare
> La donna mia quand' ella altrui saluta,
> Ch'ogne lingua deven tremando muta,
> E li occhi no l'ardiscon di guardare.
>
> Ella si va, sentendosi laudare,
> Benignamente d'umiltà vestuta;
> E par che sia una cosa venuta
> Da cielo in terra a miracol mostrare.
>
> Mostrasi sì piacente a chi la mira,
> Che dà per li occhi una dolcezza al core,
> Che 'ntender no la può chi no la prova:
>
> E par che de la sua labbia si mova
> Un spirito soave pien d'amore,
> Che va dicendo a l'anima: Sospira.

Her beauty, Dante says, creates a sweet sensation deep within the lover's heart, and from her lips proceed a gentle spirit bringing a sigh to the soul. In her, therefore, the union of goodness and beauty is as complete as it is irreducible, the moral and the aesthetic co-existing as aspects of one and the same reality. To know the one, Dante suggests, is to know the other, their unity and consistency being absolute.

Madonna and the donna-angelo

Frequently enough *madonna*'s beauty is described as 'angelic'. The basic idea here is the now familiar – and in its statement everywhere hyperbolic – notion of *madonna*'s surpassing excellence in this sense. Properly understood, she stands, in the mind of the lover, at the pinnacle of creation, her beauty having about it something of the miraculous or extraordinary. Manifest in the natural order, Nature herself, the poet often maintains, would find it challenging to replicate her, to reproduce such perfection. In, for example, Rinaldo d'Aquino's canzone *Amor, che m'ha 'n comando* the poet discusses the loss of his lady, stating:

> [...] di quella rimembrando
> Ch'altra più bella, o pare,
> Non porìa rinformare
> Natur' a suo podire.
>
> (ll. 5-8)[5]

Madonna's status is iconic, unique and exemplary, and she is, as such, the object of endless admiration and an encouragement to endless striving on the plane of goodness. Exemplary beauty is also the subject of the poem *Donna del Poeta* in the *Intelligenzia* (15), the various aspects of this beauty being in this case carefully itemised:

> La sua sovramirabile biltate
> Fa tutto 'l mondo più lucente e chiaro;
> Savia, e cortese, e di novella etate,
> Sì bella mai non fu al tempo di Daro.
>
> Al mondo non à par di nobiltate,
> Con ricche veste e con corona d'auro.
>
> (ll. 1-6)[6]

Everything about her confirms her surpassing beauty. Her wisdom and courtesy are legendary and her nobility unequalled. Her attire is said to be beautiful and costly,

[5] *La Poesia Lirica del Duecento*, edited by C. Salinari (Turin: UTET, 1951). All references to the poetry Rinaldo d'Aquino are taken from this edition.

evident above all in the crown of gold she wears upon her head. The poem goes on to analyse in minute detail each aspect of this beauty, the whole creating an impression of iconic incomparability. Beauty and goodness, once more, are all of a piece.

It is, however, the angel image that most succinctly captures and expresses this idea of surpassing beauty, and of surpassing beauty as the correlative of surpassing goodness. The angel image, in fact, fulfils in the text itself the dual role of articulating excellence *ex parte obiecti* and devotion *ex parte subiecti*, herein lying its special eloquence. Take, for example, Giacomo da Lentini's sonnet *Angelica figura – e comprobata*, the quatrains of which (replete in *rimalmezzo*) run as follows:

> Angelica figura – e comprobata,
> Dobiate – di ricura – e di grandezze,
> Di senno e d'adornezze – sete ornata,
> E nata – d'afinata – gentilezze.
>
> Non mi parete femina incarnata,
> Ma fatta – per gli frori di belezze
> In cui tutta vertudie è divisata,
> E data – voi tut[t]'è avenantezze.
>
> (ll. 1-8)[7]

The woman boasts every good thing – virtue, nobility, gentleness and beauty. She seems not to be made of human flesh at all, but of delicate blossoms irradiating charm. And with this, Cino, in the canzone *Si mi distringe Amore* (similarly committed to his lady's sovereignty on the aesthetic plane) concurs absolutely, *madonna* actually excelling in this sense the angels themselves:

> Com'io credo di piana,
> Vi elesse Deo fra li angeli più bella,
> E 'n far cosa novella
> Prender vi fece condizione umana:
> Tanto siete sovrana
> E gentil creatura, che lo mondo
> Esser vi dee giocondo,

---

[6] 'Donna del Poeta', in *L' Intelligenzia*, edited by V. Mistruzzi (Bologna: Carducci, 1928).
[7] *Giacomo da Lentini: Poesie*, edited by R. Antonelli (Rome: Bulzoni, 1979). All references to the poetry of Giacomo da Lentini are taken from this edition.

Sol che tra noi vostra cera soggiorna.

(ll. 50-57)[8]

The poet's praise knows no bounds. Were she an angel, God himself would choose her as paramount, for she is more beautiful than them all. She is, as it stands, nothing less than miraculous, and the world itself rejoices in her presence. And all this, once again, involves goodness, for that is what angels (other than those which are fallen and henceforth demonic) actually are – paragons of goodness. Again, as we see from Aquinas' commentary on the *Divine Names*, it was the Pseudo-Dionysius who secured the idea once and for all, angels for him being, as of the essence, transparent to God's own goodness:

> Sed neque in Angelis est malem. Si enium enuntiat bonitatem divinam boniformis Angelus, illud existens secundum participationem secundario, quod est secundum causam enuntiatum primo, imago Dei est Angelus, manifestation occulti luminis; speculum purum, clarissimum, incontaminatum, incoinquinatum, immaculatum, suscipiens totam, si est conveniens dicere, pulchritudinem boniformis deiformitatis.
>
> (IV, xxii, 210-1)

Angels make manifest in a peculiarly dramatic fashion the goodness and beauty of the Godhead from which they proceed. Hence, as far as women are concerned, the power of the analogy, for they too are understood to show forth these primordial qualities. Indeed, as Giacomo da Lentini suggests in his canzone *La 'namoranza disïusa*, they may even be said to constitute an incarnation of these things:

> Tanto siete maravigliosa,
> Quand'i' v'ò bene affigurata,
> C'altro parete che 'ncarnata.
>
> (ll. 25-27)

Here, then, is another miracle in the flesh, another mini-essay in incarnation, with *madonna* bearing about her all the surpassing excellence – at once moral and aesthetic –

[8] *Le Rime di Cino da Pistoia*, edited by G. Zaccagnini (Geneva: Olschki, 1925).

of an angel. This, then, is one of the most prominent *topoi* in the celebration of female beauty, even Cavalcanti, notably suspicious of *topoi*, deploying it liberally himself. This is found, for example, in his description of *madonna*'s face in the ballata *Fresca rosa novella*:

> Vostra cera gioiosa,
> Poi che passa e avanza
> Natura e costumanza,
> Ben è mirabil cosa.
>
> (ll. 23-26)[9]

A miracle, in scholastic discourse, is a happening over above the customary ways of nature, which is precisely what Cavalcanti's point is here. Cino especially, however, deploys the angelic motif on a large scale, the ballata *Angel di Deo simiglia in ciascun atto* being in this sense exemplary:

> Angel di Deo simiglia in ciascun atto
> Questa giovane bella,
> Che m'ha co gli occhi suoi lo cor disfatto.
>
> Di cotanta vertù si vede adorna,
> Che qual la vuol mirare,
> Sospirando convene il cor lassare.
>
> (ll. 1-6)[10]

Madonna is in every sense consummate. She is young, beautiful, and endowed with every virtue. To contemplate her, the poet says, is to be 'undone', abandoned to every force in human nature making for diffusion and desgregation. It is to surrender by way of a sigh – his lady's presence in this sense being as much a destructive as a constructive force, a principle of loss and alienation. Unlike the passages above, then, here we find a negative and indeed annihilative aspect of the *donna-angelo*. Her salvific power is temporarily eclipsed. More positive is Inghilfredi in his canzone *Audite forte*

---

[9] *Guido Cavalcanti: Rime, con le Rime di Iacopo Cavalcanti*, edited by D. de Robertis (Turin: Einaudi, 1986). All poems by Cavalcanti will be referenced from this edition.
[10] *Poeti del Duecento*, edited by G. Contini, vol. 2 (Milan: Ricciardi, 1960).

cosa che m'avene, where once again it is a question of understanding and celebrating goodness by way of incarnation:

> Sua caunoscenza e lo dolze parlare
> E le belleze e l'amoroso viso,
> Di ciò pensando fami travagliare.
> Iesù Cristo [creolla] in paradiso
> E, poi la fece angelo incarnata,
> Tanto di lei m'imbardo,
> Che mi consumo e ardo,
> Ch'eo rinvello com'fenice face.
>
> (ll. 9-16)[11]

To the fore here is his lady's wisdom, her sweet speech and affectionate countenance, all suggestive of an angel incarnate, indeed of an angel fashioned immediately by Christ himself. To love her, the poet says, is to be renewed like a phoenix.[12] Similarly, in Dante's canzone *Donne ch'avete intelletto d'amore* Beatrice emerges as an angelic presence apt to illuminate the world, to light it up with goodness and beauty:

> Angelo clama in divino intelletto
> E dice: "Sire, nel mondo si vede
> Maraviglia ne l'atto che procede
> D'un'anima che 'nfin qua su risplende."
>
> (ll. 15-18)

Her presence in heaven, the poet suggests, like that of all other such creatures, is a principle of completion ('Lo cielo, che non have altro difetto / Che d'aver lei, al suo segnor la chiede, / E ciascun santo ne grida merzede', ll.19-21). True, Beatrice belongs still to the natural order, and to this extent the poet proceeds, characteristically, by way of hyperbole and analogy. But proper appearances are saved (this being the way of

---

[11] *La Scuola Poetica Siciliana: Le Canzoni dei Rimatori Nativi di Sicilia,* edited by B. Panvini, vol. 2 (Florence: Olschki, 1958). All references to the works of Inghilfredi will be from this edition.

[12] In 'Libellus de Natura Animalium' edited by P. Navone, in *Le Proprietà degli Animali*, edited by G. Celli (Genoa: Costa & Nolan, 1983), p. 212, we are given a description of the nature of the phoenix: 'Natura fenicis est talis quod quando pervenit ad mortem, tunc canit duliciter suo cantu. Nam quando vult mori sua pettente natura tunc congregat multa ligna sicca et ponitse super ligna sicca et percutit ligna tantum cum alis quod ligna accenduntur et sic canendo communitur, ita quod fit ciner de ipsa. Et de illo cinere nascitur quidam vermis et de illo verme nascitur alia fenix.' The phoenix, on the verge of death, sets itself on fire and dies. From the ashes a worm is born and this, in turn, gives birth to another phoenix.

analogy), and the poet's discourse preserves in this sense something at least of the power of proper predication. Love himself, in fact, develops the argument in its specifically aesthetic register:

> Dice di lei Amor: "cosa mortale
> Come esser pò sì adorna e sì pura?"
> Poi la reguarda, e fra se stesso giura
> Che Dio ne 'ntende di far cosa nova.
> Color di perle ha quasi in forma, quale
> Convene a donna aver, non for misura:
> Ella è quanto de ben pò far natura;
> Per esemplo di lei bieltà si prova.
>
> (ll. 43-50)

Dante suggests Love himself is astonished at what he sees. Here, in Beatrice, is a being virtually *sui generis*, unique and unparalleled in all creation. Complexion, proportion and discretion all combine to produce a 'new thing' – another miracle, flawless in its conception and realisation.

Beauty thus understood and celebrated brings the poet into conversation with God himself as its maker; so, for example, Guinizzelli in the last stanza of the canzone *Al cor gentil rempaira sempre amore*, where the poet imagines himself in the tribunal of paradise and called upon to give an account of himself and of his preoccupation with *madonna*:

> Donna, Deo mi dirà, "Che presomisti?"
> Sïando l'alma mia a lui davanti.
> "Lo ciel passasti e 'nfin a Me venisti
> E desti in vano amor Me per semblanti:
> Ch'a Me conven le laude
> E a La Reina del reame degno,
> Per cui cessa onne fraude."
> Dir Li porò: "Tenne d'angel sembianza
> Che fosse del Tuo regno;
> Non mi fu fallo' s'in lei posi amanza."
>
> (ll. 51-60)

Taxed with what amounts to a species of idolatry, of exalting his lady above the Virgin and thus redirecting his spiritual energy, he seeks to explain his presumption. His lady, he says, seemed like an angel from heaven and thus he could not but love her and

sing her praises. By way, then, of a little drama or *sacra rappresentazione*, his theme is resolved at the highest level, in terms of a movement of conscience having about it a religious – or at least pseudo-religious – intensity.

Natural perfection

But the beauty of *madonna* is celebrated, typically, in terms, not only of supernatural but of natural perfection. She is in this sense the apogee of beauty in the natural order. Notable in this sense is this example from the *Mare amoroso*, in which the poet's lady is endowed by the planets with all the virtues traditionally associated with them:

> Questo mastro pianeta e gli altri sei
> Han messo in voi tutta la lor possanza
> Per farvi stella e specchio degli amanti:
> Ché 'l sol vi die' piagenza e cor gentile,
> [La] luna temperanza e umilitade,
> Satorno argoglio e alt[e]ri pensamenti,
> [E] Guipiter ricchezza e segnoria,
> [E] Marti la franchezza e l'arditanza,
> [E] Mercurio il gran senno e la scïenza,
> Venus benivoglienza e gran beltade.
>
> (ll. 185-94)[13]

Thus the sun bestows upon her comeliness and a noble heart. The moon gives her temperance and humility, while Saturn accounts for her pride. Jupiter bestows upon the lady riches and authority, and Mars gives her courage. By Mercury she is granted wisdom and by Venus benevolence and beauty. She is in this sense a repository of all goodness whatever, an amalgamation of every excellence below and above the moon. Just like the figures depicted in the north porch at Chartres cathedral, icons and images of every kind of moral virtue and elegance,[14] she stands at the peak of creation, a consummate being in the order of nature.

---

[13] 'Il Mare amoroso', in *Poeti del Duecento*, edited by G. Contini, vol. 1 (Milan: Ricciardi, 1960).

[14] See figures 5 and 6 for illustrations of the stone sculptures at Chartres. See also the description of the beatitudes given in É. Mâle, *Religious Art in France: The Thirteenth Century, A Study of Medieval*

The consequence of this from the point of view of the lover or of the one who looks on is that, not only does he find himself in the presence of surpassing beauty and surpassing goodness, but of a principle of regeneration and even of resurrection. This at any rate is Dante's theme in the great inaugural canzone of the *Vita nuova* (inaugural in respect of his new understanding of love) *Donne ch'avete intelletto d'amore*. The moral – as distinct from the aesthetic – moment runs as follows:

> E quando trova alcun che degno sia
> Di veder lei, quei prova sua vertute,
> Ché li avvien, ciò che li dona, in salute,
> E sì l'umilia, ch'ogni offesa oblia.
> Ancor l'ha Dio per maggior grazia dato
> Che non pò mal finir chi l'ha parlato.
>
> (ll. 37-42)

The lover, or indeed anyone else standing in Beatrice's presence, will find in her greeting a species of blessing. Drawn into a state of humility and piety, his offences will be forgotten and his spirit renewed. In fact, something of this is already discernible in an earlier phase of the *Vita nuova*, for example, in Chapter II Dante describes the colour of Beatrice's attire and its significance in respect of intrinsic nobility:

> Apparve vestita di nobilissimo colore, umile e onesto, sanguigno, cinta e ornata a la guisa che a la sua giovanissima etade si convenia.
>
> (*VN* ii. 3)

and again in Chapter III we have the following:

> [...] ne l'ultimo di questi die avvenne che questa mirabile donna apparve a me vestita di colore bianchissimo, in mezzo a due donne, le quali erano di più lunga etade [...]
>
> (*VN* iii. 1)

Where, then, red is a symbol of charity, white, in the second passage, is a symbol of purity, the image, in and through what amounts to characteristic process of self-

---

Iconography and its Sources, Bollingen Series XC (2) (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984), pp. 387-88.

interpretation or auto-exegesis, confirming the deep theme and abiding preoccupation of the text – the notion of Beatrice as a bringer of new life. Even her garments, therefore, are thematically eloquent, acting, not – as in the case of Costretta-Astinenza in the *Fiore* V (CII, 9-14)[15] – to disguise what she actually is and thus to defraud, but to confirm the substance of her being and its efficacy as a principle of resurrection in the lover. With this, then, the theme generally of beauty and goodness in *Madonna* reaches its highest – we might almost say religious, or at least pseudo-religious, – possibility. Not only is beauty goodness and goodness beauty, but between them, and for those fortunate enough actually to encounter them in *madonna*, they constitute a principle of moral revitalisation. Nothing, of course, is lost by way of erotic intensity, and everything here stands to be interpreted in relation to the nothing if not complex *casistica d'amore* serving to generate these texts and the means of their interpretation. Everything too, as we have reiterated throughout, is quintessentially *literary* in substance and spirit, and to this extent part of a particular kind of cultural-aesthetic undertaking. Even so, that same *casistica* and that same *letterarietà* offer the occasion for exploring some of the abiding values in human experience and for celebrating their realisation in practice.

[15] 'Il Fiore', in *Il Fiore e il Detto d'Amore: attribuibili a Dante Alighieri*, edited by G. Contini (Milan: Mondadori, 1984).

Conclusion

The first thing to stress in conclusion to this study, or rather to stress once again, is that everything – or almost everything – proposed here as an object of contemplation, from the formalities of beauty to its psychology, is in the nature of the literary, deployed in the context of what amounts to an exquisitely sophisticated literary game. The 'almost everything' moment allows (as we have already noted in the fourth chapter of this study), in truth, the astonishing degree of moral and theological intensification brought to bear by Dante in particular at this point. But in general and certainly in respect of a tendency to digress from the historical in favour of the ideal, uppermost in the mind of poets are the substance and weight of the iconic tradition. Doubtless there lurks from time to time, in the recesses of the image, a historical reality or a real encounter, but this, in the event, is wholly transcended by the image and by the craftsmanship expended upon it. But that does not necessarily rule out the value and viability of the poetic statement as a means of exploring a certain set of ideals or a certain kind of rarified spirituality. On the one hand, then, there are the formal components of beauty as understood and celebrated by the onlooker, the virtues of unity, proportion, symmetry, self-consistency, colour, texture and radiance. Everywhere, the object of the lover's delight is slender and exquisitely fashioned, with

discreet features, and radiant with her long blonde hair. And this in turn is understood to reflect the properties the soul, the inner purity and integrity of being which irradiates the historical presence of *madonna* and informs and confirms her beauty-in-depth, the depth-dimensionality of what appears on the surface. Her inner beauty shines forth, typically, through the eyes and on her lips, and is visible especially in her smiling countenance and sweet voice. Cosmetics and the apperances of beauty are, of course, important, and dress, jewelry, coiffure and adornment generally have their part to play in the enjoyment and celebration of beauty. But, as Dante stresses in the *Convivio*, beauty proper is a matter of *un*adornment, of the form and radiance proper to a woman in the simplicity and elegant sophistication of her natural presence. And it is in this context that analogy and hyperbole come into their own as a means of eulogisation, of confirming *madonna* in her status as beautiful. That beauty is unique, resplendent and unparalleled – or, if paralleled, paralleled only by that of precious stones and of stars in their courses. She is like the flowers of the field or of the garden, or like gemstones or precious metals – in short, a consummate presence and wholly exceptional within the natural order.

And with this, the poet-lover comes to the psychological aspect of his theme. In keeping with patterns of thought of an ultimately Aristotelian provenance (philosophy, in many cases at least, is never far beneath the surface of the poetic line), he develops a rarified epistemology, a subtle and ecstatic account of what he sees, and, in consequence of what he sees, of his inner psychological landscape. Everything is there from blissful anticipation to pain and suffering in absence and rejection, a perfectly exquisite panorama – or kaleidoscope – of emotional reactions. Much, again, is stock-in-trade, but the utterance is never (or rarely at least) reducible entirely to this. On the contrary, in a Giacomo da Lentini, a Cavalcanti, a Dante or a Cino this, at its best, enters into a

kind of self-exploration and issues in a special kind of confession. And what applies to the psychological applies also to the moral, goodness and beauty (and again the notion has a firm metaphysical foundation) outlining each other as ultimately irreducible aspects of one and the same phenomenon. In this sense, the formal or objective aspects of the erotic-aesthetic question (as of the aesthetic question generally) are fully complemented by the subjective aspects, beauty here, as everywhere, somehow eluding its own taxonomies or categorisation. At once formal and psychological in character, it remains ultimately – but everywhere excitingly – a mystery.

List of Illustrations

The images reproduced here derive from illuminated manuscripts, paintings and sculptures created during the Duecento and Trecento. These illustrations were viewed in, and copied from, reproduction only and are referenced accordingly.

Figure 1: 'Madonna with Child', in *Giotto: Guida alle Mostra, e Itinerario Fiorentino; Guide to the Exhibition, Florentine Itinerary*, by A. Tartuferi (Florence: Giunti, 2000), p. 21. Giotto painted this between 1315 and 1320.

Figure 2: 'Madonna in Majesty', in *The Complete Paintings of Giotto*, by E. Baccheschi (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969), fig. 44. Giotto painted this in 1310.

Figure 3: 'Niccolò Tommaso, The temptation of Adam and Eve' (detail), in *Mural Painting in Italy in the late 13th to early 15th Centuries*, ed. by M. Gregori, trans. by U. Creagh (Turin: Sanpaolo, 1995), p. 89. Niccolò Tommaso painted this between 1372 and 1374.

Figure 4: New York, Columbia University, Rare Books and Manuscript Library, MS Plimpton 284, fol. f. 2v (detail). <http://dpg.lib.berkeley.edu/webdb/scriptorium/ds_search?&MsID=1001095&MsPtID=1001126&EDocID=1001290> [accessed 4th January 2005]. Vieillesse bent over and carrying two crutches. This manuscript was produced in the 14th Century.

Figure 5: 'The Fourteen Beatitudes at Chartres Cathedral', in *Medieval Sculpture in France*, by A. Gardner (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 1931), p. 387. Chartre Cathedral was constructed between 1194 to 1260.

Figure 6: Concord, in 'The Fourteen Beatitudes at Chartres Cathedral', in *Medieval Sculpture in France*, by A. Gardner (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 1931), p. 388. Chartre Cathedral was constructed between 1194 to 1260.

Figure 7: 'Andrea Orcagna, Crucifixion' (detail), in *Mural Painting in Italy in the late 13th to early 15th Centuries*, ed. by M. Gregori, trans. by U. Creagh (Turin: Sanpaolo, 1995), p. 55. Andrea Orcagna painted this in the mid 14th Century.

Figure 8: 'Niccolò di Pietro Gerini, The Giving of Orphan Children to Adoptive Parents' (detail), in *La Pittura in Italia: Le Origini*, ed. by E. Castelnuovo (Milan: Electa, 1985), p. 272. Niccolò di Pietro Gerini painted this c. 1390.

Figure 9: 'Madonna of the Rose' (detail), in *The Sienese Trecento Painter Bartolo di Fredi*, by P. Harpring (London: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1993). Bartolo di Fredi painted this between 1355 and 1370.

Figure 10: 'Madonna in Majesty', in *L' Opera Completa di Cimabue e il Momento Figurativo Pregiottoesco*, by E. Sindona (Milan: Rizzoli, 1975), fig. 33. Cimabue painted this between 1285 and 1286.

Figure 11: Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Selden Supra 57, fol. 5r (detail). <http://image.ox.ac.uk/show?collection=bodleian&manuscript=msseldensupra57> [accessed 5th January 2005]. Dame Oiseuse greeting the lover at the entrance of the garden. This manuscript was produced in 1348.

Figure 12: 'Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, MS It IX 276 (=6902), Paradiso Canto II', in *Images of the Journey in Dante's Divine Comedy*, ed. by C. H. Taylor and Patricia Finley, (London: Yale University Press, 1997), p.192. Dante and Beatrice in the circle of the moon.

Figure 13: Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Selden Supra 57, fol. 5v (detail). <http://image.ox.ac.uk/show?collection=bodleian&manuscript=msseldensupra57> [accessed 5th January 2005]. Dame Oiseuse holding her mirror while talking to the lover. This manuscript was produced in 1348.

Figure 14: Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Holkham misc. 48, p. 126 (detail), Paradiso, Canto VIII. <http://www.bodley.ox.ac.uk/dept/scwmss/wmss/medieval/jpegs/holkham/misc/48/500/04800504.jpg> [accessed 5th January 2005]. Dante and Beatrice in the circle of Venus. This manuscript was produced in the 14th Century.

Figure 15: New York, Columbia University, Rare Books and Manuscript Library, MS Plimpton 284, fol. 5v (detail). <http://dpg.lib.berkeley.edu/webdb/scriptorium/ds_search?&MsID=1001095&MsPtID=1001126&EDocID=1001290> [accessed 4th January 2005]. Joy and the God of Love dancing in the centre of the group. This manuscript was produced in the 14th Century.

Figure 16: Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Holkham misc. 48, p. 111 (detail), Purgatorio, Canto XXXIII. <http://www.bodley.ox.ac.uk/dept/scwmss/wmss/medieval/jpegs/holkham/misc/48/500/04800489.jpg> [accessed 5th January 2005]. Dante, Beatrice and the seven virtues. This manuscript was produced in the 14th Century.

Figure 17: Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Holkham misc. 48, p. 145 (detail), Paradiso, Canto XXXII. <http://www.bodley.ox.ac.uk/dept/scwmss/wmss/medieval/jpegs/holkham/misc/48/500/04800523.jpg> [accessed 5th January 2005]. The Virgin Mary sitting at the centre of the Rose and is surrounded by saints. This manuscript was produced in the 14th Century.

Figure 18: 'The Siren' in *Le Proprietà degli Animali: Bestiario Moralizzato di Gubbio* ed. by Annamaria Carrega and Paola Navone (Genoa: Costa and Nolan, 1983), p. 319. This drawing was produced at the end of the 13th Century.

Figure 1: Giotto, Madonna and Child

Figure 2: Giotto, Madonna in Majesty

Figure 3: Niccolò Tommaso, The temptation of Adam and Eve (detail).

Figure 4: Vieillesse, bent over and carrying two crutches.

Figure 5: An image of Chartres Cathedral (north porch, left portal) depicting four of the fourteen beatitudes.

Figure 6: Concord, one of the beatitudes carved into the north porch at Chartres Cathedral, has images of doves on her shield.

Figure 7: Andrea Orcagna, Crucifixion (detail).

Figure 8: Niccolò di Pietro Gerini, The Giving of Orphan Children to Adoptive Parents (detail).

Figure 9: Bartolo di Fredi, Madonna of the Rose.

Figure 10: Cimabue, Madonna in Majesty

Figure 11: Dame Oiseuse greeting the lover at the entrance of the garden.

Figure 12: Paradiso, Canto II. Dante and Beatrice in the circle of the moon.

Figure 13: Dame Oiseuse holding her mirror while talking to the lover.

Figure 14: Paradiso, Canto VIII. Dante and Beatrice in the circle of Venus.

Figure 15: Joy and the God of Love dancing in the centre of the group.

Figure 16: Purgatorio, Canto XXXIII. Dante, Beatrice and the seven virtues.

Figure 17: Paradiso, Canto XXXII. The Virgin Mary sitting at the centre of the Rose and is surrounded by saints.

Figure 18: The Siren.

Bibliography

1. Poetry: primary sources of single authors
2. Poetry: anthologies
3. Poetry: secondary authorities
4. Prose: primary sources
5. Prose: secondary authorities
6. Theology: primary sources
7. Theology: secondary authorities
8. Medieval literature: primary sources
9. Medieval literature: secondary authorities
10. Ancient Greek and Roman literature: primary sources
11. Ancient Greek and Roman literature: secondary authorities
12. Aesthetics
13. Women throughout history
14. Paintings, sculpture and illuminated manuscripts

1. Poetry: primary sources of single authors

Brunetto Latini: Il Tesoretto, ed. by M. Ciccuto (Milan: Biblioteca Universale Rizzoli, 1985).

Cecco Angiolieri: Le Rime, ed. by A. Lanza (Rome: Archivio Guido Izzi, 1990).

Cecco Angiolieri: Rime, ed. by R. Castagnola (Milan: Mursia, 1995).

Il Contrasto di Cielo d'Alcamo, ed. by G. Cottone (Alcamo: Sarograf, 1988).

Le Rime di Cino da Pistoia, ed. by G. Zaccagnini (Geneva: Olschki, 1925).

Dante Alighieri: Convivio, ed. by F. B. Ageno, Società Dantesca Italiana, 2nd edn. (Florence: Le Lettere, 1995).

Dante Alighieri: La Divina Commedia: Inferno, ed. by U. Bosco and G. Reggio (Florence: Le Monnier, 1988)

Dante Alighieri: La Divina Commedia: Purgatorio, ed. by U. Bosco and G. Reggio (Florence: Le Monnier, 1988).

Dante Alighieri: La Divina Commedia: Paradiso, ed. by U. Bosco and G. Reggio (Florence: Le Monnier, 1988).

Dante Alighieri: La Divina Commedia, ed. by N. Sapegno, La Letteratura Italiana Storia e Testi, vol. 4 (Milan: Ricciardi, 1957).

Dante Alighieri: Convivio, ed. by F. B. Ageno, 2nd edn. (Florence: Le Lettere, 1995).

Dante's Lyric Poetry: The Poems, Text and Translation, ed. by K. Foster and P. Boyde, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967).

Dante's Lyric Poetry: Commentary, ed. by K. Foster and P. Boyde, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967).

La Vita Nuova' in *Dante Alighieri: Opere Minori*, ed. by D. de Robertis and G. Contini, La Letteratura Italiana, vol. 1, pt. 1 (Milan: Ricciardi, 1984).

Dante Alighieri: Opere Minori, ed. by C. Vasoli and D. de Robertis, La Letteratura Italiana, vol 1, pt. 2 (Milan: Ricciardi, 1994).

Dante Alighieri: Opere Minori, ed. by P. V. Mengaldo and others, La Letteratura Italiana, vol. 2 (Milan: Ricciardi, 1984).

Il Fiore e il Detto d'Amore: Attribuibili a Dante Alighieri, ed. by G. Contini (Milan: Mondadori, 1984).

Dante da Maiano: Rime, ed. by R. Bellarini (Florence: Le Monnier, 1969).

Federico II di Svevia, ed. by L. Cassata (Rome: Quiritta, 2001).

Giacomo da Lentini: Poesie, ed. by R. Antonelli (Rome: Bulzoni, 1979).

The Poetry of Giacomo da Lentino: Sicilian Poet of the Thirteenth Century, ed. by E. F. Langley (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1915).

La Poesia di Giacomo da Lentini, ed. by R. R. Vanasco (Bologna: Pàtron, 1979).

Guido Cavalcanti: The Complete Poems, ed. by M. A. Cirigliano (New York: Italica, 1992).

Guido Cavalcanti: Rime, con le Rime di Iacopo Cavalcanti, ed. by D. de Robertis (Turin: Einaudi, 1986).

The Poetry of Guido Guinizzelli ed. by R. Edwards (New York: Garland, 1987).

Guido Guinizzelli: Rime, ed. by L. Rossi (Rome: Einaudi, 2002).

Poesie: Guido Guinizzelli, ed. by E. Sanguineti (Milan: Mondadori, 1986).

Rime di Guittone d'Arezzo, ed. by N. Bonifazi (Urbino: Argalia, 1950).

Guittone d'Arezzo: Canzoniere, I sonetti d'amore del codice Laurenziano, ed. by L. Leonardi (Turin: Einaudi, 1994).

The Early Poetry of Guittone d'Arezzo, ed. by V. Moleta, Dissertation Series, vol. 9 (London: Modern Humanities Research Association, 1979).

L'Intelligenzia, ed. by V. Mistruzzi (Bologna: Carducci, 1928).

Matteo di Dino Frescobaldi: Rime, , ed. by G. R. Ambrogio (Turin: Le Lettere, 1996).

Re Enzo: Nella Storia e nella Leggenda, ed. M. de Szombathely (Bologna: Zanchelli, 1912).

Rustico di Filippo and the Florentine Lyric Tradition, ed. by J. H. Levin (New York: Lang, 1986).

2. Poetry: anthologies

Bonomi, F., ed., *Duecento: La Poesia Italiana dalle Origini a Dante* <http://www.silab.it/frox/200/ind_scu.htm> [accessed 3 September 2004].

Branca, V., ed., *Rimatori del Dolce Stil Nuovo* (Città di Castello: Società Editrice Dante Alighieri, 1965).

Carrega, A., and Navone, P., eds., *Le Proprietà degli Animali: Bestiario Moralizzato di Gubbio* (Genoa: Costa and Nolan, 1983).

Cesareo, G. A., *Le Origini della Poesia Lirica e la Poesia Siciliana sotto gli Svevi*, 2nd edn. (Milan: Biblioteca Sandron, 1924).

Contini, G., *Poeti del Duecento*, vol. 1 (Milan: Ricciardi, 1960).

Cudini, P., ed., *Poesia Italiana del Duecento* (Milan: Garzanti, 1977).

Fabio, F., ed., *I Rimatori della Scuola Siciliana* (Naples: Libreria Scientifica, 1970).

Muscetta, C., and Rivalta, P., eds., *Poesia del Duecento e del Trecento* (Turin: Einaudi, 1956).

Panvini, B., ed., *La Scuola Poetica Siciliana: Le Canzoni dei Rimatori Nativi di Sicilia,* vol. 1 (Florence: Olschki, 1955).

- *La Scuola Poetica Siciliana: Le Canzoni dei Rimatori Nativi di Sicilia,* vol. 2 (Florence: Olschki, 1958).

- *Poeti Italiani della Corte di Federico II* (Catania: Cooperativa Universitaria Editrice Catanese Di Magistero, 1989).

Salinari, Carlo, ed., *La Poesia Lirica del Duecento* (Turin: UTET Tipografico, 1951).

3. Poetry: secondary authorities

Bosco, U., ed., *Enciclopedia Dantesca*, 2 edn., vols. 1-5 (Rome: Enciclopedia Italiana, 1984).

Boyde, P., *Dante's Style in his Lyric Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971).

Fratta, A., 'Correlazione Testuali nella Poesia dei Siciliani', *Medioevo Romanzo*, 16 (1991), 189-206.

Harrison, R. P., *The Body of Beatrice* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988).

Kleinhenz, C., *The Early Italian Sonnet: The First Century (1220-1321)* (Lecce: Millela, 1986).

Langley, E. F., 'The extant Repertory of the Early Sicilian Poets', *Publication of the Modern Language Association of America*, 21 (1913), 454-520.

Marti, M,, *Con Dante fra i Poeti del suo tempo,* 2nd edn. (Lecce: Milella, 1971).

- *Storia dello Stil Nuovo* (Lecce: Milella, 1973).

Mazzaro, J., *The figure of Dante: An essay on the Vita Nuova* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981).

Moleta, V., *La Gloriosa Donna della Mente: A Commentary on the Vita Nuova* (Perth: University of Western Australia, 1994).

Nardi, B., *Dante e la Cultura Medioevale. Nuovi Saggi di Filosofia Dantesca* (Bari: Laterza, 1949).

Popolizio, S., 'The Poetry of Giacomo da Lentino and Stylistic Criteria in Early Italian Love Lyric', *Canadian Journal of Italian Studies*, 2 (1978-9), 1-18.

Reynolds, B., 'Beyond Beatrice: From Love Poetry to the Poetry of Love', *Fu Jen Fourth Annual Medieval Conference: Chivalry and Knighthood in Middle Ages* <http://www.svd.fju.edu.tw/fl/medieval/papers/4c.pdf> [accessed 23 March 2004].

Russell, Rinaldina, 'Ars Dialectica and Poetry: The Aristocratic Love Lyric of the Sicilian School', *Studies in Philology*, 77 (1980), 354 -75.

Singleton, C. S., *An Essay on the Vita Nuova* (Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1949).

Shaw, J. E., *Essay on the Vita Nuova* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1929).

4. Prose: primary sources

Francesco da Barberino: Reggimento e Costumi di Donna, ed, by G. Sansone (Turin: Loescher - Chiantore, 1957).

La Cronaca Fiorentina di Dino Compagni e L' Intelligenzia, ed. by D. Carbone, 3rd edn. (Florence: Barbèra, 1868).

La Prosa del Duecento, ed. by C. Segre and M. Marti (Milan: Ricciardi, 1959).

Marco Polo: Il Milione Veneto, ms. CM 211 della biblioteca Civica di Padova, ed. by A. Barbieri and others (Venice: Marsilio, 1999).

Marco Polo: Il Milione, ed. R. M. Ruggieri, Biblioteca dell' 'Archivum Romanticum', vol. 200 (Florence: Olschki, 1986).

Novelle Italiane: Delle Origini al Cinquecento, ed. by G. Bellonci, vol. 1 (Rome: Lucarini, 1986).

Novellino e Conti del Duecento, ed. by S. lo Nigro (Turin: UTET Tipografico, 1963).

Volgarizzamenti del Due e Trecento, ed. by C. Segre (Turin: UTET Tipografico, 1953).

5. Prose: secondary authorities

Apollonio, M., *Uomini e Forma nella Cultura Italiana delle Origini: Storia letteraria del Duecento*, 2nd edn. (Florence: Sansoni, 1943).

Contini, G, *La Letteratura Italiana delle Origini* (Florence: Sansoni, 1970).

Grillo, E, ed., *Early Italian Literature: The Dawn of Italian Prose*, vol. 2 (London: Blackie, 1920).

Salinari, C., and Ricci, C., *Storia della Letteratura Italiana con Antologia degli Scrittori e del Critici*, vol. 1 (Rome: Laterza, 1973).

6. Theology sources primary

'Sancti Ambrosii Mediolanensis Episcopi: Opera Omnia', *Patrologia Latina*, ed. by J. P. Migne, vol. 16 (1880).

S. Thomae Aquinatis: Summa Theologiae, ed. by P. Caramello, *Pars prima* (Rome: Marietti, 1950).

S. Thomae Aquinatis: In Librum Beati Dionysii de Divinis Nominibus Expositio, ed. by C. Pera (Rome: Marietti, 1950).

Sancti Aurelii Augustini Epistulae: I – LV, edited by Kl. D. Daur (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004).

S. Aurelii Augustini Hipponensis Episcopi: Epistulae, ed. by A. L. Goldbacher, pt. 1 (Vindobonae: Litterarum Cesareae, 1865).

'Augustini: Hipponensis Episcopi, Opera Omnia', *Patrologia Latina*, ed. by J. P. Migne, vols. 33, 34 and 42 (1865).

Sancti Aurelii Augustini: De Trinitate: Libri XV, ed. by W. J. Mountain (Turnhout: Brepols, 1968).

Nicene and Post - Nicene Fathers: The Confessions and Letters of St Augustin, with a Sketch of his Life and Works, ed. by P. Schaff, A Selected Library of the Christian Church, vol. 1 (Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1995).

Nicene and Post - Nicene Fathers: Augustin, City of God, Christian Doctrine, ed. by P. Schaff, A Selected Library of the Christian Church, vol. 2 (Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1995).

Nicene and Post - Nicene Fathers: Augustin, On the Holy Trinity, Doctrinal Treaties, Moral Treaties, ed. by P. Schaff, A Selected Library of the Christian Church, vol. 3 (Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1994).

Nicene and Post - Nicene Fathers: Augustin, Homilies on the Gospel of John, Homilies on the First Epistle of John, Soliloquies, ed. by P. Schaff, A Selected Library of the Christian Church, vol. 7 (Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1995).

Sancti Aurelii Augustini: In Iohannis Evangelium, Tractatuis CXXIV, ed. by D. R. Willems, Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina 36 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1954).

Biblia Sacra, Iuxta Vulgata: Genesis – Psalmi, ed. by R. Weber, Robertus, vol. 1 (Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstatt, 1969).

Biblia Sacra, Iuxta Vulgata: Proverbia – Apocalypsis, ed. by R. Weber, Robertus, vol. 2 (Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstatt, 1969).

The Works of St Bernard of Clairvaux: On the Song of Songs I, ed. by J. Leclercq, trans. by K. Walsh, Cistercian Fathers Series 4, vol. 2 (Michigan: Cistercian Publications, 1981).

The Works of St Bernard of Clairvaux: On the Song of Songs II, ed. by J. Leclercq, trans. by K. Walsh, Cistercian Fathers Series 7, vol. 3 (Michigan: Cistercian Publications, 1976).

'S. Bernardus: Abbatis Primi Claræ-Valllensis, Opera Omnia', *Patrologia Latina*, ed. by J. P. Migne, vol. 183 (1854).

7. Theology: secondary authorities

Aertsen, J. A., *Medieval Philosophy and the Transcendentals: The Case of Thomas Aquinas* (New York: Brill, 1996).

Eco, U., *The Aesthetics of Thomas Aquinas*, trans. by H. Bredin (London: Radius, 1988).

Evans, G. R., *The mind of St Bernard of Clairvaux* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1983).

Gilson, É., *The Mystical Theology of St Bernard* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1955).

Harrison, C., *Beauty and Revelation in the Thought of St Augustine* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992).

Leclercq, J., ed., *Women and St Bernard of Clairvaux*, trans. by M. B. Saïd, Cistercian Studies Series 104 (Michigan: Cistercian Publications, 1989).

Maurer, A. A., *About Beauty: A Thomistic Interpretation*, Centre for Thomistic Studies (Texas: University of St Thomas, 1983).

McGowan, R. J., 'Thomas's Doctrine of Women and Thirteenth Century Thought', *Essays in Medieval Studies,* vol. 2 <http://www.luc.edu/publications/medieval/vol2/mcgowan.html> [accessed 16 July 2004].

Miles, M. R., *Augustine on the Body* (Missoula: Scholars, 1979).

O' Paulsell, W., 'Virtue in St Bernard's Sermons on the Song of Songs', *St Bernard of Clairvaux: Studies Commemorating the Eighth Century of his Canonisation*, vol. 28 (1997).

O'Rourke, F., *Pseudo-Dionysius and the Metaphysics of Aquinas* (New York: Brill, 1992).

Pegis, A. C., *The Basic Writings of Saint Thomas Aquinas,* vol. 1 (New York: Random House, 1945).

Schine Gold, P., *The Lady and the Virgin: Image, Attitude, and Experience in Twelfth-Century France* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1985).

Warner, M., *Alone of all her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (New York: Vintage, 1983).

8. Medieval literature: primary sources

'Alanus de Insulis: Doctoris Universalis, Opera Omnia', *Patrologia Latina*, ed. by J. P. Migne, vol. 210 (1855).

Alan of Lille: Anticlaudianus or the Good and Perfect Man, ed. by J. J. Sheridan (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1973).

Alan of Lille: The Plaint of Nature, ed. by J. J. Sheridan (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1980).

Andreas Capellanus on Love, ed. by P. G. Walsh, Medieval and Renaissance Edn.s (London: Duckworth, 1982).

The Cosmographia of Bernardus Silvestris, ed. by W. Wetherbee (London: Columbia University Press, 1973).

Guillaume De Lorris et Jeun De Meun: Le Roman de la Rose, ed. by A. Lanly, vol.1 (Paris: Librairie Honoré Champion, 1971).

Jeun De Meun: Le Roman de la Rose, ed. by A. Lanly, vol. 2 (Paris: Librairie Honoré Champion, 1971).

Matthew of Vendôme: The Art of Versification, ed. by A. E. Galyon (Ames: The Iowa State University Press, 1980).

Matthei Vindocinensis: Opera, Ars Versificatoria, ed. F. Munari, vol. 3 (Rome: Storia e Letteratura, 1988).

9. Medieval literature: secondary authorities

Bornstein, D., *The Lady in the Tower: Medieval Courtesy Literature for Women* (Hamden: Archon, 1983).

Dronke, P., *The Medieval Lyric* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1996).

Hunt, T., 'The Song of Songs and Courtly Literature: Court and Poet', *Selected Proceedings of the Third Congress of the International Courtly Literature Society* (1981), pp. 189-96.

Ker, W. P., ed., *Essays on Medieval Literature* (London: Macmillan, 1905).

Lewis, C. S., *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition* (London: Oxford University Press, 1946).

Weigand, H. J., *Three Chapters on Courtly Love in Arthurian France and German: Lancelot, Andreas Capellanus, Wolfram von Eschenbach's Parzival* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, 1956).

10. Ancient Greek and Roman Literature: primary sources

Cornelii Taciti, Annalium Ab Excessu Diui Augusti Libri: The Annals of Tacitus, ed. by H. Furneaux, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1952).

Ovidi Nasonis: Ars Amatoria, ed. by F. W. Lenz (Turin: In Aedibus Io. Bapt. Paraviae et Sociorum, 1969).

Plato: The Republic, ed. and trans. by D. Lee (London: Penguin, 1987).

Plato: Symposium, ed. by C. J. Rowe (Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 1998).

C Plini Secundi: Naturalis Historiae, Libri XXXVII, ed. by C. Mayhoff, vol 5 (Lipsiae: In Aedibus, B. G. Teubneri, 1906).

Pliny The Elder: Natural History, A Selection, ed. by J. F. Healy (London: Penguin, 1991).

Plotinus: The Enneads, ed. by S. MacKenna (New York: Larson, 1992).

Pseudo-Bede, De Mundi Celestis Terrestrisque Constitutione: A Treatise on the Universe and the Soul, ed. by C. Burnett (London: The Warburg Institute, 1985).

Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagite: The Divine Names and Mystical Theology, ed. and trans. by J. D. Jones (Wisconsin: Marquette University Press, 1980).

Seneca: Moral Essays, ed. and trans. by J. W. Basore, The Loeb Classical Library, vol. 3 (London: Heinemann, 1935).

11. Ancient Greek and Roman literature: secondary authorities

Emilsson, E. K., *Plotinus on Sense Perception: A Philosophical Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

Graves, R., *The Greek Myths*, vols. 1 and 2 (London: Folio Society, 1996.

Guerber, H. A., *Greece and Rome: Myths and Legends*, Great Mythology Series (London: Chancellor, 1995).

Lefkowitz, M. R., *Women in Greek Myth* (London: Duckworth, 1986).

Leggatt, S., ed. and trans., *Aristotle: On the Heavens, I and II* (Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 1995).

Miles, M. R., *Plotinus on Body and Beauty: Society, Philosophy and Religion in Third Century Rome* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999).

Moravcsik, J., and Temko, P., *Plato on Beauty, Wisdom and the Arts* (Totowa: Rowman and Littlefield, 1982).

Seltman, C., *The Twelve Olympians: Gods and Goddesses of Greece* (London: Pan, 1952).

Vidén, G., *Women in Roman Literature: Attitudes of Authors under the Early Empire*, Studia Graeca et Latina Gothoburgensia, vol. 57 (Göteborg: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, 1993).

12. Aesthetics

Beardsley, M. C., *Aesthetics from Classical Greece to the Present: A Short History* (New York: Macmillan, 1966).

Bosanquet, B., *A History of Aesthetics* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1966).

Bottomley, F., *Attitudes to the Body in Western Christendom* (London: Lepus, 1979).

Barrera, de, M., *Gems and Jewels, their History, Geography, Chemistry and Ana: from the earliest age down to the present time* (London: Bentley, 1860).

Beals, K., M., *Flower Lore and Legend* (New York: Holt, 1917).

Beltrame, O., *La Gemma nella Leggenda e nella Storia* (Vicenza: Raschi, 1890).

Bruyne, de, E., *Études d'Esthétique Médiévale: De Boèce a Jean Scot Erigène,* vol.1 (Brugge: 'de Tempel' Tempelhof, 1946).

- *Études D'Esthétique Médiévale: L'Époque Romane*, vol. 2 (Brugge: 'de Tempel' Tempelhof, 1946).

- *Études D' Esthétique Médiévale: Le XIIIe Siècle*, vol. 3 (Brugge: 'de Tempel' Tempelhof, 1946).

Coakley, S., *Religion and the Body* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

Eco, U., *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages*, trans. by H. Bredin (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986).

Evans, J., *Magical Jewels of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance particularly in England* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1922).

Freeman, K., *The Pre-Socratic Philosophers: A Companion to Diels, Fragmente Der Vorsokratiker* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1946).

Goody, J., *The Culture of Flowers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

Grant, E., *Planets, Stars, and Orbs: The Medieval Cosmos, 1200-1687* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

Greenhalgh, M., *The Classical Tradition in Art* (London: Duckworth, 1978).

Hofstadter, A., and Khuns, R., eds., *Philosophies of Art and Beauty: Selected Readings from Plato to Heidegger* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1976).

King, C. W., *Antique Gems, their Origin, Uses and Value: As interpreters of Ancient History and as an illustration of Ancient Art* (London: Murray, 1860).

Kunz, G. F., *The Curious Lore of Precious Stones* (London: Lippincott, 1913).

Lakoff, R. T., and Scherr, R. L., *Face Value: The Politics of Beauty* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984).

Mâle, É., *Religious Art in France: The Thirteenth Century, a study of Medieval Iconography and its Sources*, Bollingen Series XC.2 (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984).

- *Religious Art from the Twelfth to the Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1949).

Maple, E., *The Secret Lore of Plants and Flowers*, (London: Hale, 1980).

McCulloch, F., *Medieval Latin and French Bestiaries* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1960).

Mermier, G. R., *A Medieval Book of Beast: Pierre de Beauvais' Bestiary* (Lampeter: Mellen Press, 1992).

Montserrat, D., *Changing Bodies, Changing Meanings: Studies on the Human Body in Antiquity* (London: Routledge, 1997).

North, J., *The Fontana History of Astronomy and Cosmology* (London: Fontana Press, 1994).

Panofsky, E., *Meaning in the Visual Arts* (London: Penguin, 1970).

Payne, A., *Medieval Beasts* (London: British Library, 1990).

Sandqvist, S., ed., *Le Bestiaire et le Lapidaire du Rosarius (B.N.F.Fr.12483)* (Lund: Lund University Press, 1996).

Seward, B., *The Symbolic Rose*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960).

Streether, E. W., *Precious Stones and Gems: Their History and distinguished Characteristics*, 2nd edn. (London: Chapman and Hall, 1879).

Tatarkiewicz, W., *History of Aesthetics: Ancient Aesthetics*, trans. by Adam and Ann Czerniawki, vol 1 (The Hague: Mouton, 1970).

- *History of Aesthetics: Medieval Aesthetics*, vol. 2 (The Hague: Mouton, 1970).

Walgrave, J., *Het Labo van de Verleiding: Geschiedenis van de Make-up; The Laboratory of Seduction: History of Make-up* (Antwerp: Koningin Fabiolazaal, 1998).

Wright, M. R., *Cosmology in Antiquity* (London: Routledge, 1995).

13. Women throughout history

Amt, E., ed., *Women's Lives in Medieval Europe: A Sourcebook* (New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, 1993).

Baker, D., ed., *Medieval Women*, the Ecclesiastical History Society (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978).

Blamires, A., and others, eds., *Women Defamed and Women Defended: An Anthology of Medieval Texts* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992).

Bruck, du, E., ed., *New Images of Medieval Women: Essays towards a Cultural Anthropology*, vol.1 (Lampeter: Edwin Mellen, 1989).

Dixon, S., *The Roman Family* (London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992).

Ennen, E., *The Medieval Woman*, trans. by E. Jephcott (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989).

Ferrante, J. M., *To the Glory of her Sex: Women's roles in the Composition of Medieval Texts* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997).

- *Women as Image in Medieval Literature: From the Twelfth Century to Dante* (London: Columbia University Press, 1975).

Frymer-Kensky, T. S., *In the Wake of the Goddesses: Women, Culture, and the Biblical Transformation of Pagan Myth* (New York: The Free Press, 1992).

Gardner, J. F., *Women in Roman Law and Society* (London: Croom Helm, 1986).

Klapisch-Zuber, C., and others, eds., *A History of Women in the West: Silences of the Middle Ages*, vol. 2 (London: Belknap, 1992).

Labarge, M. W., *Women in Medieval Life: A small sound of the Trumpet* (London: Hamilton, 1986).

Lefkowitz, M. R., and Fant, M. B., *Women in Greece and Rome* (Toronto: Samuels-Stevens, 1977).

Molho, A., *Marriage and Alliance in late Medieval Florence* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994).

Pantel, P. S., and others, eds., *A History of Women in the West: From Ancient Goddesses to Christian Saints*, trans. by A. Goldhammer, vol. 1 (Massachusetts: Belknap, 1992).

O'Faolain, J., and Martines, L., *Not in God's Image: Women in History from the Greeks to the Victorians* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973).

Piponnier, F., and Mane, P., *Dress in the Middle Ages,* trans. by C. Beamish (London: Yale University Press, 1997).

Pomeroy, S. B., *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* (New York: Dorset, 1975).

Power, E., *Medieval Women* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975).

14. Paintings and sculpture and illuminated manuscripts

Alexander, J. J. G., *Medieval Illuminators and their Methods of Work* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

Baccheschi, E., *The Complete Paintings of Giotto*, (London: Weidenfield and Nicolson, 1969).

Backhouse, J., *The Illuminated Manuscript* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1979).

Bomford, D., and others, *Art in the Making: Italian Paintings before 1400* (London: National Gallery, 1989).

Brieger, P., and others, *Illuminated Manuscrripts of the Divine Comedy*, vol 2 (New York: Princeton University Press, 1969).

Calkins, R. G., *Illuminated Books of the Middle Ages* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1983).

Castelnuovo, E., ed., *La Pittura in Italia: Le Origini* (Milan: Electa, 1985).

Cattaneo, G., and Baccheschi, E., *L' Opera Completa di Duccio*, (Milan: Rizzoli, 1972).

Contini, G., and Gozzoli, M. C., *L' Opera Completa di Simone Martini* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1970).

Gardner, A., *Medieval Sculpture in France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 1931).

Gregori, M., ed., *Mural Painting in Italy in the late 13th to early 15th Centuries*, trans. by U. Creagh (Turin: Sanpaolo, 1995).

Harpring, P., *The Sienese Trecento Painter Bartolo di Fredi* (London: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1993).

New York, Columbia University, Rare Books and Manuscript Library, MS Plimpton 284 <http://dpg.lib.berkeley.edu/webdb/scriptorium/ds_search?Image=1001095> [accessed 4th January 2005].

Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Holkham misc. 48 <http://www.bodley.ox.ac.uk/dept/scwmss/wmss/medieval/browse.htm#12th> [accessed 5th January 2005].

Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Selden Supra 57 <http://image.ox.ac.uk/show?collection=bodleian&manuscript=msseldensupra57> [accessed 5th January 2005].

Sindona, E., *L'Opera Completa di Cimabue e il Momento Figurativo Pregiottoesco* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1975).

Smart, A., *The Dawn of Italian Painting*, (Oxford: Phaidon, 1979).

Tartuferi, A., *Giotto: Guida alle Mostra, e Itinerario Fiorentino; Guide to the Exhibition, Florentine Itinerary* (Florence: Giunti, 2000).

Taylor, C. H., and Finley, P., *Images of the Journey in Dante's Divine Comedy* (London: Yale University Press, 1997).

Wieck, R. S., *The Book of Hours in Medieval Art and Life* (London: Sotheby, 1988).