293 Beauty (*Pulcritudo*)

Beauty is triple: bodily, virtual, eternal. The first is dangerous, second is gracious, and the third is glorious.

First, just as the deceiver is taught to scorn by the cross or to value it little, for Christ who was “You are beautiful,” Psal. [44:3], “above the sons of men.” On the cross he did not have beauty nor decorum.

And certainly, bodily beauty is triple. For some it is innate consistent in the lineaments of the body.

Another is changeable consistent in ornamental accoutrements.

¶ Another is hidden consistent in signs painted by hypocrisy.

Against the first of these Christ on the cross appeared as if a leper. Against the second he hung naked. Against the third he had an open side.

¶ Second, beauty just as followers are taught by the cross to seek these things. Certainly, beauty consists in chastity just as in fairness, in charity just as in redness, in truth just as in the owed proportion of the parts. But Christ hanging taught chastity among the virgins, charity praying for his enemies, and truth of the prophets and fulfilling their promises.

¶ Third, beauty just as the proficient are taught by the cross to hope. Because for these things Christ died. This consists in three: in contemplating the deity, in rejoicing in society, and in a secure eternity.

¶ Again, suspect beauty is triple, because it is apparent and not existing. Of which the first is feigned and simulated, in which it consists in words and signs of the hypocrites, when however, it is not thus in heart. Superiors have this who pursue vices under the guise of correcting, but they are more under the intent of extorting money that they might support their ample entourage, or that they may give a splendid alms, and many gorge themselves under the species of becoming stronger in the service of the Jews, Matt. 23[:27]: “Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, you are like to whited sepulchers.”

¶ Second, beauty is apparent and not substantive. It is a promise that makes a fool happy, so the flesh promises delight, but concludes with bitterness.

¶ Third, beauty is changeable, which consists in sayings, delights, and honors, concerning which Dan. 4[:7, 9]: “I saw, and behold a tree in the midst of the earth … most beautiful”

About which see above, chapter [28] Tree (*Arbor*).

But again, this beauty is unstable and uncertain since it is borrowed. About which it is said proverbially, a borrowed thing in the end wants to return home. In English, **Guide love well and you (will have a) lasting home.** Job 5[:3]: “I have seen a fool with a strong root, and I cursed his beauty immediately.”

¶ The example as says the poet,[[1]](#endnote-1) the crow’s prayer because of his blackness is thrown out. Thus, does the cautious with reason as concerning a certain beautiful bird changes its feathers to ornament of the Indies, but when afterwards it despised other birds, according to the decree of Jove it pulled out some of the bird’s feathers, and thus the crow remained naked and derided. So, man, who is cherished much by other creatures, if he contemns God in the end he is denuded by the birds, that is, derided by angels, trampled upon by the demons, Isai. 3[:18]: “In that day the Lord will take away the ornaments of the daughters of Sion,” etc. Seneca on this,[[2]](#endnote-2) concerning the horse covered and having the blankets bound, which is suspected in those places, so it is concerning the rich who cover their riches and underneath are weak and foul.

¶ Again, note that many things are desired such as are beauty and deceitful things of which kind are riches, delights, and honors.

¶ Certainly Lucifer was beautiful in elegance, knowledge, and honors, but exceeded in desiring the limits or rectitude and fell.

¶ The Jews were fertile in riches, but they exceeded in seeking.

¶ Alexander who is also Paris judged the more beautiful of Venus, Pallas or Juno, and therefore perished. Wherefore the poet,[[3]](#endnote-3) Juno, Minerva, and Venus came to him, and sought judgment who was the most beautiful among them.

¶ They also promised gifts which was his honor from Juno, his strength from Pallas, and a maiden from Cytherea. But he gave to Venus to conquer for the allowance of the maiden.

¶ But, this pleasure which beauty seems to men renders men foul and casts them below the beasts, just as a punishment of the principle member, which is reasonable. Wherefore note that just as three things beautify the soul, namely, hearing the word of God, frequent confession, avoidance of sin and the occasion of slipping backward. So, three are opposed to these befoul and pollute which are hunger for pleasurable activity, neglect of speaking, and contact of a foul thing.

Concerning the first, what is food to the stomach, this word of God is to the soul. For just as without food the stomach languishes, Job 18[:12]: “Let his strength be wasted with famine,” etc. So, the mind without the word of God which “Not in bread alone does man live,” Matt. [4:4].

¶ Concerning the second, a vase composed of as many different metals as possible, namely, lacks bonding, traction, washing, cleansing. To this composition because its beauty is saved, in truth it is explained that in this metal it does not easily contract dirt. Man, however, is composed as it from diverse metals out of his body, namely, and soul, it is necessary because of their repugnance to each other, it is necessary to confess frequently, Psal. [95:6]: “Praise and beauty are before him,” as if saying, confession which follows beauty of the soul is accepted in the approbation of God.

¶ It is read that the devil once came to confession because he saw many beautifully people to return from confession.

¶ But because he does not want to, nor can be crushed he goes back to his deformities, but what is to be lamented more what is cared for today is the beauty of clothing than of the mind. Wherefore Augustine, *De verbis apostoli*,[[4]](#endnote-4) you wish to have all your things good and beautiful, apart from you yourself which you wish to have evil.

¶ Concerning the third, just as one who touches pitch is soiled, and whoever cohabits with lepers infected, so whatever is associated with evils is extended to touches.

¶ Iron and stone are hard and when from their contact arises fire, Zach. 9[:17]: “What is his beautiful thing, but the corn of the elect,” that is, the clean society of the good purged of the chaff.

Again, some distinguish also that beauty is external and internal. First is corporal, the virtual, and the third is heavenly.

1. ###  Crow, cf. Odo of Cheriton 3. DE CORNICE. [Perry](http://mythfolklore.net/aesopica/perry/noperry.htm) : *Contra illos qui iactant se habere quod non habent.* Cornix semel, uidens se turpem et nigram, conquesta est Aquile. Aquila dixit ei quod mutuo reciperet plumas de diuersis auibus. Fecit sic. Accepit de cauda Pauonis, de alis Columbe, et, sicut sibi placuit, de ceteris auibus. Cornix, uidens se ornatam, cepit deridere et inclamare contra alias aues. Venerunt igitur aues, et conquerebantur Aquile de superbia Cornicis. Respondit Aquila: Accipiat quelibet auis suam pennam, et sic humiliabitur. Quo facto, Cornix relicta est turpis et nuda.

Cf. Bartholomaeus Anglicus [13th century CE] (*De proprietatibus rerum*, book 12): … For when father and mother in age are both naked and bare of covering of feathers, then the young crows hide and cover them with their feathers, and gather meat and feed them. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Seneca, *Epistula* 47.16 (LCL 75:310-311): Quemadmodum stultus est, qui equum empturus non ipsum inspicit, sed stratum eius ac frenos, sic stultissimus est, qui hominem aut ex veste aut ex condicione, quae vestis modo nobis circumdata est, aestimat.

As he is a fool who, when purchasing a horse, does not consider the animal’s points, but merely his saddle and bridle; so he is doubly a fool who values a man from his clothes or from his rank, which indeed is only a robe that clothes us. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Cf. Ovid, *Ars Amatoris* 1.245-250 (LCL 232:30-31):

Hic tu fallaci nimium ne crede lucernae: Iudicio formae noxque merumque nocent. Luce deas caeloque Paris spectavit aperto, Cum dixit Veneri “vincis utramque, Venus.” Nocte latent mendae, vitioque ignoscitur omni, Horaque formosam quamlibet illa facit.

not at such a time o’ermuch to the treacherous lamp; darkness and drink impair your judgment of beauty. It was in heaven’s light unveiled that Paris beheld the goddesses, when he said to Venus, “Venus, thou dost surpass the other two.” By night are blemishes hid, and every fault is forgiven: that hour makes any woman fair.

Cf. Ovid, *Heroides* 16.65-88 (LCL 41:202-203): Venus et cum Pallade Iuno, graminibus teneros inposuere pedes. obstipui, gelidusque comas erexerat horror, cum mihi “pone metum!” nuntius ales ait, “arbiter es formae; certamina siste dearum; vincere quae forma digna sit una duas!” ... [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Augustine, *Sermones de scripturis* 72.4.5 (PL 38:469): Omnia quae circumjacent oculis tuis, elegantia et pulchra tibi chara sunt; et tibi ipse vilis es ac foedus? [↑](#endnote-ref-4)