

**“Pues no la has tú visto como yo”: Scrutinizing and Resignifying the Beauty Myth
in *Celestina***

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In the various incarnations of *Celestina*, as a *Comedia* and later on as a *Tragicomedia*, we can find some of the aesthetic models prevalent during the late Middle Ages. These beauty ideals operated as an attempt to immobilize any transgressive woman who tried to escape patriarchal conventions and manifested themselves in two typecasts. On the one hand, the already outdated ideal of courtly love embodied in the young Melibea, her physique depicted by Calisto in the famous top-to-bottom description to Sempronio, represents a eulogy to the stereotypical beauty of the medieval period.¹ On the other, *Celestina*, an archetype composed of all the faults attributed to women by medieval misogynistic *vituperio*, both on a physical and a moral level. I suggest that the book called *Celestina* exposes the falseness of this duality of stereotypes while unmasking the artificial quality of the ideal of virginity.

The beauty model that prevailed in late medieval literature reflects for the most part the aesthetic ideal of the classics, portrayed among others by Ovid. Along with this model, its antithesis, represented in antifeminist *vituperio* by a deceitful lady, often gifted with a pleasant appearance but who, under a facade of *afeites*, hides the most repulsive anatomy – the farthest from the beauty ideal. The analysis of both poles, *i.e.* beauty and ugliness, makes it evident that these are in fact two sides of the same coin, depending on the eye of the beholder. The solution to this duality reveals the hidden ideal woman desired by medieval men: a creature of such perfection that simply does not exist, perhaps a platonic idea to which women of the time can only aspire to be a shadow of or imitation.

In order to elucidate this unattainable idea of beauty, we can start by looking at specific physiognomic traits. As far as the most superficial feature, the complexion, most medieval authors agree on the importance of the whiteness of the skin as a signifier of beauty.² In the first auto of *Celestina*, Melibea is described by Calisto as having “tez lisa, lustroza, el cuero suyo escureçe la nieve” (Rojas, 101). On the contrary, dark-skin is an undesirable sign that denotes negative moral associations. For example, in the classic of misogynistic literature, *Corbacho*, a jealous woman slanders another lady by saying, “Más negra es que un diablo” (Martínez de Toledo, 161).

In addition to being an esthetic quality, skin color also functions as a sociopolitical signifier. In this sense, Michael Gerli notes how, in the Middle Ages, the human body and its representation constitute a predominant means of social and political identification of the individual inside the state: “The body’s physical constitution and the way it was enhanced, then, were recognized forms of social textuality” (373). We can establish a correlation between skin pigmentation and social status, since the ladies of the nobility were able to preserve themselves from the effects of the sun, protected –like Melibea– in the paternal home; while low-class rural women, for example, were exposed not only to air and sunlight, but also to social and sexual scrutiny, as we can note in the following lines from the

¹ See Alice Colby (23-72).

² For instance, Colby remarks this fact in the case of twelfth-century French authors (37).

Cancionero: “Criéme en aldea, / híceme morena; / si en villa me criara, / más bonica fuera” (Frenk, 122).³

Along with these class considerations, the impeccable whiteness of the skin could be equivalent to the flawless, pure blood required for the Old Christians, with no hint of Moorish or Jewish presence in their lineage. It could also be a signifier for the immaculate purity of female virginity. Sometimes, this snow-white complexion was achieved through the use of makeup, which is censored by medieval *vituperio*. Again in the *Corbacho*, a lady is accused of faking her pallor: “¿si lieva blanquete? ¡A la fe fasta el ojo!” (Martínez de Toledo, 161). From this perspective, the hymen reconstructions performed by Celestina would be tantamount to an expert application of makeup in which a patina of whiteness is used to conceal the tainted skin and nature of women. Moreover, in the first auto of *Celestina*, Pármemo describes the old procuress as a “maestra de hazer afeytes y de hazer virgos”, thereby connecting her cosmetic and surgical abilities (110). This “maestra” in the art of deceit is at the same time executing a demystification of virginity, exposing it as a construct, a mere appearance that can be touched up as if applying makeup.

Real or counterfeit, this pale skin should ideally be devoid of any hair or fuzz. Colby notes that in medieval times, even in men, excessive hair was considered a trait of ugliness (79). Needless to say, an excess of body and facial hair was even more vilified in women and hirsutism was deemed the opposite of femininity. In this vein, Celestina is called “vieja barbuda” in several occasions.⁴ As Lillian von der Walde Moheno has pointed out, this characteristic is associated not only with “sagacidad, desvergüenza, lujuria, maldad demoníaca” but also with her “varonil condición”, which would explain some of her positive traits such as astuteness (132-133).⁵ Her phallic power and lack of submission to patriarchal order places her outside the space assigned to females.

Another trait that was regulated by the masculine beauty prescription was body weight. According to medieval esthetic canons, excessive thinness was frowned upon, as shown again in the *Corbacho*, when the Arcipreste insults a woman by calling her “flaca, que non parece sinón a la muerte”, but so was flabbiness and excessive fatness (Martínez de Toledo, 161).⁶ In general, as with everything in the Middle Ages, moderation was the key; excess, hyperbole—even in the case of a desired trait—was condemned as a grotesque monstrosity. In Colby's words,

[...] the choice of the ideals of ugliness is based on one of the two aesthetic principles: either any physical characteristic diametrically opposed to an ideal of

³ María Luque explains how in popular Castilian songs the “morenas o morenicas” are often associated with Arabic ethnicity. For this reason, in many cases these dark-skinned women felt the need to justify their skin color by blaming it on their work in the fields under the sun (44-45).

⁴ For instance, in the first *auto* of the *Comedia*, Sempronio recommends the matchmaking services of Celestina to a lovesick Calisto and describes her as “una vieja barbuda [...] hechizera, astuta y sagaz en quantas maldades hay” (Rojas, 103).

⁵ As Barbara Newman points out, in many contexts, such as Christian Hagiography and the Patristic Age, “the virile woman is one who possesses the courage and integrity that cultural norms denied to women as such” (2003, 151). In the same sense see Newman 1995 (4-15). It is worth noting that, unlike the virile women of Early Christianity, Celestina is the farthest from an angelic virgin unconcerned with worldly matters.

⁶ Claudio da Soller points out how the twelfth-century feminine ideal is just an imitation of the classical Latin canon of beauty, which prescribed the proportion for the ideal woman as “Neither tall nor short; neither fat nor skinny” (99).

beauty is ugly, or ugliness consists of the possession of an excessively large or small amount of what which is normally thought to be beautiful. (72)

That which exceeds the limits, which escapes containment, was labeled ugly. These bodily representations connect the idea of beauty with order and orderly conduct. According to anthropologist Mary Douglas, in primitive societies the concept of dirt is “a by-product of the creation of order” (161). Sacred objects and spaces are defined in contrast to impurity, and therefore must be sheltered from uncleanness, which involves “care for hygiene and respect for convention” (7). In medieval and early modern societies unruly women were considered dirty because they exceeded their containment and defied conventions.⁷

As a result, cleanliness plays a fundamental role in this ideal of beauty, to such an extent that, in *Cárcel de amor*, among the “veinte razones por que los ombres son obligados a las mugeres”, Leriano lists “la linpieza que nos procuran, así en la persona, como en el vestir, como en el comer, como en todas las cosas que tratamos” (San Pedro, 164). In Rojas' *Comedia*, Celestina offers Lucrecia “unos polvos para quitarte esse olor de la boca”, warning her that “no ay cosa que peor en la mujer parezca” (Rojas, 169).⁸ Likewise, Ovid admonishes ladies that “el olor que expide el macho cabrío no debe partir de vuestras axilas” (311). Conversely, a pleasant scent is highly praised, as when Sosia compliments Areúsa in auto XIX, expressing delight in the fact that she “echaba de sí, en bulliendo, un olor de almizque [...] parecía que se derramava azahar por casa” (Rojas, 318). Immediately after, however, Tristán reminds him that she is a whore and warns him “Esta mujer es marcada ramera, según tú me dixiste; quanto con ella te passó as de creer que no careçe de engaño” (Rojas, 319). Therefore, according to male perspective, her trail of perfume is only a smokescreen and her apparent cleanliness, as with those who use makeup to fake whiteness, is just concealment for an indelible, underlying murkiness: the signifier of the inherently impure and morally unclean *meretrix*.

If cleanliness is associated with chastity, it is easy to infer the correlation between dirtiness and promiscuity. Dirty lust is, precisely, one of the vices most frequently attributed to women in medieval antifeminist discourse. According to the misogynists, cosmetics would ironically contribute to filthiness, since they artificially enhance women's beauty and therefore deceive men, misleading them into sinful activities. An example of the inventory of Celestina's beauty-enhancing concoctions can be found when Pármeno describes in auto I “los untes y mantecas que tenía, es fastío de dezir: de vaca, de osso, de cavallos y de camellos, de culebra [...]” (Rojas, 111). Ovid himself, although he recommends their use, warns about how revolting cosmetics are: “estos aderezos os darán gracia, pero es desagradable verlos” (312). El *Corbacho* provides an interesting catalog of these disgusting beauty remedies that seem to combine homemade recipes with witchcraft: “la saliva ayuna con el paño para lepar [...] tuétanos de ciervo o de vaca e de carnero. ¿E no son peores éstas que diablos, que con las reñonadas de ciervo fazen dellas xabón?” (Martínez de Toledo, 158).

⁷ Peter Stallybrass has noted the equivalence between verbal, spatial, and sexual containment in Early Modern Europe. Silence, the closed mouth, as well as enclosure in the private space behind closed doors, were considered signs of a contained feminine sexuality. See Stallybrass 123-132. In a similar vein, the *Corbacho* praises the virtue of *continencia* in women (Martínez de Toledo, 96).

⁸ In *De ornatu mulierum*, the *Trotula* has some powder remedies for the “stench of the mouth” and other dental conditions that cause bad breath and putridity, offering recipes for cleaning and whitening the teeth as well, and prescribing the sublingual use of laurel leaves and musk “especially when she has to have sexual intercourse with anyone” (Green, 187, 189).

In contrast with this messy artifice, the cleanliness of natural female beauty is praised by Calisto when, referring to Melibea, he observes “Solo un poco de agua clara con un ebúrneo peyne basta para exceder a las nascidas en gentileza” (Rojas, 191). Regarding female attire, we can observe that any excessively ornate outfit is criticized as well. Once again, we can establish a connection between modesty and sexual continence. Not surprisingly, Ovid cautions women against the inefficiency of “este fasto, con el cual nos queréis seducir” because “a menudo nos aleja”; instead, he advocates for the “simple elegancia” (209). Excess of frill and ostentation entail an aspect of exhibitionism contrary to the modesty prescribed for the ideal woman of the time. As with cosmetics and perfumes, when it comes to female clothing, there is an underlying aversion to artificiality and excessive adornment that reflects the suspicion of deceit. Deemed manipulative beings, there is the wariness that, since Eve, women deceive men, even in their own physical appearance. In fifteenth-century Castilian literature, as Laura Carlucci has noted, misogynistic authors attempted to discredit the beauty ideal by proving it fake, a diabolical illusion created by skincare products and makeup to disguise the evil of female nature: “La perfección física de la mujer, típica del amor cortés, tan exaltada en la lírica cancioneril, aparece ahora como fruto del artificio, como belleza falsa que conduce irremediabilmente al engaño” (500). In auto XVII of the *Tragicomedia* Elicia claims that “los atavíos hazen la mujer hermosa, aunque no lo sea; tornan de vieja moça y a la moça más” (307). This could be a resentful reference to the sumptuary laws that, as Yolanda Iglesias points out, prohibited prostitutes from wearing certain clothes, colors, or accessories that were reserved for honest women (196). Once again we can see how patriarchal society fears the deceitfulness of women, in this case represented by prostitutes dressing as decent women.

For antifeminist discourse, this innate ability for deceit is often connected to the purported vanity and the coquettish nature of women. In the opening scene of *Celestina*, when the two lovers meet in the garden, Melibea, instead of rejecting Calisto's flirtatious approach, demands more compliments of him. When he says “En esto veo, Melibea, la grandeza de Dios”, she promptly replies “¿En qué, Calisto?” (Rojas, 85). Here Melibea has broken the verbal continence than any respectable woman should have and, by opening her mouth to request more flattery, is suggesting the possibility of an open sexuality. Later on, in auto IV, Celestina seduces Melibea with such flatteries as “O angélica ymagen, o perla preciosa” (Rojas, 158). In this dialogue, Celestina is praising Melibea while surreptitiously alluding to the fact that her disposition to talk to the *alcahueta* opens the door to a sexual encounter with Calisto: “Donzella graciosa y de alto linage, tu suave habla y alegre gesto, junto con el aparejo de liberalidad que muestras con esta pobre vieja, me dan osadía a te lo dezir” (Rojas, 159). Celestina is reading Melibea's signifiers, in this case her welcoming nature and her willingness to talk to someone of a lower class and dubious reputation, as receptiveness for sexual transgression. Certainly, Melibea ends up throwing Celestina out, calling her “alcahueta falsa, hechizera, enemiga de la honestidad, causadora de secretos yerros” (Rojas, 161), but the fact that she agreed to converse with her, as when she agreed to exchange words with Calisto, tells the reader about her open morals.

In this conversation, Celestina uses vanity and, in particular, the praise of her youthful appearance to persuade Melibea. Rather than black magic, Celestina uses her rhetorical prowess and the tried and true topic of Ausonio's *collige virgo rosas*, to compel the young woman to enjoy her beauty before it is too late: “Dios la dexa gozar su noble juventud y florida moçedad, que es [el] tiempo en que más plazerres y mayores deleytes se alcançarán” (Rojas, 154). The old bawd uses herself as an example of the execrable effects of time in

female beauty to rush Melibea to the satisfaction of her desire: “¿No has leydo que dizen: Verná el día que en el espejo no te conosças?” (Rojas, 158). Harriet Goldberg defines ugliness as a process, “as beauty transformed” (80). According to this author, beauty declines and fades away due to causes such as illness, age (the most common reason), or poverty (86). I would personally add violence to this list, as in the case of Celestina's knife scar, a stigma that marks her body inscribing it in the group of the marginalized. In this instance, Melibea, in her particular anagnorisis of Celestina, identifies the trace of this deforming and vilifying process: “no te conociera sino por esa señaleja de la cara. Figuráseme que eras hermosa; otra pareces, muy muda estás” (Rojas, 157). Celestina uses some of the stereotypes of *vituperio* to illustrate the unkind results of time through her self-deprecating portrait: “aquel arrugar de cara, aquel mudar de cabellos su primera y fresca color” (Rojas, 155). The old procuress manipulates these stereotypes of beauty and ugliness to serve her purposes; in this case, the goal is the seduction of Melibea for Calisto.

Melibea is just another woman listed in Celestina's ledger. In *auto* III, when Sempronio inquires “no será este el primero negocio que as tomado a cargo”, Celestina proudly states, “Pocas virgines, a Dios gracias, has tu visto en esta ciudad que hayan abierto tienda a vender, de quien yo no haya sido corredora de su primer hilado” (Rojas, 141). Melibea is becoming a part of the matchmaker's sexual network, an emerging commodity exhibited for public sale by Celestina and Calisto's servants.⁹ This progressive commodification of Melibea is particularly obvious in *auto* IX, when Celestina hosts a banquet for the prostitutes and Calisto's servants. During this celebration of the outlaws – Sempronio states “todos somos de casa” – Melibea's attributes are scrutinized and therefore publicly “brought to the table”, as though another course at the feast (Rojas, 223). As Michael Gerli has noted, this description of Melibea marks “a figural nexus that subsumes a series of symbolic connections linking sexuality, corporality, nutrition, and desire to questions of social authority, privilege, agency, money, and power” (372). From the moment Melibea steps out of her ivory tower into the other side of the social threshold, in the eyes of this lumpen her body becomes an object of public consumption. She is praised by Sempronio as “graciosa y gentil”, which generates a jealous reaction by Elicia, who introduces an element of class in the discussion of beauty by arguing that “Aquella hermosura por una moneda se compra de la tienda [...] que si algo tiene de hermosura es por los buenos atavíos que trae” (Rojas, 226). This view is seconded by Areúsa, who proceeds to verbally tear Melibea's image to pieces, dissecting and recomposing her portrait as the antithesis of beauty:

Pues no la has tú visto como yo, [...] enviste su cara con miel y hiel [...] y con otras cosas que por reverencia de la mesa dexo de dezir [...] unas tetas tiene para ser donzella como si tres vezes oviese parido; no parecen sino dos grandes calabças. El vientre no se le he visto, pero juzgando por lo otro, creo que le tiene tan floxo como vieja de cinquenta años. No sé que se ha visto Calisto [...] (Rojas, 226-228)

⁹ Celestina's physical trait of being a “vieja barbuda” could be related to her ability of building a network of women under her control, at least if we look at the antifeminist corpus of *maldits*. In her analysis of a *maldit* by Aussias March, Eukene Lacarra notes how the poet accuses a woman of being an *alcahueta* by arguing that “si juntase todos los pelos de los brazos y los de la barba podría hacer para atrapar fuertes redes para atrapar a tórtolas, perdices y cogujadas, tres aves simbólicas de las viudas castas, de las prostitutas y de las casadas adúlteras, respectivamente” (2005, 44).

As Gerli remarks, this parodic description parallels the head-to-toe portrait that Calisto had related to his servant Sempronio in the first *auto* (376):

Comienço por los cabellos [...] Los ojos verdes, rasgados, las pestañas luengas, las cejas delgadas y alçadas, la nariz mediana, la boca pequeña, los dientes menudos y blancos, los labrios colorados y grossezuelos [...] el pecho alto, [...] La tez lisa, lustroza, el cuero suyo escureçe la nieve [...] Las manos pequeñas [...] Aquella proporción que veer yo no pude, sin dubda por el bulto de fuera juzgo incomparablemente ser mejor que la que Paris juzgó entre las tres diosas. (Rojas, 101)

Both portraits –Calisto’s beautifying ekphrasis and Areúsa’s vilifying opprobrium– manifest a patriarchal anxiety of control. This anxiety translates into the existing stereotypes, of beauty or ugliness, seeking in any case to immobilize the movement and circulation opened by Celestina’s networking. In the instance of Calisto’s eulogy, a sense of apprehension may be detected in Melibea’s presence as a static portrait, a lifeless, controlled description that paralyzes narrative movement.¹⁰ The stereotype of classical Ovidian beauty is heavily reinforced in this portrait, which follows the classical pattern of the *descriptio feminae pulchritudinis* and in which Calisto constitutes himself as the esthetic judge.¹¹ Jenny Jochens traces back to the twelfth century the association of beauty with female bodies, always insofar as related to the male gaze, since men would be the authority that defines the ideal, and judges the extent to which actual females conform to it (3).¹² Clearly, in Western medieval literature, beauty was in the eye of the male beholder. This gaze makes the textually absent female body present, while immobilizing it by forcibly fitting it into pre-established categories.

In a similar fashion, Areúsa’s derisive portrait actualizes Melibea’s presence in the work. Order and purity give way to pollution and excess, which are typically used to reflect ugliness. As we have mentioned, in the Middle Ages there was a co-dependent relation between the stereotype of ugliness and that of beauty in the medieval aesthetic canon. Ugliness was judged in relation to the paradigm of beauty inasmuch as it deviated from it by excess or defect (Colby, 72). As we have also established, female beauty, by contrast, would be related to order and rational containment. As Gerli has noted, ugliness overflows aesthetic and social containment, therefore assuming the traits of monstrosity and disorderly instinct (374-375). By transgressing the social order –through her dealings with Celestina and her premarital relations with Calisto– Melibea becomes associated with the abject, as expressed in Areúsa’s visceral words of disgust: “si en ayunas la topasses, si aquel día pudiesses comer de asco” (Rojas, 226). By rendering such a portrait of grotesquery and unruliness, she suggests a claim to the order that Melibea has allegedly transgressed.

As far as systems of control and order, patriarchy situates the place of females in society in the margins, *i.e.* their place would be defined by exclusion. Paradoxically, in this

¹⁰ With regard to the ekphrastic moment of immobilization that the head-to-toe descriptions represent, Jean Campbell says, “When a beautiful woman enters the pages of a medieval romance the action often stops as the poet begins a long ornamental panegyric describing, sometimes in great detail, the woman’s comportment, her physical appearance, and her dress” (155).

¹¹ In Spanish, the Latin term for “pulchritude” has evolved to mean “cleanness”. To be sure, the model of female beauty was necessarily based on tidiness and orderly moral behavior. For a thorough analysis of this classical ideal of beauty, see Henrik Specht 129-133.

¹² In fact, Melibea would be compared to Helen of Troy, since the subtext underlying Calisto’s description seems to be the *Roman de Troie*.

social and sexual diagram, the center may itself become a marginalized place. Patriarchal order is not only based on exclusion, but more importantly needs to demarcate a territory of exclusion in order to define its own precincts. Douglas has compared the crossing of social boundaries with a source of dirtiness or pollution that endangers the whole of society with the threat of infection.¹³ From a psychoanalytic point of view, Julia Kristeva makes clear that demarcation of space is a primal repression, a way of purifying the abject (28).¹⁴ In *auto* IX of the *Comedia*, by framing Melibea at the center of public scrutiny, the participants in the banquet are putting her in a sort of prophylactic quarantine, isolating her not only from the rest of polite society but also from themselves, the pariahs. In this way the prostitutes protect their commercial space from illicit competition while ironically preserving the purity of the system from any form of transgressive contamination. While this concern with order seems very strange coming from outcasts like the harlots at Celestina's banquet, this inversion of social roles is prompted and preceded by a spatial transgression represented by Melibea's sexual misconduct.¹⁵

In this respect, Lacarra notes that Melibea, after her out-of-marriage sexual encounter with Calisto, experiences a process of degradation and objectification and, in the eyes of the servants, becomes a woman like any other, comparable to the prostitutes Elicia or Areúsa:

A sus ojos se ha consumado la transformación de Melibea en mujer [...] El haber permitido a Calisto tener acceso a su cuerpo la sitúa a los ojos de estos jóvenes en el papel de objeto usado, poseído, mercancía dañada, y por tanto accesible en potencia a todos y cualquiera. (2000, 139)

This jealousy that the prostitutes feel toward Melibea and that triggers an acrid *vituperio* against her reminds us of chapter IV of the second part of the *Corbacho*, which discusses for the most part “los vicios, tachas e malas condiciones de las malas e viçiosas mugeres” (Martínez de Toledo, 145). The fourth chapter is entitled “Cómo la muger es envidiosa de qualquiera más fermosa que ella” and goes into the misogynistic stereotype of women competing with and being critical and jealous of each other. Accordingly, a woman supposedly delivers the *vituperio* against another woman who is reportedly more beautiful than her: “Fallan las gentes que Fulana es fermosa [...] Non la han visto desnuda como yo el otro dia en el baño” (Martínez de Toledo, 161). The beginning of this defamation is strikingly similar to Areúsa's “Pues no la has tú visto como yo” and both examples seem to reinforce the

¹³ In this fashion, the “polluter becomes a double wicked object of reprobation, first because he crossed the line and second because he endangered others” (Douglas 140).

¹⁴ According to Kristeva “abjection is above all ambiguity”, lack of separation between objects, between bodies, and between spaces offering a repulsive flashback of a primary time of confusion and lack of definition (9). By overflowing the borders, this abject fluidity defies dichotomies and classifications.

¹⁵ With respect to the connection between beauty and moral values, Goldberg notes that ugliness is considered a “visual representation of sinfulness, or a sign of divine anger” (88). Henrik Specht also underlines this neo-platonic equation between physical unattractiveness and moral perversion: “The primary function of hideousness in the literature of the Middle Ages may be summed up as that of arousing aesthetic disgust and moral aversion against the person (or being) who is described as physically repulsive” (134). In the same vein, John D. Burnley points to the link between femininity and moral laxness that can be traced back to Isidore's *Etimologies*, which situate the origin of the word *mulier* [“woman”] in the Latin word *mollities* [“laxness”] (36). In order to counteract this inherent moral slackness, virtuous females should contain themselves “by the rational control they exert over appetites and affections” (Burnley 26). The alleged association of the female with fluidity, viscosity, and her tendency to overflow boundaries is regarded as a potential danger for the antiseptic and ordered structure of patriarchal system.

ongoing stereotype, persisting still nowadays, of women as catty and envious of other women's beauty. As Lacarra reminds us, when Areúsa insults Melibea by revealing the alleged ugliness that lies under her cosmetics and expensive clothing, she is putting her on the same level as any prostitute and lamenting the unfairness of not being able to have Calisto as a client: "a los celos de Elicia se une el despecho de Areúsa, que no comprende la preferencia de Calisto por Melibea" (2001, 136-137). For Areúsa, this could be due to Calisto's bad judgment: "No sé qué se ha visto Calisto [...] sino que el gusto dañado muchas veces juzga por dulce lo amargo" (Rojas, 228). If by looking at the "bulto de fuera" Calisto judges Melibea's physique "incomparablemente ser mejor que la que Paris juzgó entre las tres diosas" (Rojas, 101), Areúsa argues that "El vientre no se le he visto, pero juzgando por lo otro, creo que le tiene tan floxo como vieja de cinquenta años" (Rojas, 228). Despite the misogynistic appearance of her discourse, Areúsa is actually questioning the validity of the male gaze as the authority on female beauty. Furthermore, she is questioning the mere existence of the beauty ideal, deeming it a patriarchal illusion.¹⁶ In a similar fashion, Celestina exposes the fact that virginity, like beauty, is only a social construct.

In the Middle Ages, virginity was not so much a physical as a social concept, a mechanism of control over family lineage and distribution of patrimony.¹⁷ Rather than in the anatomical presence of a membrane, the Christian idea of a virgin consisted of a woman who was "untouched by a man" (Schleissner, 69). There was a constant awareness and a patriarchal anxiety regarding the possibility of a "false virginity" that could be simulated through recipes such as "a dove's intestine with blood" (Lastique, 65). In the *Trotula*, included in the section "On Women's Cosmetics", between recipes to remove facial abscesses and whitening the complexion, we can find preparations for "a woman who has been corrupted" so that she "might be thought to be a virgin" or "so that the vagina might be constricted" (Green, 189). An expert in beauty products and fake maidenheads, Celestina, in her laboratory, next to the "aguas de rostro", "lexías para enruviar", and "[a]parejos para baños" stored rudimentary operating instruments ("unas agujas delgadas y peligrosas, y hilos de seda encerados") and diverse materials for the clinical reconstruction of *virgos*: "unos hazía de bexiga y otros curava de punto" (Rojas, 112).

The existence of this type of recipes and surgical techniques on top of the radical distrust of women's behavior triggered a constant and vigilant observation of the outer symptoms of chastity, which, apart from the bodily tissue, also manifested itself in intangible signs such as "speech, eyes, and modesty" (Lastique, 66). For patriarchy, therefore, enclosure and severe custody were in order as the only way of securely preserving female virginity and control over hereditary transmission of property. By enclosing his only daughter behind walls, Pleberio tries to control his linear succession—particularly frail, since he does not have a son— from any dispersion or devaluation. An expert social navigator, Celestina, crosses boundaries and exploits the fragility of the concept of virginity by marketing as a public

¹⁶ In this sense, Goldberg reminds us that in the literature of medieval Castile "there was no one stereotypically ugly man or woman as there was a rather standard portrait of the ideally beautiful person" (82). The wide variety of portraits of ugliness—absolute or relative, innate or caused by change—contrasts with the lack of variation in the standard portrait of beauty (82). For this reason, Goldberg defines ugliness as "either the absence of beauty or the exaggeration of attributes normally thought to be beautiful" (88).

¹⁷ See Lacarra (1995), especially 23-26. In this respect Pleberio's elegy following his daughter's suicide seems particularly significant. In his speech, Melibea's father—aside from mourning the absence of his daughter—laments the fact that this fatality has truncated his patrimonial lineage: "¿Para quién edificué torres; para quién adquirí honrras; para quién planté árboles; para quién fabriqué navíos?" (337).

commodity the most private and sacred treasure of familial patrimony: the honor of their daughters and sisters.

If Calisto, as oblivious male, cannot see what Areúsa clearly sees in Melibea (her artificial beauty), Melibea's parents, as bourgeois fools, cannot see the change in their precious daughter. In *auto XVI*, as she discusses with her husband the marriage plans for her daughter, Alisa reminds her of Melibea's nubile innocence: “¿Piensas que sabe errar aun con el pensamiento? No lo creas [...] Que yo sé bien lo que tengo criado en mi guardada hija” (Rojas, 306). Upon hearing their conversation, Melibea feels “enojada del concepto engañoso que tienen de mi ignorancia” (Rojas, 306). Even Lucrecia, the maid, is stunned by this ignorance: “tarde acordáys, más aviades de madrugar” (Rojas, 303). With Celestina dead, Melibea has no one to mend her virginity; she is becoming a common woman like her servant Lucrecia, an object of male consumption like Elicia and Areúsa. Her value in the sexual market has plummeted and will eventually lead to her literal plunge when she commits suicide by jumping from the highest symbol of her social status: the tower in the house of her father. Her beauty is no longer coveted and her reputation no longer preserved. Without the veil that Celestina provided, she is exposed to public scrutiny and vituperation.

In conclusion, in the book *Celestina* we can find what in fifteenth-century medieval literature represented the two extremes of a perverse duality: on the one hand, the singular, idealized female beauty, monolithic and far from reality; on the other, the vast majority of women. Lacking or exceeding elements of the unachievable ideal, most women were labeled ugly in a gross generalization; were scathed for being imperfect, their flaws exaggerated, and their virtues attributed to cosmetics and make up. These women were accused of embodying a moral and intellectual mediocrity in a physique that required many touch ups in order to be deserving of the implacable gaze of the male. Aware of the falseness of this dichotomy, in which one of the poles is inaccessible, the character Celestina manipulates these static stereotypes of beauty and ugliness and makes them fluid, rendering them permeable instead of static, as she does with virginity.

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