Early Modern Representations of the Feminine Bodily Canon

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Résumé : *Cet ouvrage se propose d'expliquer les mentalités, les discours et les pratiques culturelles pré-modernes liés au corps féminin et à l'idée de féminité prescrits par le nouveau canon apparu aux temps pré-modernes et aux valeurs que celui-ci allait représenter. Le canon a été conçu le long de deux axes: le canon médiéval versus le canon pré-moderne, et le canon pré-moderne classique du corps féminin achevé et l'anti-canon. Le corps est analysé par les diverses hypostases dans lesquelles celui-ci est représenté pendant la période pré-moderne et en comparaison avec le Moyen Age : la relation avec l'église, la représentation du corps à travers la mode, les interprétations et les représentations du corps dans l'art et la littérature. On a choisi une approche interdisciplinaire et on a utilisé des ressources tirées de la littérature (les pièces de Shakespeare), de l'histoire de l'art, de l'histoire des idées et des mentalités, de la sociologie qu'on a interprétées du point de vue des études culturelles.*

Mots-clés : *corps, féminité, canon, anti-canon, représentation*

The body – from effacement to celebration

Social representations place the body in a certain position within the general symbolism of the society. The body is never a given fact, it is the effect of a social and cultural construct. Within the framework of the transformations that occurred in the early modern times, the approach to the body also shifts: the body is no longer repealed, condemned, and effaced; on the contrary, it is celebrated as a valuable part of human experience.

The body, as an element which can be isolated from the person who owns it, can only exist in individualist societies, where people are separated from each other, relatively autonomous in their initiatives and values, and where the body functions as a boundary separating one person from the rest of the community. In traditional societies like the medieval one, the body, on the contrary establishes the connections with the community.

The rise of individualism in the early modern period gradually leads to the individual's separation from his/her body, not from a religious, but a profane perspective. In the Middle Ages, the individual was separated from his/her body from a religious perspective: as opposed to the soul, which was the only important element in the human experience and the only one capable of reaching God, the body is discredited as leading only to temptation and sin. In the early modern times, the human being is separated from the body in the sense that he perceives his body as an asset, or as an instrument, which should be taken care of, used, or displayed.

Individualism emerged in the late Middle Ages, as a result of the development and increase in importance of the fields of commerce and banking. The merchant is the prototype of the modern individual, he is a cosmopolitan, whose ambitions go beyond the pre-established limits. He is therefore less influenced by the community and by traditions. He is aware of his social importance, and therefore he knows that he is the only one to create his destiny. On the other hand, secularization, liberation from all the restraints imposed by religion, leads to the awareness of personal responsibility.

As a consequence of the rise of individualism in Western Europe, more and more people become famous and gain glory in their lifetime: poets and artists are the best examples. If, in the Middle Ages, creators remain anonymous, parts of a community, the early modern artists sign their works, they are acknowledged and appreciated by the society, and gradually they impose their own views in the design and creation of the work of art. Giorgio Vasari contributes to the artists' social recognition. The artist is no longer dependent on the spirituality of the masses, he becomes an autonomous creator.

The rise of individualism is also reflected in the approach to the body. In the early modern times, the portrait becomes one of the most important forms of painting, gradually

removing and replacing religious painting and the subsequent tendency of representing the human being only with reference to a religious figure. The church considered that portraits were sources of temptation, and the sitters were likely to become victims of magic. Therefore, the only portraits in the early Middle Ages were portraits of high dignitaries of the church, were protected against magic, because they were portrayed as participants in religious episodes and surrounded by divine characters. Individualism and secularization made it possible for the portraits to increase in number and to become devoid of any religious reference.

As a result of the human being's self-awareness as an individual, not as a member of a community, the body becomes the boundary between individuals. As a factor of individualization, the body becomes the target of specific interventions: the anatomic research, through the dissection of the human body, is the most remarkable in this sense.

In the Middle Ages, the human body was studied in relation to the universe. The body was defined in terms of the four humours: the blood, the phlegm (mucus), the yellow gall, and the black gall. Health and illness depended on the exchanges between the four humours. The vital fluids had to have a constant level, ensuring the individual's relation with the world. Illness was thought to appear when one of the humours was either in excess, or insufficient.[1] Each of these humours was believed to cause specific illnesses, and the doctor's task was to reestablish the balance between man and universe. The movements of the stars were thought to decisively influence the balance of these humours, as well as the cycle of the seasons. Medical care, consisting in the taking of blood, diets or some surgical interventions, tried to reestablish the humoral balance and harmony. The medicine of correspondences contributed to this representation which unites the human being with the entire universe. The moon, for instance, was said to influence the taking of blood, women's menstruation, the moment of birth or death etc. By analogy, an element of nature – un object, a colour, a smell, a shape – could act upon an organ, a wound, a disorder etc.[2] A multitude of beliefs which link the human body with the stars, with the universe and with the elements of nature was what medieval medicine consisted in.

Popular beliefs were based on the same idea: man was part of a holistic network, in which everything intertwined, and in which a simple gesture could influence the universe and unleash forces, either on purpose (magic, witchcraft), or accidentally. The frontiers of the individual are beyond his body; the individual is defined not by his/her body, but by his/her family, his/her assets, by everything that surrounds him/her, in a network which is typical of the community structure where the human being is not an individual, but a man or a woman in a relation or a network of relations.

In the Middle Ages, the individual couldn't be separated from his/her body, not even after his/her death. It was believed, for instance, that the victim's dead body bleeds in the presence of the assassin. The murderer's body, on the other hand, could be subjected to any kind of torture, because the murderer is someone who imposed his/her individuality against the will and values of the community. This is the murderer's destiny: his/her separation from the society is a dismemberment of the social group, metaphorically punishable by the dismemberment of his body. As a consequence of this belief, the first corpses offered to anatomists for dissections belonged to criminals sentenced to death.

Saints' relics were also dismembered, so that the relics could spread in the whole Christian world. In the sanctified body fragment a metonymy of the glory of God is celebrated. It was believed that the state of a corpse, even if mutilated or destroyed by time, could not prevent revival, but this belief was professed by the members of the clergy. The popular belief was that an alteration of the body could affect the deceased person's destiny in the afterlife, and, therefore, the dead body provoked fear. The body, therefore, was thought to continue to accompany the person even in death.

In a world which was governed by superstition, by popular beliefs, by magic, and which man was seen as inseparable from his body, the idea of shedding blood, even in order to treat the body, meant breaking the sacred alliance, destroying a taboo. This is why the surgeon's profession was one of the most disregarded in the Middle Ages. Surgeons are suspect characters, who generate their contemporaries' unrest. In the 12th century, the medical profession was divided into three categories: the university doctors, the clerical doctors, who were experts in speculations rather than therapy, and surgeons. The first two categories treated the body against 'external' illnesses, without touching the patient's body. Surgeons acted at the level of the interior of the body, going beyond the sacredness of the blood and the frontier of the skin. They were generally laic, despised by the clerical doctors for their ignorance in the scholastic science. Ambroise Pare, a surgeon who discovered the ligature of arteries for avoiding hemorrhages and as a consequence saved numerous lives, was ridiculed by the clerical doctors for not speaking Latin.[3] It was therefore more important for a doctor to speak Latin than to cure. The doctor held the privileged position of a person who is assumed to have the knowledge, but who does not touch the impure blood, and thus his profession is not among the most despised.

A sign of the shift in mentalities which makes the individual autonomous and throws some light on the human body is the inauguration of the anatomic science in Italy in the 14th century. With the first official dissections, a huge anthropological and ontological mutation takes place: the distinction between the person and the body, man's separation from his body. Dissociated from the person, the body is studied as an autonomous reality. The treaties dating before the 16th century were based especially on the porcine anatomy, considered not to differ too much from the human. This is because until the 16th century the human body was untouchable, since man, a fragment of the community and of the universe, was untouchable.

One of the sources of our representation of the body dates back in the 16th century. Starting with Vesalius, a new anthropology develops, announcing a break with the previous one, which saw man as a part of the cosmos. But even if Vesalius (1514 – 1564) is considered the initiator of the new anatomic science, his science was prefaced by Leonardo da Vinci, who dissected around thirty bodies and who left a great number of notes and files on the human anatomy. But since Leonardo's notes were not published, Vesalius did not know of them.

The first official dissections took place at the Italian universities at the beginning of the 14th century. They were controlled by the church, whose authorization was required. Hence the solemnity of these dissections: slow ceremonies, which lasted for days. The dissections were carried out for the benefit of an audience made up of doctors, surgeons, barbers, and students. They generalize in the 16th century and their target audience changes. They turn into a form of entertainment meant for a curious and heterogeneous audience. The anatomic theatres are mentioned in the travel notes of the time.[4]

At the end of the 16th century a new feeling appears: curiosity, in close connection with individualism and with the distinction between the public and the private. Private persons create in their homes their own anatomic cabinets, where they collect unusual things associated with the human body, or even mummified bodies. Corpses and body fragments are collected for their originality or for the direct knowledge they provide, thus enriching the medical practice. As the body is dissociated from the person it used to incarnate, becoming the anonymous relic of someone who no longer exists, collecting and studying body fragments, tumours, stones, fetuses, limbs with malformations or preserving mummified bodies become legal.[5]

Besides the emergence and development of the anatomic science, another important aspect which significantly influenced the approach to the human body is the attitude towards physical pain. In the Middle Ages, physical pain was something that was supposed to concern women; men had to disregard and despise pain, he was not supposed to show he was

suffering, otherwise he risked losing his virility, degrading, being associated with the women's condition. Pain was therefore seen as degrading – a symbol of inferiority. A sign of weakness, pain was associated with physical labour – the superior categories, *oratores*, i.e. the clergy, and *bellatores*, i.e. the warriors, were not suppose to display any sign of pain or suffering – and with the inferior beings, such as the women and children. Pain was also seen as a form of punishment, and, therefore, a sign of sin. It was also, in the case of corporal punishment, a form of redemption. On the whole, pain in the Middle Ages had only negative connotations. Towards the beginning of the early modern time, physical pain was gradually valorized. First, as a result of the change in the religious discourse, which gradually emphasized Christ's physical suffering, inviting Christians to share this suffering, and then as a result to the development of the medical and anatomic sciences.

With the development of the anatomic and medical sciences, the approach to the body changes. The individual is separated from his/her body, and the body becomes an autonomous reality. Popular traditions and beliefs lose their significance. At the level of the higher social categories, the body is depreciated, objectified. Two attitudes polarize: one that depreciates the body, objectifying it, and identifying it as it actually is – different from the person it incarnates – the attitude of having a body; the other one identifying the person with the body – the attitude of being your own body.

However, the depreciation of the body is not the medieval rejection of the body as unimportant or unworthy. On the contrary, seen as autonomous, separate from the person, the body lets itself be studied, cured, taken care of, adorned, and used. It is no longer a taboo. If it suffers, it should be treated. If it is healthy, it has to be taken care of, in order not to become ill. And, since according to the early modern mentality, the body is a personal asset contributing to the public image of the self, it should also be adorned, and its image should be used.

Apart from this, the change in the structure of the family which occurred in the early modern times brought about a new approach to the feminine body. The medieval patriarchal family was gradually replaced in the early modern times by the affective family, thus giving women a much greater say in their own marriage, but also in the public realm. Women's condition started to change with the rise of individualism. Women, though still mostly confined to the household, had more access to the outside world. Within the household, their status also changes. Married women had legal existence and rights, and could benefit from some of the attributes of their status. Single women were no longer institutionalized, since the overall numbers recruited in nunneries were small and declining. Women are no longer feared, and, consequently, the woman's body is no longer seen only as a source of temptation and sin; it gradually becomes a form of beauty, which should be admired, praised, even worshiped.

The body is therefore no longer effaced, on the contrary, it is displayed and emphasized. There are new criteria for evaluating the body, from the ideal of beauty, to fashion and manners. The ideal shape of the body is reconsidered: the flesh colour is emphasized; the female body, especially, acquires a density and a flesh tint which it didn't have until then, its aspect becomes fleshier, and its contours more consistent. A discreet sensuality hints to the sap pulsating under the skin, suggesting the milk and the blood.[6] 'Roundness' is the term most widely used to describe a beautiful body, indicating the balance between plumpness and thinness. The medieval slim shape is no longer an ideal.

The early modern idea of beauty implies a hierarchy, distinguishing the upper and the lower parts of the body. Beauty is present in the upper part, and this is why the upper part is displayed. The lower part is concealed, as it is seen merely as the support of the upper part, where beauty actually resides. The neck, the shoulders, the chest, and the arms, not to mention the face, are the actual indicators of beauty, and hence the fashion of the décolletage.

But beauty does not only involve the natural beauty of the body, but also the dress, which is meant to emphasize the body, the posture, and the manners related to the body. The body is therefore not only displayed and celebrated for its beauty, it is also used as a symbol of status. Social distance is also expressed at the level of the manners. Dress is obviously a marker of the wearer's status, but it has to be accompanied by the appropriate posture and manners.

The re-presentation of the body through fashion

The climate created by Christianity is characterised by a dual tension between divinity, which is transcendental, and human existence in the real world. Since the human being's true homeland, his/her place of redemption, is the sky, nature is regarded as a place of exile, and the body is seen as a tomb. This situation involves, on the one hand, a constant seduction exercised by nature over man, whose effect is an increasingly obvious alienation from the divine; on the other hand, it involves a constant effort – whose main instruments are religion itself and religious ethics – to escape nature's temptations.

Nature is an organism that lacks reflection, endowed with beauty and with an enormous capacity to fascinate, which creates beings and feeds them, but which eventually destroys them. On the contrary, religion represents a set of rules whose aim is to protect man from natural destruction, ensuring his indestructibility at the level of the spiritual and the transcendental. At the level of gender differentiation, the woman represents nature, while the man represents religion and its rules.[7] This means that the more beautiful a woman is, the more she displays the marks of her natural functions (insemination, fecundity, nutrition), and the more she becomes suspect from a religious standpoint. Indeed, beauty is seduction and, consequently, a great danger for the man, who has to keep away from the defilement of sexual desire.[8] The spirit must not be defiled by carnal pleasures. Even within the wedlock, spouses are not supposed to feel pleasure, since the only purpose of love-making is procreation. Love-making is therefore seen as a nasty duty; nakedness was not allowed even in the marriage bed. And the somatic signs of fecundity and nurturing (the thighs, the breasts) are precisely the ones that generate lust and sin. For this reason, the culture of the Middle Ages proposes its own ideal of beauty, which is opposed to natural beauty: it is the beauty of virtue, which is attained by means of despising and mortifying the body. What was always admired until the end of the Middle Ages was the woman's thin waist, her fragile and virgin appearance. The habit of the spouses sleeping naked in the marriage bed did not appear until the fourteenth century. Before that, it was not rare for a husband never to see his wife completely naked.

The history of fashion gives us valuable information in this respect. Beyond its variations, the costume has the primary function of entirely concealing the female body – including the hair. The bust has to be leveled, flat, because the ideal of virtuous beauty presupposes the absence of breasts.

The shape of the early medieval costume was characterised by extreme simplicity. Both men's and women's costumes were loose and generally not much adorned. A typical men's costume consisted of a tunic with a wide neck, three-quarter-length sleeves and embroidered borders, very loose and pouched over a belt at the waist, worn over a linen shirt and braies. The latter were loose, trouser-like items, which were held up by means of a cord running through the hem at the waist; crossed linen bands kept them secured to the lower legs. Other common elements were the semicircular cloak, sometimes fastened over a shoulder with a brooch. Shoes were very simple and high-fitting to the ankles. Armours were also very simple: a cone-shaped helmet and a hood of chain covering the head, and a coat of mail (hauberk) with short sleeves.

The only changes that emerged during this period were the appearance of the hose and the adornment of a few items. Towards the end of the twelfth century, a new style of tunic

appeared, with unusual sleeves that were wide from the elbow but narrowed to the wrist. Other new elements were the ornate girdle, the full woolen cloak, the Phrygian cap, very popular among the rich, and the boots with coloured lining.

A typical women's costume consisted of plain woolen and linen clothes, with some embroidery. The gown was similar in style to a man's tunic, very loose and with an opening at the neck. The neck, cuffs and hem of the gown were embroidered, and the gown was gathered at the waist with a girdle. A veil was used to cover the head, wound around the neck so that the hair was completely covered. The hair was not supposed to be visible, as it represented a temptation. Over the gown a voluminous woolen cloak was worn for warmth. The shoes were also very simple, with no embroidery or garments.

The style slightly changed at the beginning of the twelfth century. The gown was more or less the same, except for the fact that the sleeves became very wide from the elbow. The girdle was long and jeweled, and worn high around the waist, crossed at the back and brought forward low onto the hips. For covering their head women wore a veil and a coronet, and the hair was arranged into two long plaits bound with a silk ribbon. The rest of the twelfth century saw little change in women's clothes, except that the long plaits and the wide sleeves gradually went out of fashion. In 1170 the barbette was introduced. This was a linen band that passed under the chin and over the head. In 1190 a linen covering for the neck appeared. It was called a wimple and was tucked into the dress at the front and often veiled the chin. These items became very popular and, after a few years' respite, ladies concealed their hair once again.

Real changes in style did not appear until the first half of the fourteenth century, when revolutionary ideas were introduced and the whole silhouette was transformed. Instead of being loose and flowing, garments were made to fit the figure, emphasizing the male and female shapes, and so the tailoring began. These innovations were due in part to natural evolution, but also to the stirring of the Renaissance in Italy, where the human body was being studies and glorified in art and literature, and tailored fashions helped to display the figure better. Brilliant colours, costly fabrics, fur and fur linings, patterning, motifs and jeweled embroideries were all popular, culminating in ostentatious displays during the reign of Richard II.

The new styles developed further in the fifteenth century with an even greater variety of designs and fabrics. The most interesting change in fashion that has occured since the late fourteenth century is the disappearance of the slim silhouette. Expensive, rich fabrics like velvet, brocade, silk, and gold and silver cloth were imported for the upper classes and beautifully woven fabrics were produced in England due to the influx of Flemish weavers who came to England under the patronage of Edward III. Fashion became more exaggerated and flamboyant: there was great scope for display and extravagance, which sometimes caused much inconvenience to the wearer. Good examples of this were the exaggerated pointed toes of men's shoes and the large, unusual headdresses worn by ladies.

However, by law, high fashion was defined as being the prerogative of the upper classes with diminishing privileges given to those in the middle and lower classes. This meant that wealthy middle-class people would not be allowed to wear clothes as sumptuous as those of the nobility. Sometimes royalty would hand down or bequeath garments to their servants, but only after the costly trimmings had been removed. The servants would later sell them to second-hand clothes dealers and eventually the same garments would be seen, worn out, on the backs of the poorer. Clothes were a mark of status and it was possible to determine a person's rank by the length of his tunic or size of her headdress. As fashions became more extravagant, strict sumptuary laws were passed in an attempt to curb any excesses. For example, it was ordained that: 1) only royalty and nobility could wear pearl embroidery and ermine; 2) cloth of gold, jewels and miniver (plain white fur) linings could be worn only by

knights and people of higher rank; 3) cloth of silver, silver girdles and fine quality wool were restricted to squires and people of higher rank; 4) commoners were permitted to wear only the coarser quality wools, and even if they could afford jewels and silk, they were not allowed to wear them.[9]

At the end of the Middle Ages a radical change occured, which (as we have shown above) was translated into a similarly revolutionary women's fashion. The decolletage became so deep, that breasts were half visible. A novelty was the dress 'a la grande gorge', which opened at front to the navel. But, as opposed to the medieval dress code, where the body was completely concealed and effaced, the early modern permissiveness went even further: sometimes the breasts remained completely uncovered, the nipples were ornamented with red, with precious stones, and sometimes they were even pierced to allow for gold chains to be hung up. This permissiveness will later be depicted in some of Herrick's poems: 'A sweet disorder in the dress/Kindles in clothes a wantonness:/A lawn about the shoulders thrown/Into a fine distraction:/An erring lace, which here and there/Enthralls the crimson stomacher:/A cuff neglectful, and thereby/Ribbands to flow confusedly:/A winning wave (deserving note)/In the tempestuous petticoat:/A careless shoestring, in whose tie/I see a wide civility:/Do more bewitch me than when art/Is too precise in every part.' ('Delight in Disorder'). 'Whenas in silks my Julia goes,/Then, then (methinks) how sweetly flows/That liquefaction of her clothes.//Next, when I cast mine eyes and see/That brave vibration each way free,/O how that glittering taketh me!' ('Upon Julia's Clothes')

In the fifteenth century, if the topless style is only rarely adopted – Simonetta Vespucci painted by Piero de Cosimo – a new ideal of beauty emerges, which emphasizes the charms of nature at the expense of the charms of virtue. The preference for the round, ripe shapes increases with the progress of the early modern period. The lithe young men and fragile young ladies of the Trecento and Quattrocento became powerful and determined men with broad shoulders and vigorous women with ample lines in the Cinquecento, as we know them from the masterpieces of the time (Leonardo da Vinci, Raphael, Michelangelo, Giorgione, Titian, Corregio and others). The shape of the body was sometimes revealed, and other times emphasized by clothing. This tendency will still have echoes later, in the seventeenth century. Richard Lovelace, for example, made an apology of the vigorous body in his 'La Bella Bona Roba' (a common expression for a whore, but literally meaning a pleasantly plump girl): 'I cannot tell who loves the skeleton/Of a poor marmoset, naught but bone, bone./Give me a nakedness with her clothes on.//Such whose white-satin upper coat of skin,/Cut upon velvet rich incarnadine,/Has yet a body (and of flesh) within.'

The Italian fashion in the fifteenth century was with the waist high, emphasizing the breasts. This can be seen on the funerary monument of a matron from Lucca, carried out by Jacopo della Quercia (around 1438), a sculptor of the round shaped maternity. We find the same high waist fashion in Jan van Eyck's famous painting, 'The Marriage of Giovanni Arnolfini and Giovanna Cenami'. In the sixteenth century, the Italian fashion provides for the waist down, the bust being covered by a short singlet with a square décolletage. Francesco del Cossa's fresco 'The Weavers' is a real parade of the high waist fashion; on the contrary, Raphael's portraits are proofs of the lowering of the waist and the evolution of the décolletage. There is a certain balance in this variation in women's fashion: the high waist emphasizes the breasts, which still remain covered; the low waist flattens the breasts, but the décolletage, sometimes large enough to stretch over the shoulders, reveals the upper part of the female body.

An English example of the topless fashion is to be found in Robert Peake's Portrait of Lady Elizabeth Pope. Pope's portrait shows a young lady seated under a laurel tree in a pastoral landscape. Her upper body is partially covered with a classical mantle of heavy black cloth, knotted at her shoulder. The fabric is embroidered with pearls in an elaborate feather

design. Her hat displays the same feather pattern. Her hair falls loose across her shoulders and upper arms, hiding but also suggesting the line of her exposed left breast. She is represented wearing a necklace with a pendant reaching between her breasts. Her neck is encircled by a choker whose large hanging pearl points to the pendant. The painting is an illustration of the tensions between voluptuousness – conveyed by the loose hair, the curves of the feather pattern, the uncovered breast and the relaxed and graceful position of Lady Elizabeth Pope's hands – and the more rigid codes of Elizabethan fashion and portrait convention. 'Lady Elizabeth's head is held in a precise vertical position, and the slight angle of the line between the pearl and the pendant implies that her body is not equally upright. Yet even this intimation of a relaxed pose is effectively denied by the rigid axial coordination of the necklaces and the awkward position of her arms. Both are bent, the rigid arm resting lightly on a green stump, the left stiffly away from her body.' [10]

In Peake's painting, with its formal and symbolic complexities, meaning is conveyed through a play of oppositions and contrasting elements: the public display of the full-scale portrait and the private experience of the miniature (the painting is designed and framed as a miniature); the heraldic flatness of Lady Pope's body and the sensuous physicality of her costume. And although her image belongs to the heraldic tradition, the depictions of movement, the display of the body, and the space and depth within the painting suggest an attempt to change the conventions of the English icon. 'Within this frontal plane, symbolic framing devices define a parameter or boundary for Lady Elizabeth's image. Laurel branches fill the top of the panel, focusing the viewer's glaze, while sheltering Lady Elizabeth within a private bower. This reframing of her image is repeated in a self-generating frame. Lady Elizabeth's arms are positioned so that a powerful circular movement through hands, arms, hair and head creates a little world of her body within that protected bower. With this enframing device Peake seems to re-create for the viewer the Renaissance conception of the human body as a miniature or microcosm of the world.'[11] We will come back to the discussion of the miniature and its relation to the body.

The position of Lady Elizabeth's hands suggesting modesty and passivity was typical of many Elizabethan and Jacobean portraits of women: hands are clasped together or rest at their side or on a table or a chair. However, the image of Lady Elizabeth Pope, as depicted by Peake, is a sensuous one. Despite the fact that it belongs to this tradition and to a certain extent participates in the above described convention, Peake's portrait is atypical through its sensuality. In her left hand, Lady Elizabeth feels a thick fold of cloth between her thumb and her ring finger. The material presence of the cloth is described in precise detail: each fold and drape are revealed by the distortions imposed on the pearls of the feather pattern. 'The fabric is the only real volumetrically conceived space in the painting. Its descriptive power, as Elizabeth Pope touches it, quite literally fashions her identity, and at the same moment she seems to invite the beholder to share the intimacy of that touch and to feel the palpable fabric that creates her presence.'[12] So both the materiality and the sensuality within the portrait are actually given by the fabric rather than by the body itself. The cloth complements the body, it both hides and reveals the body.

Elizabethan and Jacobean paintings have been described as 'miniatures blown up under glass'. The image appears as if it were held in hand, and the full-scale portrait resembles the miniature through the way in which it couples the real and aesthetic space. The portrait of Lady Elizabeth Pope is full-sized, but Peake has 'deliberately evoked many of the formal and associative qualities of the miniature: not only the very different physical relation between viewer and image, but also the miniature's courtly origins, its representational function and its expression of 'private' emotion'[13]. The detailed depiction of the fabric and jewels that Elizabeth Pope wears invites the viewer to compare the real and the represented, to measure and acknowledge the value of the image. In addition, this precise, detailed

description of the fabric and jewels is meant to reflect the status and wealth of the sitter. In this and other paintings, as well as in the mentality of the time, dress defined the social status of the sitter, as evidenced by the English sumptuary laws which defined the dress code for every social rank and which were designed to preserve the established order and hierarchy.

Although Peake alludes to an Italianate figure, his portrait fits in the long-established convention of English portraits: Lady Elizabeth's figure is not an object of desire, nor is it an ideal of beauty or a means of expressing or inspiring emotion. What this figure emphasizes is the voluptuous display of rank and status rather than mere eroticism. Therefore the portrait of Lady Elizabeth Pope reveals a play of contradictions and a juxtaposition of dualities: exposure and concealment (suggested by the fabric and jewels), public display and private possession (full-scale portrait, inviting public admiration of Lady Elizabeth's beauty, painted in the style of miniatures, suggesting a private exchange between lovers), voluptuousness and chastity (loose hair, exposed body). And this play of contrasts and dualities is typical to the early modern mentality, as reflected in portraits and in the art of costume and jewelry: public and private, erotic voluptuousness and the voluptuousness of status, concealment and display, permissiveness and restrictions.

The fashion at the end of the Middle Ages and throughout the early modern period display all signs of a permissiveness and even, in some cases, of a promiscuity – if we think of the mixed public baths, which were unknown until then. Literature does not deny or contradict the general impression in any way since the erotic subjects had never been treated, in the Christian age, with the straightforwardness and detachment manifested by Boccaccio, Chaucer, Rabelais. Visual arts also go through this shift in morality. The subjects inspired by the ancient mythology become – with Piero di Cosimo, Lorenzo di Credi, Signorelli, Leonardo da Vinci, Michelangelo – a pretext for carrying out studies of incredibly daring female nudes. In the city of Florence, traversed by Lorenzo de Medici's Bacchic pageants, Simonetta Vespucci poses topless for Piero di Cosimo, while Raphael has no difficulty in finding models for nudes.

The reaction to sexual emancipation and to exhibitionist fashion soon made its appearance. The moralizing sermons of Jan Hus in Bohemia and Savonarola in Florence, with their huge persuasive force and effectiveness, allow us to see what is to follow, i.e. the Reformation mentality.

Wherever the Reformation is established, the morality changes. In women's fashion, this is translated into the complete disappearance of the décolletage, substituted by a bodice with a high collar , and the appearance of a double skirt aimed at avoiding the indiscreet glances during the dance. The mixed public baths, which were widespread in the fourteenth century, are almost lacking in the sixteenth century.

The German reform did not bring about any unitary fashion. After 1540, the dominant influence comes from Spain and very rapidly conquers the whole Europe, including the protestant countries. The discourse underlying Spanish women's fashion is simple and clear: the woman is nature's blind instrument of seduction, the symbol of temptation, of sin and evil. Apart from the face, her main instruments of luring are the signs of her fecundity: the thighs and the breasts, as well as every inch of skin that she exhibits. Her face has to remain unveiled; but it can be imprinted with a rigid, masculine expression. The neck may be wrapped by a high lace collar. The collar, as an emblem of discipline and restraint, is the topic reflected upon in George Herbert's poem 'The Collar', perhaps also punning on 'choler': 'I struck the board, and cried, 'No more,/I will abroad!/What? Shall I ever sigh and pine?/My lines and life are free, free as the road,/Loose as the wind, as large as store./Shall I be still in suit?/Have I no harvest but a thorn/To let me blood, and not restore/What I have lost with cordial fruit?/Sure there was wine/Before my sighs did dry it; there was corn/Before my tears did drown it./Is the year only lost to me?/Have I no bays to crown it?/No flowers, no garlands

gay? All blasted?/All wasted?/Not so, my heart: but there is fruit,/And thou hast hands./Recover all thy sigh-blown age/On double pleasures: leave thy cold dispute/Of what is fit, and not. Forsake thy cage,/Thy rope of sands,/Which petty coats have made, and made to thee/Good cable, to enforce and draw,/And be thy law,/While thou didst wink and wouldst not see./[…]'

The changed attitude towards the body is most obvious in the way in which the bust is treated, reminding of the traditional distortion of the feet that the Japanese women had to go through, but without being though as painful and damaging.[14]. The ideal of beauty, which remained unchanged until the end of the eighteenth century, was for women not to have breasts at all; therefore, women were very careful to prevent their breasts from growing. When the breasts began to grow, women tried to impede them by pressing them with lead plates and wrap themselves the way infants are swaddled. Thus their chest was almost completely flat.

The body becomes a taboo and a new system is invented that makes the skirt longer than the legs, and a new style of shoes is adopted, with thick soles made of wood and cork. These uncomfortable shoes are favoured by the ecclesiastical circles in Italy, as they represent an effective instrument for preventing worldly pleasures, especially dancing. Fashion certainly determines the level of sexual excitement: a permissive fashion that occasions the exhibition of all the natural charms leads to a certain degree of indifference between the sexes; on the contrary, a repressive fashion results in a proportional lowering of the level of excitement.

The only country where the Spanish fashion did not gain ground was Italy. The fact that Rome always sheltered the Vatican and the papal curia, made up of people of a remarkable intelligence and skepticism, protected Italy from the excesses of intolerance: it was actually the only province of the Church that hardly witnessed any passionate executions of witches at all. The baroque art impregnated by sensuality and the women's fashion of the Seicento are far from displaying the same rigid uniformity as in the rest of Europe.

The feminine ideal proposed by the Reformation finds its perfect expression in the Spanish fashion. This imposes the type of defeminized, masculine woman, whose role no longer is to exercise an ominous seduction over the man, but to help him through the hard way to moral perfection. Culture tends to destroy her natural charms through cruel and damaging practices: her bust is flattened with lead plates, the expressive mobility of her face is suppressed, her waist is heightened, her body is completely covered from head to toe; all attempts are made to make her look as masculine as possible.

The reformed mentality is exemplified by Andrew Marvel's poems, among which 'A Dialogue Between the Resolved Soul and Created Pleasure', and 'A Dialogue Between the Soul and the Body' are among the most representative, with a deeply religious character. In the former, the tempter deploys against the resolved soul all the elements of the temptation Christ was faced with in the wilderness: the senses are the first to be targeted, then follow the temptations of voluptuous sex, money, glory, and forbidden knowledge – everything that has to do with the earthly existence and with the lure of the worldly: 'Everything does seem to vie/Which should first attract thine eye;/But since none deserves that grace, In this crystal view thy face/[…]/All this fair and soft and sweet,/Which scatteringly doth shine,/Shall within one beauty meet,/And she be only thine.' Having overcome this, the Soul rejected and defeated all temptations: 'When the Creator's skill is prized,/The rest is all but earth disguised./[…]/If things of sight such heavens be,/What heavens are those we cannot see?' The victory of the Soul is in the end praised by the Chorus. The latter poem takes over and develops the idea in Galatians 5:17: 'the flesh lusteth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary one to the other'. As indicated in the title, the poem is a dialogue between the body and the soul, which suggests the incompatibility between the two.

The body and the soul are forced to be together and to make up a whole, but there is no possible compromise between them, the contrasts and contradictions between the two are impossible to reconcile. The soul is enslaved, chained and tortured by the vain body: 'Oh, who shall from this dungeon rise/A soul enslaved so many ways?/With bolts of bones; that fettened stands/In feet, and manacled in hands;/Here blinded with an eye, and there/Deaf with the drumming of an ear;/A soul hung up, as 'twere, in chains/Of nerves and arteries and veins;/Tortured, besides each other part,/In a vain head and double heart./[…]/What magic could me thus confine/Within another's grief to pine?/Where whatsoever it complain,/I feel, that cannot feel, the pain./And all my care itself employs,/Constrained not only to endure/Diseases, but, what's worst, the cure;/And ready oft the port to gain,/Am shipwrecked into health again.' The infinite, immortal soul is confined within the finite, mortal, fragile body, subject to disease and temptation, needing the soul's support for its survival, but destroying the soul through sin and pain. The body, on the other hand, is tortured by the 'tyrannic' soul: 'Oh, who shall me deliver whole/From bonds of this tyrannic soul?/Which stretched upright, impales me so/That mine own precipice I go;/And warms and moves this needless fame,/A fever could but do the same./And, wanting where its spite to try,/Has made me live to let me die./A body that could never rest,/Since this ill spirit it possessed./[…]/But physic yet could never reach/The maladies thou me dost teach:/Whom first the cramp of hope does tear,/And then the palsy shakes of fear;/The pestilence of love does heat,/Or hatred's hidden ulcer eat./Joy's cheerful madness does perplex,/Or sorrow's other madness vex;/Which knowledge forces me to know,/And memory will not forgo./What but a soul could have the wit/To build me up for sin so fit?/So architects do square and hew/Green trees that in the forest grew.' The body is therefore completely dependent on the soul; aware of its sinful nature, the body blames the soul for the way it is designed: it needs pleasure and comfort, but these are forbidden and eventually prevented by the very soul which created them.

The natural, overflowing, voluptuous, sinful femininity is therefore banned. From now on, only witches can 'dare' have long thighs, big breasts, curved shapes and loose long hair. If we look at Hans Baldung Grien's engravings we can see the vitality and the richness of representation that these 'maleficae' enjoy. This image of the natural, tempting and destructive femininity is opposed by the rigid and uniform silhouette and the emaciated, immobile face of the Spanish virtuous woman.

The imagery connected to witchcraft is close to the pornographic imagery: it contains all the repressed emotions of a highly restrictive age. All the possible and even impossible perversions are attributed to witches and their devilish partners. One of the many examples can be found in Hans Baldung Grien's painting – 'The Death and the Woman' – where the woman stands for the voluptuous, curve-shaped, long-haired type of the temptress or witch. This woman is represented kissing Death, a hideous representation of evil, and wrapping her in an obscene embrace. The paintings representing the Sabbath contain similarly scabrous scenes, whose manifest intention is to persuade the audience of the antisocial practices of the witches. But the underlying content of all the iconography of this type is easy to grasp: using the pretext of the erotic fantasies of the marginals who surfaced on occasion of the transfer process brought about by the Inquisition, the persecutors themselves projected all their personal repressed emotions into those images.[15]

The approach to the body, the interpretation and representation of the body stems from the mentality of an epoch, as well as from the various discourses circulated in a given society. In the Middle Ages, the religious discourse prevailed, focusing on the spiritual ideal and insisting on the idea that the body should be hidden, concealed, effaced, as a source of sinful temptation and as an unworthy element of human experience. The early modern times witnessed the rise of individualism and the secularization of art and thought. The early

modern individual was liberated from the medieval restraints and rigidness; individualism gave him the freedom to express himself and to value, nurture and educate both his body and his mind. This triggered the interest in and emphasis on the human body as a valuable asset which should be displayed for its beauty, but also used as a form of expression of the social status of the individual. The body was therefore ostentatiously displayed and adorned with expensive fabrics and jewels. Later, the Reformation witnessed a reaction to all this ostentation, which caused another shift in the attitude towards the body: moderation and austerity.

Notes

[1] in Le Breton, *Antropologia corpului şi modernitatea*, Editura Cartier, Chişinău, 2009, p. 67.
[2] in Le Breton, op. cit., p. 68.
[3] ibid., p. 77.
[4] ibid., pp. 82-84.
[5] ibid., p. 97.
[6] in Vigarello, Georges, *O istorie a frumuseții. Corpul şi arta înfrumusețării din Renaştere până în zilele noastre*, Editura Cartier, Chişinău, 2006, p. 19.
[7] in Culianu, Ioan Petru, *Eros şi magie în Renaştere*, Editura Nemira, Bucureşti, 1999, p. 271.
[8] in Duby, Georges, *Evul mediu masculin*, Editura Meridiane, Bucureşti, 1992, p. 43.
[9] in Ruby, Jenifer, *Costume in Context. Medieval Times*, B.T. Bradsford Ltd., London, 1995, p. 38.
[1] Chirelstein, Ellen, 'Lady Elizabeth Pope: The Heraldic Body', in Gent,L. and Llwellyn, N. (eds.), *Renaissance Bodies – The Human Figure in English Culture c. 1540-1660*, Reaktion Books Ltd., London, 1994, p. 36.
[11] Chirelstein, op. cit., pp. 37-38.
[12] ibid., p. 38.
[13] id.
[14] in Culianu, op. cit., p. 276.
[15] ibid., p. 277.

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