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Mary's Transparent Beauty in St. Bernard's Aesthetics

Adrián Pradier

Department of Philosophy, University of Valladolid, 47011 Valladolid, Spain; adrian.pradier@uva.es

Abstract: The subject of the beauty of the Virgin Mary was a delicate one in medieval aesthetic thought. Halfway between the sacred and the profane, the theological and the anthropological, the question of Mary's beauty opened up a strictly material dimension of appreciation that could generate problems related to decorum. However, the progressive humanization of Marian images from the thirteenth century onwards invites us to wonder if there was not, after all, a way to balance or, better, to sublimate the immaterial beauty of Mary, Mother of God, and material beauty of Mary, the young virgin of Nazareth. Taking as our leitmotiv a fictional scene from Umberto Eco's novel *The Name of the Rose*, we will analyze St. Bernard's position on this issue, because he was particularly influential on this matter in his own time and later, since his work brings together not only Marian concerns of deep theological depth, but also aesthetic questions that can contribute to clarifying this question.

Keywords: St. Bernard of Clairvaux; mariology; beauty; medieval aesthetics; medieval philosophy

1. By Way of Introduction: In the Company of Adso de Melk and Ubertino da Casale

I would like to begin this paper by taking a walk through that mysterious abbey in Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* (1980). Let us go to the church. We will meet two Franciscans there: the young novice Adso of Melk, the protagonist of the story, and an elderly Ubertino of Casale, a historical character. They speak in whispers. The themes revolve around the terrible end of the controversial Fra Dulcino, a subject which leads them to slightly more personal paths. In this way, one of the most poignant concerns that Umberto Eco deploys throughout his novel is undoubtedly the one related to the concupiscible desires of Adso. The fear, sometimes dread, that he manifests towards his own passions makes him a tormented character that reflects very well the aesthetic tensions of the period. Moved by the purpose of seeking advice from Ubertino, because he is an experienced man, he finds him prostrate before a column, on which there is a statue of the virgin. That sculpture is the same in front of which William of Baskerville and Adso, at the beginning of the story, had found Ubertino.

The description of sculptures that populate the tenebrous Benedictine monastery occupies a good part of the novel. One can appreciate here the influence that the interest in medieval aesthetics played in Eco's own career, to which he dedicated several works (Eco 1956, [1959] 1986). In the scene at hand, the statue is described in sufficient detail to give us a very approximate idea of it. The text reads: "Near the last chapel before the altar, in the left nave, stood a slender column on which a stone Virgin was set, carved in the modern fashion, with an ineffable smile and prominent abdomen, wearing a pretty dress with a small bodice, the child on her arm" (Eco [1980] 2004, p. 53).

The elements that, in an iconographic key, contribute to fix the appearance of the statue are, therefore, the following: a column specifically intended to exhibit devotional figures; a new fashion or manner in the design of the image of the Virgin and Child; a particular facial gesture—the smile—and a bodily detail—the belly; the clothing, which draws attention because it is beautiful or pretty; and, finally, the position of the child on her arm. Without further clues in the story than those indicated by Adso, but considering that 1327 is the year of the narrative, we can safely infer that such an image would be integrating a typology of the Virgin Mother originating in the French sculpture of the first

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third of the fourteenth century, which probably finds its maximum expression—or, at least, the most recognizable—in the Golden Virgin of the cathedral of Amiens, which "will mark the devotional sculpture of the century" (Martín Ansón 2002, p. 43). A brief glance at the sculptural panorama of the Madonnas in this period allows us to confirm that we are not only witnessing a flowering of the Marian cult cultivated throughout the previous century, but also a considerable diversification of Her images (Waller 2011, p. 32).

Umberto Eco's description, certainly concrete, is not trivial: on the one hand, it responds to contextual interests, since it serves to situate the narration temporally, an aspect that is undoubtedly relevant for any historical novel; on the other hand, it also serves as a material witness for the end of the conversation that Adso himself and Ubertino da Casale have about feminine beauty. Kneeling in front of the statue of the Virgin, their conversation, which dealt with the heresy of Fra Dolcino and the Apostolic Brotherhood, leads to the base instincts of Remigio da Varagine, the monastery's cellarer. Taking the latter as a counterexample, the old friar urges the young novice to initiate himself into "immaculate love" and, embracing him and pointing to the image of the Virgin, declares:

> 'There is she in whom femininity is sublimated. This is why you may call her beautiful, like the beloved in the Song of Songs. In her,' he said, his face carried away by an inner rapture, like the abbot's the day before when she spoke of gems and the gold of his vessels, 'in her, even the body's grace is a sign of the beauties of heaven, and this is why the sculptor has portrayed her with all the graces that should adorn a woman.' He pointed to the Virgin's slender bust, held high and tight by a cross-laced bodice, which the Child's tiny hands fondled. 'You see? As the doctors have said: *Pulchra enim sunt ubera quae paululum supereminent et tument modice, nec fluitantia licenter, sed leniter restricta, repressa sed non depressa* . . . What do you feel before this sweetest of visions?'. (Eco [1980] 2004, p. 221)

Umberto Eco exposes in this brief discourse one of the most important crossroads of medieval aesthetic thought: the possibility of a disinterested contemplation of matter capable of sublimating it and turning it into an occasion for elevation. In order to present the stress elements, he invokes two key voices, halfway between fiction and history—voices which he had already used in his work *Apocalittici e integrati* (Eco [1964] 1994, pp. 17–19) to illustrate two types of position vis-à-vis mass culture: the first character, Abbone, abbot of the fictitious monastery, a reflection of another historical abbot, Suger of Saint-Denis, also a Benedictine and a lover of the beatific power of precious stones in devotional spaces; the second one, present in Ubertino's literal quotation, is Gilbertus of Hoyt, who was, according to tradition, the first continuator to the exegetical work of St. Bernard of Clairvaux in relation to the Song of Songs, today conceived as a "work in progress" (Pranger 1994, p. 22). In other words, in Ubertino's quote, St. Bernard of Clairvaux is present, the main spiritual impugner of the 12th century and the driving force behind the Cistercian reform . . . and its artistic expression.

As we know, both figures, Suger and St. Bernard, embodied two completely different ways of confronting material delights: while the latter wrote that "those of us who have come out of the people" are precisely those who consider the beauty of material things "as garbage" (*ut stercora*) (Bernardus Claraevallensis 1854a, col. 915a)[1], the other, possibly influenced by the aesthetic theology of Hugues de Saint-Victor (Poirel 2001, pp. 141–70), interpreted the contemplation of material objects, in their aesthetic properties, as meditative occasion (Pradier 2022), suitable for a mystical ascent of anagogical character (*more anagogico*), in which Suger was "transferred from the material to the immaterial" (*de materialibus ad immaterialia transferendo*) (Suger of St. Denis 2018, p. 106; Suger de St. Denis 1867, p. 198)[2]. What is interesting, in this case, is that aesthetic tension between one and the other way of facing material charms does not develop in relation to the role of plastic arts in religious spaces—a genuine controversy of the aesthetic thought of the twelfth century, but around the feminine beauty through the figure of Virgin Mary. However, Ubertino's choice of words borders on a total lack of decorum in such a delicate matter. What is the proper way to address Her in aesthetic terms? Is it appropriate to speak of Her material beauty, that is,

Her bodily beauty? Is She beautiful in a strictly aesthetic sense? And, if these questions can be asked, how should they be articulated?

If there is one medieval author who dedicated a large part of his theological reflection to the figure of the Virgin Mary, it was undoubtedly St. Bernard of Clairvaux. On the other hand, in him also converge deep aesthetic concerns about the desirability of cultivating a type of inner beauty based on the cultivation of virtues, as opposed to the external beauty of matter. His position will contribute to the formation of an aesthetic discourse on the beauty of Mary which, after all, serves to indicate the appropriateness of a certain aesthetic attitude towards her image and, at the same time, shape a spiritual theory on beauty of deep philosophical depth. Accordingly, my presentation will be organized as follows: first, I analyze St. Bernard's theory of humility as the basis for all his subsequent aesthetic developments; second, I study the counterpoint to Mary's beauty in the biblical figure of Dinah, the young and beautiful daughter of Jacob, who, in contrast to Mary, embodies the exercise of curiosity as an occasion for personal downfall; finally, I present Mary's beauty in terms of transparent beauty. In other words, Her beauty, which is inner, is also based on the supreme virtue of humility, which is what, in some way, makes it shine, anticipate itself or, better, transparent itself in Mary's body. Her material beauty is only a consequence, a pale reflection of that other superior, immaterial beauty emanating from Her virtuous soul.

2. Humility and Curiosity in St. Bernard's Thought

The thesis that articulates St. Bernard's whole approach to the beauty of Virgin Mary—and, by extension, all feminine beauty—is founded on a general theory of humility, which "can be defined as follows: humility is a virtue by which a man humbles himself by the truest knowledge of himself" (Bernardus Claraevallensis 1854b, col. 942b)[3]. Therefore, the first step in addressing this delicate question consists in clarifying this point, whose foundational character reverberates throughout Bernardine's philosophical and theological thoughts. The Abbot of Clairvaux considered humility to be the touchstone against which to test the worth of any person dedicated body and soul to the encounter with the divine: actions, thoughts, omissions, and faults should thus be reviewed and evaluated in terms of humility and, consequently, of pride. To humble oneself is, in fact, "essentially to prove by acts of the body and of thought that one's own misery is known and that one judges oneself" (Gilson [1986] 2006, p. 95). It is necessary, however, a personal commitment to interior truth, in line with the Benedictine Regula, so that such judgment is not only said in words: it is fundamental that each one "believes it also in the depths of his heart" (Benedict Nursiae 1847, col. 374a)[4]. Only in this way is humility capable of revealing the fragility of oneself; the brokenness of humanity; the profound and unbearable lightness of life; the anguished solitude in which the evanescence of interpersonal bridges is revealed; the lightness of spirit; the complacent pleasure of passionate falls; and, in short, the evident contrast between the ontological richness of the human, as God's favorite work, and the ontic indigence of the individual, exposed to the elements.

St. Bernard's theory of humility, which runs through his entire oeuvre, was first formulated in a treatise of his youth written around 1118: *On the degrees of humility and pride* (*De gradibus humilitate et superbiae*). The purpose was to collect in writing his fundamental teachings of his catechesis, given by himself, to the Clairvaux cloisters (McGuire 2011, p. 30; Holdsworth 1994, pp. 58–60). Humility is thus at the summit (*culmen*) of all virtues, for it is the only one whose exercise, for those disposed (*dispositi*) to carry it out and who have surpassed all previous degrees, places men in a true contemplative attitude (*in speculatione*), situated (*positi*) to "see the truth" (Bernardus Claraevallensis 1854b, col. 942b)[5].

Following Saint Benedict, each degree of possession of the truth in the way of humility corresponds to each of the twelve degrees of humility recognized by Saint Benedict of Nursia (Benedict Nursiae 1847, col. 371a–376a). Additionally, for each degree ascended on the path of contemplation, one descends on the path of pride, and vice versa. The image that serves to illustrate tropologically the whole "task of ascension" (*labor ascensionis*) coincides with the biblical account of Jacob's ladder. As is well known, Jacob saw in the course of

a dream a ladder which, "resting on the earth, touched the heavens with its head", and "the angels of God ascended and descended" (Gen. 28:12–15)[6]. Jacob's ladder represents for St. Bernard the ethical idea of the need to choose "between progress and failure" (*inter profectum et defectum*), dimensions that he considers absolute, mutually and logically exclusive; but, at the same time, it symbolizes the condition of the human spirit, exposed "always either to advance or to decay" (Bernardus Claraevallensis 1854d, col. 461d)[7]: "You need to go up or you need to go down: if you want to stand, you will fall" (Bernardus Claraevallensis 1854d, col. 224a)[8]. In other words, humility implies choosing and accepting the more than foreseeable defeats. At the same time, the twelve steps of the ladder, in correspondence with Benedictine indications, are not to be enumerated, but to be climbed (Bernardus Claraevallensis 1854b, col. 941c)[9]: the revelation of the ladder already implies, in a certain way, a form of ascent by which those to whom grace has been granted can ascend; that is, all the angels and saints, as well as men who are on their way to the first degree of the possession of truth, that is, humility.

If the path of humility implies a retreat from the exterior to the interior of oneself, the path of curiosity runs in the opposite direction and constitutes the first degree of ascent up the ladder of pride or the first step of descent from the summit of humility. From the ancient perspective of St. Augustine, curiosity was already considered a vice rather than a virtue, leading to the confusion of the faithful and the unhealthy search for sensual, rather than spiritual, gratifications. The position became more acute in the framework of the Cistercian theological thought of the 12th century, where St. Bernard characterized it as "the starting point of the degradation of the soul" and "the very negation of Cistercian asceticism" (Gilson [1986] 2006, p. 181)[10]. The reason for such a rejection finds its origin, besides in St. Bernard's own character, in a radicalization of the maxim *nosce te ipsum*. The search for the divine must begin with oneself, "but not only that, but in you it ends" (*non solum autem, sed et in te finiatur*) (Bernardus Claraevallensis 1854e, col. 745d)[11]. In this way, the Premonstratensian Adam Scott, for example, very influenced by St. Bernard (Ardura 1995, p. 116), considered that the reprobate "prostrate themselves" (*prosternuntur*) because of desire; "arise" (*eriguntur*) because of vanity; and "go forth" (*egrediuntur*) on account of curiosity "for the concupiscence of the eyes" (Adamus Scotus 1844, col. 454c-d)[12].

St. Bernard's ideas on this subject are grounded in the practice of the Desert Fathers and in the thought of St. Augustine. There is, even if the idea of a St. Bernard reader of Pseudo-Dionysius is unlikely, a methodological coincidence with the practice of his negative theology. This is properly exercised by the purest souls and can be defined as a mode of contemplation characterized by its impulse towards the contemplation of the Divine through the negation of all things that are not God or do not point to Him (Williams 1999; Turner 1995, pp. 19–49; Roques 1949, pp. 209–10; Lossky 1939, pp. 213–14). Consequently, the specific movement of the soul ends up being "circular", a movement whereby the "entrance into itself of those which are outside it" takes place. This movement confers stability on the soul insofar as it maintains itself identical to the natural movement of the divine intelligences, which, being united to the Good-Beauty principle that attracts them, find their motor around Him. Logically, and due to the proximity of the former in relation to God, the movement from bottom to top becomes circular here (Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagite 1999, p. 141; 1857, col. 705a)[13]. In short, this is the path of negations, traced on a total adherence of the soul to the divine principle, in a recollection stripped of everything external and of every element foreign to itself.

This abyssal encounter of the soul with itself unfolds a bridge, given by God's grace, as far as the soul is allowed and as long as it has been freed from material burdens and the pleasures of sensibility. Any incursion into the "outside" (*foras*) could modify the meaning of the ascent journey and closing to the soul its possibility of "transcending" (*transcendere*) both the material world and itself: it is precisely within this idea, deeply rooted in the theological thought of the 12th century, that the famous Augustinian adage "do not want to go outside" (*noli foras ire*) takes on meaning and context (Augustinus Hipponensis

[1953] 1964, 1841a, col. 154)[14]. In reality, the best of beauty resides in the soul, so the soul must be loved more than the body. Its continuous exposure to corruption and passions makes it the door through which the attraction of matter enters and, consequently, also the pleasures aroused by the corresponding beauty, which are like anchors in the earthly world that hinder the advancement of spiritual perfection:

> Of what do we consist? Of soul and body. Which of these is the better? Doubtless, the soul. What is praised in the body? Nothing else than beauty. What is beauty of the body? A harmony of its parts with a certain pleasing color. Is this form better when it is true or when it is false? Who could doubt that it is better when it is true? But, where is it true? In the soul, of course. Therefore, the soul is to be loved more than the body. But, in what part of the soul is that truth? In the mind and in the understanding. What is opposed to these? The senses. Therefore, it is clear that the senses are to be resisted with the whole force of the mind. But, what if sensible things give us too much pleasure? They must be prevented from giving pleasure. How? By the practice of renouncing them, and aiming at higher things. (Augustinus Hipponensis 1951, pp. 9–10; 1841b, col. 63)[15]

The Spanish Professor Luis Rey Altuna, who was a profound connoisseur of Augustinian aesthetics, wrote that "when St. Augustine, an interiorist observer if ever there was one, made psychological aesthetics, he did not walk any other path", namely "the observation and study of the aesthetic effects of the soul" (Rey Altuna 1945, p. 67). It is worth noting that this is not an observation of passions aroused in the soul in the face of the beautiful, but of the soul's own passions before itself: it welcomes beauty among its own attributes and gathers under it. In this way, for St. Bernard, too, the contempt for oneself and recognition of one's own misery, in word and in heart, not only reaches the spiritual dimension, but also the misery of the body. Where the immaterial beauty of the soul prevails, there is no room left for material beauty, which is only so in appearance, and which therefore only attracts the inexperienced people. To appreciate these delights and to desire to remain in them thus becomes a sign of weakness (*infirmitas*), which extends, ultimately, to the human body itself. This is a commonplace for Cistercian aesthetic thought, but also for Latin Fathers. For Boethius (1847, col. 742a), for example, "he who considers you beautiful does so not because of your nature, but because of the weakness of the eyes of the beholder"[16]. Compared to the beauty of the soul, the beauty of the body pales (Bernardus Claraevallensis 1854c, col. 901d)[17].

3. Biblical Figures of the Fall into Curiosity: Dinah and the Goatlings

St. Bernard's theory of humility begins with self-contempt and interior recollection, in search of the most precious and beautiful thing in life: the immaterial soul. Under this general approach, it is obvious that "Cistercian artistic and aesthetic research will always lead us towards a conception of spiritual beauty" (Piñero 2000, p. 55). This implies recognizing it as the thing around which the task of one's salvation revolves: to care for the soul means to attend to it at every possible moment; to renounce everything that maintains us submerged under the pressure of trivial and therefore unnecessary external occupations; to discard, consequently, bodily pleasures. In this way, St. Bernard also opens the fight against senses, almost as if they were the progenitors of curiosity: they are the ones that make us go outside. Curiosity, consequently, finds its origin in a "defective self-knowledge" that is the cause of "an excessive interest in external things, frivolity of mind and heart" (Casey 2011, p. 103).

If it is already difficult to express the difficulties of a mystical encounter with the divine, it is even more difficult to communicate it to others (Lázaro Pulido 2022, pp. 983–84). For this purpose, he refers to the biblical figure of Dinah on at least two occasions: in *On the degrees of humility and pride* and in the *Sermons on the Song of Songs*. He was possibly supported by the identification that St. Isidore had established between the figure of Dinah and the soul (Isidorus Hispalensis 1850, col. 108a)[18].

The first text reads as follows:

> [. . .] (the soul) that, because of its laziness, is hindered in taking care of itself, becomes curious in the affairs of others. It does not know itself. That is why it is sent out to feed the goatlings. The eyes and ears are rightly called goatlings, symbols of sin; for just as death entered the world through sin, so it enters the soul through these windows. (Bernardus Claraevallensis 1854b, cols. 957b)[19]

The biblical account of Dinah, the daughter who Jacob had with Leah, plays a key role in the Bernardine theory of humility. The scene is focused on the following verse: "and Dinah the daughter of Leah went out to see the women of that country" (Gen. 34:1)[20]. Hamor, son of Shechem, falls in love with her and rapes her. It is interesting to note that, although in a certain way he partially releases Dinah from her total responsibility, he nevertheless locates the fault in the occasion that curiosity originally opened, which, as he himself expresses, "brings to light the experience of evil": "these steps you have in Dinah, the daughter of Jacob" (Bernardus Claraevallensis 1854f, cols. 578b-c). With extreme crudeness, St. Bernard reads the story by focusing on problems derived from the verb *videre* and the term *curiositas* attributed to Dinah: "Why did you have to go and browse foreign women; what necessity, what utility was imposed on you; was it out of sheer curiosity?" (Bernardus Claraevallensis 1854b, col. 958c)[21].

> Although you see idly, you are not seen idly. You observe curiously, but you are observed more curiously. Who would have thought then that your curious innocence, or your innocent curiosity, would be not only idle, but very pernicious to you, to your own and to your enemies? (Bernardus Claraevallensis 1854b, col. 958c)[22]

As can be seen, there are no goatlings in the biblical text. This is because St. Bernard is combining two figures: that of Dinah, daughter of Jacob, who goes outside to "see"; and that of the goatlings, which is taken from the *Sermons on the Song of Songs*. It is in this text that the bride, asking the members of the choir about the whereabouts of her bridegroom, receives the following answer: "If thou knowest not thyself, O fairest among women, go forth and follow in the steps of the flocks, and feed thy goatlings by the shepherds' tents" (Song of Songs 1:7)[23]. St. Bernard interprets this verse in the *De gradibus* as follows: the young bride, who represents the soul, is illustrated in the need to know herself in the context of a soliloquy, logically interior, before she is worthy to enter the King's chamber (*cellaria Regis*) (Song of Sg. 1, 3; 3, 4)[24], that is, the space of mystical intimacy with the Lord, Christ. Conforming to the idea that she is not ready to accede, the soul must therefore go out to herd the goatlings (Bernardus Claraevallensis 1854b, col. 957c)[25]. The figure is frequently used by St. Bernard to illustrate those moments in which the soul reveals self-ignorance, more concerned with what is happening outside. We find the most clear explanation for this issue in the *Sermons on the Song of Songs*:

> Terrible therefore, and a very fearful threat: "Go forth, and let your goatlings graze". Which is: "You know yourself unworthy of that familiar and sweet contemplation of heavenly, intelligible, and divine things. Wherefore go forth from my sanctuary, from your heart, where you used to draw sweetly the secrets and sacred senses of truth and wisdom; and more like one of the secular, feeding and entertaining entangle the senses of your flesh". (Bernardus Claraevallensis 1854c, cols. 963d–964a; see Bernardus Claraevallensis 1854d, col. 286a)[26]

However, every departure implies the risk of losing oneself, hence he himself writes: "For while Dinah was going out to let the goatlings graze, she herself was taken away from her father and her own virginity" (Bernardus Claraevallensis 1854b, col. 958c)[27]. The term *haedos* here means "goatlings", but its allegorical sense, according to St. Bernard, is that of "sin" (*peccatum*). Therefore, their care, their feeding, and, in general, any occupation related to their maintenance requires going outside. Hence St. Bernard goes so far as to identify the goatlings with "eyes and ears", for just as "death enters the world through sin, so it enters the mind through these windows". He continues:

> The curious person, therefore, attends to these tasks, while he cares not to know in what manner he stays within. And truly if you pay attention to yourself in a watchful way, man, it will be a remarkable thing if you ever pay attention to anything else. Curious man, listen to Solomon! Listen, fool, to the wise man: "With all watchfulness keep thy heart, because life issueth out from it,"[28], and all your senses be vigilant to guard that from which life springs. Curious! Where do you go when you turn away from yourself; to whom do you entrust yourself during that time; how dare you lift up your eyes to Heaven, you who sinned against Heaven? Look at the earth, so that you know yourself. It will represent you, for you are earth, and to earth you will go. (Bernardus Claraevallensis 1854b, col. 957c-d)[29]

St. Bernard was simply taking up a long tradition in which, contrary to the attitude of the Marian model, the attitude of Dinah, whose gaze is lost in the territory of desire, passions, or curiosity, is emphasized. Alain de Lille thought in this respect that the appetite for what is foreign is what leads the monk to look back, acting "like the wife of Loth" and withdrawing its "hand from the plow; like Dinah, the daughter of Jacob", for she craves "the ornament of strangers" (Alanus ab Insulis 1855, col. 190d)[30]; Thomas of Perseigne, or Thomas Cisterciensis, known for writing another commentary on the Song of Songs, wrote that death entered the world through the windows, symbol of the eyes, "just as it is said of Dinah, Jacob's daughter" (Thomas Cisterciensis 1850, col. 192b); finally, it is interesting to consider the position of Hugh of Saint-Victor, who, displaying his famous moderation, considers that the "force" (*vi*) that impels Dinah to look outside "does not go out to corrupt herself, but, nevertheless, by going out recklessly, she also suffered the losses of chastity against her will" (Hugo de S. Victore 1854, col. 639c)[31].

Interesting is the position of Richard of St. Victor, who departs considerably from Bernardine ideas, not only in relation to the exculpatory treatment of Dinah, but also with regard to his aesthetic positions—largely indebted to Hugh's own convictions. In fact, he maintains the same perspective as his master, but his point of view is more exhaustive, detailed, and abundant, insofar as he throws a whole series of reasons to excuse or, at least, to understand and exculpate Dinah's fall. She represents "shame", but "ordered shame" (*intelligimus per Dinam nisi verecundiam, sed ordinatam*) (Richardus S. Victoris 1855a, col. 34a). In this sense, it is interesting how shame becomes an aesthetic criterion of a moral order, which is added to Dinah's own physical virtues and thus makes it possible to explain the strong attraction felt by others: "Dinah is of an admirable beauty and singular form, and that easily attracts the eyes of those who look at her with admiration, and quickly attracts the hearts of those who admire her with their love", for, indeed, "who does not know how the modesty of shame makes men both commendable and loved by all others? [. . .]. Emor is a witness to this matter, the son of Shechem, who was united to her with such ardent love that he would rather have all her males circumcised without delay than not have her" (Richardus S. Victoris 1855a, col. 36b-c)[32]. On this basis, Richard considers Dinah's beauty to be captivating for all of us (*captivamur*), and, far from thinking of it as an occasion of downfall, he sees it as an ingredient that deepens her beauty in a moral, behavioral root, rather than only physical. In fact, external beauty is increased by shame itself:

> How else to explain the fact that we always embrace shy men with more affection than others, but that, while we marvel in them at the modesty of shyness and the grace of modesty, we are somehow attracted by the beauty of Dinah and captivated by the grandeur of her loveliness in her love? Oh, how singular is the beauty of this Dinah! (Richardus S. Victoris 1855a, col. 36b-c)[33]

Richard, like St. Bernard, also locates the occasion of downfall in Dinah's departure to the outside: "the integrity", he says, "that she might have been able to maintain inside, she loses it when she leaves". However, there is an elementary difference: for him, that departure does not take place according to an interest in the beauty of the other women, but to an edifying motive. The cause that has forced her to leave her innermost places and wander outward is the need to verify, in others, the presence of her own weak-

nesses: ashamed of herself, she goes outward with the purpose of learning about human condition. Hence, she looks "around her with curiosity at the shapes of women" and discovers "that sometimes they are very beautiful and sometimes they are less beautiful" (Richardus S. Victoris 1855a, col. 38a-b)[34]. Vainglory strikes her every time that, on the basis of this innate shame, she nevertheless receives the flattery of others, the praise, and, consequently, she then suffers consequences of her own corruption . . . but by a "kind of violence rather than by will, and resists as much as she can with the flattery of a perverse pleasure" (Richardus S. Victoris 1855a, col. 37d)[35]:

> For as the beauty of shame is praised, praised and loved by almost all, Dinah is going out and abandoning her intimates, and soon forgetting the memory of her weakness, which had accustomed her to humiliate, she suddenly receives the praises of men, and while they soften her with favors, they corrupt her. [. . .], what do you think is the cause that has compelled her to leave her innermost recesses and wander abroad, but that we are often too ashamed of our weaknesses, so that perhaps others feel the same weaknesses in themselves, or at least our allies? So it happens that we begin to look more curiously at the affairs of others, now to look frequently around us at their faces, now at their gestures and the attitude of their whole body, ready to learn their secrets from the reports of others. (Richardus S. Victoris 1855a, col. 37c–38a)[36]

The difference between both authors, Richard and St. Bernard, consists in the figure chosen to speak about shame as a moral virtue: for the former, shame, when it is ordered, is represented by Dinah; hence, being beautiful, she is even more so. On the contrary, St. Bernard considers that shame is more appropriate for the Virgin Mary, not Dinah. Shame makes her even more pleasing in the eyes of God, as can be read in the *Homilies in Praise of the Virgin Mary* (*Sermones in laudibus Virginis Mariae*): "because the Virgin is shy, simple, shameful by nature" (Bernardus Claraevallensis 1854g, col. 57c)[37].

With the exception of Richard and the School of St. Victor, the general idea treats the figure of Dinah as the counterpoint of a soul whose appetites are ordered according to its own divine nature. For St. Bernard, it is obvious that Dinah shows a series of gestures and actions contrary to humility, motivated by curiosity, and always centered on the position of the one who "looks outside". This subject leads to the question of what could be the motive that drives such a gaze, and since it is a gaze centered on matter—the shapes of other women—it is interpreted, then, that the driving force is material delight, ephemeral and subject to corruption and loss of self. St. Bernard does not deny, therefore, the aesthetic power of matter, but its correlative influence on the sensibility to divert attention from oneself. This approach implies a condemnation of curiosity at the same time as a rejection of material beauty, especially when compared to the beauty of the soul.

4. Dinah's Counterpoint: Mary's Transparent Beauty

The *Homilies in Praise of the Virgin Mary* (*Sermones in laudibus Virginis Mariae*) were probably written by St. Bernard around 1119–1120 (McGuire 2011, p. 32; Holdsworth 1994, pp. 36–39), that is, immediately after the writing of the treatise *On the degrees of humility and pride*. It is understandable, consequently, that they share the same perspective on the value of humility. These are four texts belonging to the genre of the homily since, in Leclerq's terms, the subject is not entirely free, but rather "the explanation of a biblical passage", "verse by verse" (Leclerq 1965, p. 314). It is not, therefore, a treatise or reflection on beauty, much less on the material beauty of Mary—which, we must remember, would imply on the part of St. Bernard a clumsy affirmation. However, there are sufficient propositions that point to a consideration of beauty in psychological terms, that is, in terms of a beautiful soul, which find their highest expression in the figure of Mary. In synthesis, Mary's beauty, as opposed to Dinah's, is based on the humility with which she accepts the task of her universal Motherhood.

The setting chosen by St. Bernard is that of the Annunciation. The main theme around which the four homilies revolve is the motif of the humility with which Mary (1) receives the Archangel Gabriel, keeping her head fixed on the ground, as can be seen in the most common iconographic types as a sign of humility and obedience (Salvador 2015); (2) welcomes the news; and (3) accepts her destiny. Our Lady is indeed "holy", "simple", and "devout" (Bernardus Claraevallensis 1854g, col. 59c)[38]. What is interesting is the way in which the Abbot of Clairvaux links one dimension with the other and establishes, in practice, his aesthetic theory of humility . . . or his moral theory of aesthetics based on the Marian example: "This is a beautiful (*pulchra*) combination of virginity and humility. God is very pleased with this soul, in which humility exalts virginity, and virginity adorns humility" (Bernardus Claraevallensis 1854g, col. 58d)[39]. Humility again becomes the pillar of discharge of all appreciable conduct, so that the Virgin Mary is thus insinuated as the perfect example in the exercise of two virtues, one of which, virginity, is commendable (*laudabilis*) and advised (*consulitur*), while the other, however, is indispensable (*necessaria*) and prescribed (*praecipitur*) (Bernardus Claraevallensis 1854g, col. 59a)[40].

The beauty of the Virgin was not a taboo subject. On the contrary, it is a theme with strong patristic roots that can be traced, with particular intensity, in the texts of Ephrem the Syrian (ca. 306–373), although it is true that his "insistence" is centered, above all, on her "spiritual beauty and holiness, and on her freedom from any stain of sin" (Gambero [1991] 1999, p. 110). In this way, St. Bernard describes the Virgin as "adorned with the gems of the virtues" (Bernardus Claraevallensis 1854g, col. 62a)[41]. It is not the first time that he uses this metaphor to extol certain virtues: for example, he refers to the "gem of wisdom" (*gemma sapientiae*) (Bernardus Claraevallensis 1854h, cols. 814a)[42] or the "gem of shame" (*gemma pudoris*) (Bernardus Claraevallensis 1854d, col. 258d)[43]. It is interesting to see how the allegorical sense prevails over the purely aesthetic value of the gems. To appreciate the specific value enjoyed by these comparisons, it is necessary to recall the criticism that St. Bernard, around 1122 (McGuire 2011, p. 34; Holdsworth 1994, pp. 48–52), carried out in his *Apologia to Abbot William* (*Apologia ad Guillelmum abbatem*) about the use of precious stones, gold, and silver in conventual spaces.

The target of his criticism was the prominent visual culture of excess that, emanating from Cluny, seemed to spread little by little to the rest of the Benedictine monasteries. Therefore, as opposed to the usual criterion of Ovidian origin, whereby the artistic result was exalted for its superiority to the material, St. Bernard denounced a loss of the simple and plain nature of everyday things. In the words of Conrad Rudolf, "not only has the material surpassed the craftsmanship, it has surpassed nature itself" (Rudolf 1990, p. 60). St. Bernard's tropological use of precious stones thus reinforces the importance of inner as opposed to outer beauty: Mary's jewels are not exterior, they are interior. Mary's beauty is not essentially exterior, but only and fundamentally interior.

The beauty of Mary, however, does not end in a collection of metaphors, more or less elaborated, more or less articulated in an aesthetic discourse on spiritual beauty. Nor does it exhaust itself in revealing a certain aesthetic taste for precious stones. She is beautiful in two ways, "resplendent with the beauty of her mind and body alike, renowned for her appearance and beauty in the heavenly places" (Bernardus Claraevallensis 1854g, col. 62a)[44]. This is not indicative that both beauties walk separately, but rather that they are united under a hierarchical principle, I would say, of cause and effect. In reality, Mary's beauty, entirely dependent on her soul, is transparent, to the point that her own body receives such beauty and shines outwardly. This idea, which seems to breathe the same atmosphere of Neoplatonic theory of the period[45], is founded, again, in the *Sermons on the Song of the Songs*, which St. Bernard would begin to draft—and left unfinished before his death—about fifteen years after composing his treatise on humility and his homilies on the Virgin (Casey 1988, p. 13; McGuire 2011, p. 45). The final thesis of this whole approach is that withdrawal into the interior is the condition of possibility that anticipates the triumphant appearance of exterior beauty:

> When the love of this beauty has fully filled the most intimate parts of the heart, it must go beyond the doors and not be like a lamp lit under a bushel basket, but rather like a lamp that shines in a dark place and does not know how to hide itself. The body, mirror of the soul, receives this resplendent light that gives off brilliant rays, and diffuses it through the limbs and senses until every act, speech, appearance, movement and smile (if there is), take on splendour, as well as seriousness and complete decorum. When the movement, gesture and use of these and all the other members of the body are serious, pure, modest, devoid of all insolence and lewdness, foreign to weakness and indolence, but adjusted to the convenience and dictated by piety, the beauty of the soul will be patent, as long as the heart does not hide any duplicity. [. . .]. Happy is the soul clothed with this chaste beauty, with this mantle of celestial innocence, which enables it to claim a glorious conformity, not with the world, but with the Word, of whom it is said to be the radiance of eternal life (W. 7:26), the radiance and figure of the divine substance (Hebr. 1:3). (Bernardus Claraevallensis 1854c, col. 1193c–1193d)[46]

It is evident, therefore, that no description of Virgin Mary's charms is necessary, since her *interior* moral beauty anticipates her *exterior* physical beauty, which is only a reflection of the first. Conversely, in other words, there is no need for any exterior beauty, since it is the interior beauty that imposes itself on matter and shines, with the strength of the virtues, in the territory of the sensible appearance, when this latter is detached from matter[47].

5. Conclusions and a Short Epilogue on Adso, Ubertino and the Sculpture of the Virgin

As mentioned before, Virgin Mary's beauty was not a taboo subject in medieval aesthetic thought. It is evident, however, that there is a tension between the renunciation of Mary's material beauty—or, at least, of Her aesthetic appreciation—and the exaltation of Her moral beauty—which implies, in short, the development of a psychological or, if one prefers, spiritual aesthetic. In this sense, we consider that St. Bernard's solution is undoubtedly of interest. In his treatise, he establishes a theory of humility as the moral basis from which to appreciate Mary's beauty, a beauty that, consequently, is translucent, that is transparent in her body: Mary's beauty is, in reality, the perceptible effect of a suprasensible disposition.

It is obvious, therefore, that the role of matter in the aesthetic appreciation of Mary's body, under St. Bernard's consideration, is minimal, insofar as it only plays the role of vehicle of perceptual qualities, which are the ones that are properly considered. Under this consideration is placed the historical distinction between the "veneration" (*veneration*) of images, where they play a mediating role between the visible and the suprasensible, and their "adoration" (*adoratio*), where both the subject and its image are considered objects of worship and, therefore, subjects of idolatry. The liberation of the image from its specifically material rootedness, as something effectively emanating from its superior moral condition—linked, in the Marian case, to the beauty of Her soul—neutralizes the status of the images as effectively material and thus eliminates the idolatrous risks in clear harmony with the theological results of the Synod of Paris of 825, according to which such distinctions were established[48].

In this sense, the appreciation of Her material beauty would not make sense if it is not done expressly taking into account her condition as an immaterial result. If this is so, man's attention to devotional representations of Mary should attend not so much to the concrete materiality of figures, but rather to their appearance, detached from those pleasures provided only by direct contact with matter. This perspective situates the experience, in Hegel's terms, "in the middle between immediate sensuousness and ideal thought" (Hegel [1835] 1975, p. 38). Focusing attention on the material representation of Mary in this way implies paying attention to that which, "despite its sensuousness, is *no longer* a purely material existence either" [. . .]; on the contrary, the sensuous in the work of art

is something ideal, but which, not being ideal as thought is ideal, is still at the same time there externally as a thing" (Hegel [1835] 1975, p. 38).

Cistercian aesthetic thought, which finds in St. Bernard one of its best representatives, differs greatly from other thinkers of his time, especially Hugh and Richard of Saint-Victor. The senses, which for the latter are also windows of access to the visible world from which to deploy approaches to the invisible—as can be seen in Hugh's own positions in the *De arca Noe morali* (Hugo de S. Victore 1854)—pose a notable risk of moral and spiritual falling for St. Bernard. The same question arises in Richard's thought on the power of the visible to reach the invisible, where sensorial beauty plays an indisputable role (e.g., Richardus S. Victoris 1855b, col. 153c). This difference can also be seen in aesthetic questions: the resistance of the Cistercian to consider Mary's sensitive beauty as an aesthetic element of appreciation is only possible if it depends heteronomously on a prior moral condition that anticipates that beauty as a sort of emanation, while in the Victorian framework it could be contemplated, according to the texts, as another element of Mariological dignity, but in any case autonomous (Kovach 1974; Pradier 2022).

Let us now return to the meeting between Adso and Ubertino. We had left them in front of an image of the Virgin, probably carved following the model that Amiens and other similar types marked during that period. Ubertino explained to Adso that feminine beauty should be sublimated and, consequently, also that of the Virgin herself. When Ubertino "pointed to the Virgin's slender bust", he then quotes the words of another Cistercian scholar, Gilbert of Hoyt, author also of some *Sermones in Cantica Canticum Salomonis*. He writes there the famous sentence: "For beautiful breasts are those that protrude a little and swell moderately, not floating freely, but gently contained, contained but not depressed" (Gillebertus de Hoilandia 1854, cols. 163a-b).

Certainly striking is Gilbert's appreciation, which, however, always responds to the same Bernardine criterion: it is possible to appreciate beauty without the apparent physical and material necessity of its abuse. Elsewhere Umberto Eco writes that "only nowadays, perhaps, we can see that his gravity is suffused with a certain malice" (Eco [1959] 1986, p. 11). Both St. Bernard and Gilbert point to the possibility of appreciating things when there is nothing else to do—remember, in this regard, the previous requirement of withdrawing into the interior—in their purely sensory condition, separated from their material prison, and rejoicing in the encounter with the beautiful exterior because it constitutes a precious occasion for extolling the interior beauty, which is undoubtedly superior. It is obvious that Ubertino is testing poor Adso. This reminds us that beauty, in medieval thought, was always a limit experience, in need of a suprasensible meaning, in order to become an occasion of salvation.

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Notes

[1] *Apol. ad Guil.* XII, 28: *Nos vero qui iam de populo eximus, qui mundi quaeque pretiosa ac speciosa pro Christo reliquimus, qui omnia pulchre lucentia, canon mulcentia, suave olentia, dulce sapientia, tactu placentia, cuncta denique oblectamente corporea arbitrari sumus ut stercora,* [. . .].

[2] *Adm.* XXXIII: *Unde, cum ex dilectione decoris domus Dei aliquando multicolor, gemmarum speciositas ab exintrinsecis me curis devocaret, sanctarum etiam diversitatem virtutum, de materialibus ad immaterialia transferendo, honesta meditatio insistere persuaderet, videor videre me quasi sub aliqua extranea orbis terrarum plaga, quae nec tota sit in terrarum faece nec tota in coeli puritate, demorari, ab hac etiam inferiori ad illam superiorem anagogico more Deo donante posse transferri.*

[3] *De gradibus humilitatis et superbiae tractatus* I, 2: *Humilitatis vero talis potest esse definitio: humilitas est virtus, qua homo erissima sui cognitione sibi ipse vilescit.*

[4] *Regula* VII: *Septimus humilitatis gradus est, si omnibus se inferiorem et viliorem, non solum sua lingua pronuntiet, sed etiam intimo cordis credat affectu, humilians se, et dicens cum Propheta: Ego autem sum vermis, et non homo; opprobrium hominum et abjectio plebis (Psal. XXI); exaltatus sum, et humiliatus, et confusus (Psal. LXXXVII). Et item: Bonum mihi, quod humiliasti me, ut discam mandata tua (Psal. CXVIII).*

[5] *De gradibus humilitatis et superbiae tractatus* I, 2: *Haec autem convenit his, qui ascensionibus in corde suo dispositis, de virtute in virtutem, id est de gradu in gradum proficiunt, donec ad culmen humilitatis perveniant, in quo velut in Sion, id est in speculatione, positi, veritatem prospiciant.*

[6] Gen. 28:12–15: "Then he had a dream: a stairway rested on the ground, with its top reaching to the heavens; and God's messengers were going up and down on it. And there was the Lord standing beside him and saying: 'I, the Lord, am the God of your forefather Abraham and the God of Isaac; the land on which you are lying I will give to you and your descendants. These shall be as plentiful as the dust of the earth, and through them you shall spread out east and west, north and south. In you and your descendants all the nations of the earth shall find blessing. Know that I am with you; I will protect you wherever you go, and bring you back to this land. I will never leave you until I have done what I promised you'."For English translations of biblical texts, we use the New American Bible Revised Edition (NABRE); for excerpts from St. Jerome's *Vulgate* (Hyeronimus Stridonensis 1845a, 1845b), translations are mine.

[7] *Epistola* CCLIV. *Ad Abbatem Guarinum Alpensem. Laudat in sene abbate studium reformandi Ordinis. Temporis brevitatem non obsistere studio perfectionis. In vita espirituali semper proficiendum, nunquam standum*, 5: *Vidit scalam Jacob, et in scala angelos, ubi nullus residens, nullus subsistens apparuit; sed vel ascendere, vel descendere videbantur universi (Gen. XXVIII, 12): quatenus palam daretur intelligi, inter profectum et defectum in hoc statu mortalis vitae nihil medium inveniri; sed quomodo ipsum corpus nostrum continue aut crescere constat, aut decrescere, sic necesse sit et spiritum aut proficere semper, aut deficere.*

[8] *Epistola* XCI. *Ad Abbates sucessione congregatos. Abbates excitat ad strenue curandum negotium, cujus causa convenerunt. Studium profectus serio commendat: nil morandum, si tepidi quidam et dissoluti forsan detrectent et obmurmurent, 3: Vidit Jacob in scala Angelos ascendentes et descendentes:* [. . .]. *Aut ascendas necesse est, aut descendas: si attentas stare, ruas necesse est.*

[9] *De gradibus humilitatis et superbiae tractatus* I, 1: *[. . .] non numerandos, sed ascendendos.*

[10] On the concept of curiositas in medieval thought, see (Labhardt 1960; Newhauser 1987; Krüger 2002; Bruce 2019).

[11] *De consideratione III*, 6.

[12] Adamus Scotus, *De ordine habitu et professione canonicorum ordinis Paremonstratensis* II, 4: "And so reprobate fall down, go out, and rise up. Now the cause of these three are: pleasure, curiosity and vanity; these three things. For pleasure makes them prostrate, curiosity makes them go out, vanity sets them upright. And pleasure belongs to the lust of the flesh; curiosity to the lust of the eyes; vanity to the pride of life" (*Itaque reprobi prosternuntur, egrediuntur, eriguntur. Horum autem trium causa sunt: voluptas, curiositas, vanitas; tria haec. Nam voluptas prostratos, curiositas egressos, vanitas reddit erectos. Et ad concupiscentiam carnis pertinet voluptas; curiositas ad concupiscentiam oculorum; vanitas ad superbiam vitae*).

[13] *De divinis nominibus* IV, 9: "In this circular motion a non-erring motion is given to the soul which returns and gathers the soul from the many which are outside it. It is first returned into itself and then, as it comes to be of one form, it is singly united with its unified powers; in this way it is conducted to the beautiful and good beyond all beings: the one and the same, without beginning and end" ([. . .] ἡ ἑνοειδὴς συνέλιξις ὥσπερ ἔν τινι κύκλῳ τὸ ἁπλανὲς αὐτῇ δωρουμένη καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν πολλῶν τῶν ἔξωθεν αὐτὴν ἐπιστρέφουσα καὶ συνάγουσα πρῶτον εἰς ἑαυτήν, εἶτα ὡς ἑνοειδῆ γενομένην ἑνοῦσα ταῖς ἑνιαίως ἡνωμέναις δυνάμεσι καὶ οὕτως ἐπὶ τὸ καλὸν καὶ ἀγαθὸν χειραγωγοῦσα τὸ ὑπὲρ πάντα τὰ ὄντα καὶ ἓν καὶ ταὐτὸν καὶ ἄναρχον καὶ ἀτελεύτητον).

This idea is taken (Rico Pavés 2001, p. 427) from Plotinus (1939, p. 330; *Enn.* VI, 9, 8, 3–5; 19), for whom, "except when there is a kind of break in it," the "natural movement" of the soul is "in a circle around something, something not external but a center, and the center is that from which the circle derives" (ἡ δὲ κατὰ φύσιν κίνησις οἵα ἡ ἐν κύκλῳ περὶ τι οὐκ ἔξω, ἀλλὰ περὶ κέντρον, τὸ δὲ κέντρον ἀφ'οὗ ὁ κύκλος,[. . .]).

[14] *De vera religione liber unus* XXIX, 72: "Do not go abroad. Return within your self. In the inward man dwells truth. If you find that you are by nature mutable, transcend yourself. But remember in doing so that you must also transcend yourself even as a reasoning soul. Make for the place where the light of reason is kindled. What does every good rea- soner attain but truth? And yet truth is not reached by reasoning, but is itself the goal of all who reason. There is an agreeableness than which there can be no greater. Agree, then, with it. Confess that you are not as it is. It has to do no seeking, but you reach it by seeking, not in space, but by a disposition of mind, so that the inward man may agree with the indwelling truth in a pleasure that is not low and carnal but supremely spiritual" *(Noli foras ire, in teipsum redi; in interiore homine habitat veritas; et si tuam naturam mutabilem inveneris, transcende et teipsum. Sed memento cum te trascendis, ratiocinantem animam te transcendere. Illuc ergo tende, unde ipsum lumen rationis*

accenditur. Quo enim pervenit omnis bonus ratiocinator, nisi ad veritatem? Cum ad seipsam veritas non utique ratiocinando perveniat, sed quod ratiocinantes appetunt, ip a sit. Vide ibi convenientiam qua superior esse non possit, et ipse conveni cum ea. Confitere te non esse quod ipsa est: siquidem se ipsa non quaerit; tu autem ad ipsam quaerendo venisti, non locorum spatio, sed mentis affectu, ut ipse interior homo cum suo inhabitatore, non infima et carnali, sed summa et spirituali voluptate conveniat).

15 E*pistolae* III, 4: *Unde constamus? Ex animo et corpore. Quid horum melius? Videlicet animus. Quid laudant in corpore? Nihil aliud video quam pulchritudinem. Quid est corporis pulchritudo? Congruentia partium cum quadam coloris suavitate. Haec forma ubi vera melior, an ubi falsa? Quis dubitet ubi vera est, esse meliorem? Ubi ergo vera est? In animo scilicet. Animus igitur magis amandus est quam corpus*.

16 *De consolatione philosophiae* III, 8: [. . .] *igitur te pulchrum videri non tua natura, sed oculorum spectantium reddit infirmitas*.

17 Sermones in Cantica Canticorum XXV, 6: "No carnal beauty is comparable to it, nor a glowing and rosy complexion; nor a healthy face soon worn by the years; nor a valuable dress exposed to the passage of time; nor the beauty of gold or the splendor of precious stones or similar things, which have a common destiny: corruption" (*Non comparabitur ei quantalibet pulchritudo carnis, non cutis utique nitida et arsura, non facies colorata vicina putredini, non vestis pretiosa obnoxia vetustati, non auri species, splendorve gemmarum, seu quaeque talia, quae omnia sunt ad corruptionem*).

18 *De Allegoriae sacrae Scripturae, Ex veteri testamento*, 51: *Dina, filia Jacob, Synagogam, vel animam, significat: quam in exterioribus saeculi curis repertam Sichem princeps terrae opprimit, id est, diabolus vitio concupiscentiae carnalis corrumpit*.

19 *De gradibus humilitatis et superbiae tractatus* X, 28: *[. . .] quam, dum a sui circumspectione torpescit incuria sui, curiosam in alios facit. Quia enim seipsam ignorat, foras mittitur, ut haedos pascat. Haedos quippe, qui peccatum significant, recte oculos auresque appellaverim, qoniam sicut mors per peccatum in orben, sic per has fenestras intrat ad mentem*.

20 Gn. 34:1: *Egressa est autem Dina, filia Liae, ut videret mulieres regionis illius* (Hyeronimus Stridonensis 1845a, col. 208b).

21 *De gradibus humilitatis et superbiae tractatus* X, 29: *O Dina, quid necesse est ut videas mulieres alienigenas? Qua necessitate? qua utilitate? An sola curiositate?*

22 *De gradibus humilitatis et superbiae tractatus* X, 29: *Etsi tu otiose vides, sed non otiose videris. Tu curiose spectas, sed curiosius spectaris. Quis crederet tunc illam tuam curiosam otiositatem, vel otiosam curiositatem, fore post sic non otiosam, sed tibi, tuis, hostibusque tam perniciosam?*

23 Song of Sg. 1:7: *Si ignoras te o pulchra inter mulieres egredere et abi post vestigia gregum et pasce haedos tuos iuxta tabernacula pastorum*.

24 Song of Sg. 1:3: *Trahe me post te curremus introduxit me rex in cellaria sua exultabimus et laetabimur in te memores uberum tuorum super vinum recti diligunt te*; 3:4: *paululum cum pertransissem eos inveni quem diligit anima mea tenui eum nec dimittam donec introducam illum in domum matris meae et in cubiculum genetricis meae*.

25 *De gradibus humilitatis et superbiae tractatus* X, 28: *Quia enim seipsam ignorat, foras mittitur, ut haedos pascat*.

26 On this subject, *Epistola CXXX Ad Pisanos*: "Otherwise, if you do not know yourself, O fair one among the cities, you will go out after the flocks of your comforters to graze your goatlings" (*Alioquin si ignoras te, o pulchra inter civitates, egredieris post greges soladium tuorum pascere haedos tuos*); Sermones in Cantica Canticorum XXXV, 3: "[. . .] and go after the flocks of your fellows, and so your little goats they will be able to graze. In which, as it seems to me, he reminds us of something important. What is that? Alas! That an excellent creature, already once made of the herd, and now rushing miserably into the worse, is not at least allowed to remain among the herds, but is ordered to go away" (*et abi post greges sodalium tuorum, et pasce haedos tuos. In quo, ut mihi videtur, magnae cujusdam rei nos admonet. Quid istud? Heu! quod egregia creatura, jam olim facta de grege, et nunc in pejus miserabiliter proruens, non saltem inter greges remanere permittitur, sed post abire jubetur*).

27 *De gradibus humilitatis et superbiae tractatus* X, 29: *Dina namque dum ad pascendos haedos egreditur, ipsa patri, et sua sibi virginitas rapitur*.

28 Prov. 4:23 (Hyeronimus Stridonensis 1845b, col. 1247b).

29 De gradibus humilitatis et superbiae tractatus X, 28: Haedos quippe, qui peccatum significant, recte oculos auresque appellaverim: quoniam sicut mors per peccatum in orbem, sic per has fenestras intrat ad mentem. In his ergo pascendis se occupat curiosus, dum scire non curat qualem se reliquerit intus. Et vere si te vigilanter, homo, attendas, mirum est si ad aliud unquam intendas. Audi, curiose, Salomonem; audi, stulte, Sapientem. Omni custodia, inquit, custodi cor tuum: ut omnes videlicet sensus tui vigilent ad id, unde vita procedit, custodiendum. Quo enim a te, o curiose, recedis? Cui te interim committis? Utquid audes oculos levare ad coelum, qui peccasti in coelum? Terram intuere, ut cognoscas teipsum. Ipsa te tibi repraesentabit, quia terra es, et in terram ibis.
Again in Sermones in Cantica Canticorum XXXV, 2 (Bernardus Claraevallensis 1854c, 963b): "For goatlings—which signify sin, and are to be placed in judgment on the left side—are the wandering and malicious senses of the body, through which sin, like death through windows, entered into the soul" (Haedos quippe—qui peccatum significant, et in judicio collocandi sunt a sinistris—dicit vagos et petulantes corporis sensus, per quos peccatum, tanquam mors per fenestras, intravit ad animam).

30 Alanus ab Insulis, *De arte predictatoria* XLIII: "The cloistered man, therefore, who longs to have his own, looks back like Lot's wife, turns his hand away from the plow, while Dinah, Jacob's daughter, desires the adornment of strangers) (*Claustralis ergo qui proprium habere desiderat, retro respicit cum uxore Loth, manum ab aratro retrahit, cum Dina filia Jacob, ornatum alienigenarum appetit*).

31 *De arca Noe morali* V: *Quae vi opprimitur patet quod non ideo exit ut corrumpatur, sed tamen quia temere exiit, pudicitiae suae damna etiam invita sustinuit*.

[32] Benjamin Minor XLIX: Est enim Dina admirandae pulchritudinis et formae singularis, et quae intuentium oculos in sui admirationem facile trahat, et admirantium animos cito sua dilectione alliciat. Quis enim ignorat quomodo modestia verecundiae homines omnibus et commendabiles reddat, et amabiles efficiat?

[33] *Benjamin Minor* XLIX: *Unde namque est quod verecundos homines fere semper caeteris charius amplectimur, 196.0036C | nisi quod, in eis dum verecundiae modestiam modestiaeque gratiam miramur, Dinae quodammodo pulchritudine allicimur, et pulchritudinis suae magnitudine in ejus amorem captivamur? O quam singularis hujus Dinae pulchritudo*!

[34] *Benjamin Minor* LI: *Dum ergo Dina mulierum formas curiose circumspicit, alias multum, alias minus pulchras nimirum invenit*.

[35] *Benjamin Minor* LI: *Verumtamen tunc Dina corruptionis suae damna violentia quadam potius quam voluntate patitur, cum blandienti pravae delectationi quantum potest reluctatur*.

[36] *Benjamin Minor* LI: *Nam quoniam verecundiae venustas ab omnibus fere commendatur, laudatur, amatur, Dinam egredientem et intima sua deserentem, et quae eam humiliare consueverat infirmitatis suae memoriam cito obliviscentem, subito hominum laudes excipiunt, et eam, dum favoribus demulcent, corrumpunt*. [. . .]. *Sed quid putas causae accidit quae eam sua intima deserere, et ad exteriora vagari compulit, nisi quod saepe dum infirma nostra nimis erubescimus, unde forte alii easdem infirmitates in se sentiant, mirari incipimus, et videtur nobis quoddam solatii genus invenisse, si deprehendamus nos in nostra saltem dejectione vel socios habere? Inde fit ut incipiamus aliorum studia curiosius quaerere, nunc vultum, nunc gestum, totiusque corporis habitum frequenter circumspicere, eorum occulta ex aliorum relatu libenter addiscere*.

[37] *De laudibus Virginis Matris I*, 2: [. . .] *quia virginem natura pavidam, simplicem, verecundam* [. . .].

[38] *De laudibus Virginis Matris* I, 6: *Virgo utique sancta, virgo sobria, virgo devota*.

[39] *De laudibus Virginis Matris* I, 5: *Pulchra permistio virginitatis et humilitatis: nec mediocriter placet Deo illa anima, in qua et humilitas commendat virginitatem, et virginitas exornat humilitatem*.

[40] *De laudibus Virginis Matris* I, 5: *Laudabilis virtus virginitas, sed magis necessaria humilitas. Illa consulitur, ista praecipitur. Ad illam invitaris, ad istam cogeris*.

[41] *De laudibus Virginis Matris* II, 2: *His nimirum Virgo regia gemmis ornata virtutum*, [. . .].

[42] *De moribus et officio episcoporum II*, 4.

[43] *Epistola CXIII. Ad Sophiam virginem*, 5.

[44] *De laudibus Virginis Matris* II,2: [. . .] *geminoque mentis pariter et corporis decore praefulgida, specie sua et pulchritudine sua in caelestibus cognita*, [. . .].

[45] Even if the presence of certain typically Neoplatonic topics is evident, integrated in general in the thought of the twelfth century—some even speak of the effective presence of a "platonising theology" (Casey 2011, p. 91)—, we cannot confirm that St. Bernard drew his own conclusions from the translations of Greek texts that populated the intellectual panorama of the twelfth century.

[46] *Sermones in Cantica Canticorum LXXXV*, 11: *Cum autem decoris hujus charitas abundantius intima cordis repleverit, prodeat foras necesse est, tanquam lucerna latens sub modio, imo lux in tenebris lucens, latere nescia. Porro effulgentem, et veluti quibusdam suis radiis erumpentem, mentis simulacrum corpus excipit, et diffundit per membra et sensus, quatenus omnis inde reluceat actio, sermo, aspectus, incessus, risus (si tamen risus) mistus gravitate, et plenus honesti. Horum et al.iorum profecto artuum sensuumque motus, gestus et usus, cum apparuerit serius, purus, modestus, totius expers insolentiae atque lasciviae, tum levitatis, tum ignaviae alienus, aequitati autem accommodus, pietati officiosus; pulchritudo animae palam erit, si tamen non sit in spiritu ejus dolus. [. . .]. Beata mens, quae hoc se induit castimoniae decus, et quemdam veluti coelestis innocentiae candidatum, per quem sibi vindicet gloriosam conformitatem, non mundi, sed Verbi, de quo legitur, quod sit candor vitae aeternae; splendor et figura substantiae Dei*.

[47] On this question, I greatly appreciate suggestions made by one of the blind reviewers for this paper, who reminds that "modesty" or "shyness" (*pudor*), parallel to the issue of "shame" (*verecundia*), are understood as moral conditions powerful enough to generate some very evident beautiful aesthetic effects, also in the Virgin's case. He quotes, in this regard, a text by Baldwin of Ford (*ca.* 1125–1192), which I translate here and thus indicate a possible research line: "The grace of this charm is adorned by the grace of color, both white and red. The color is shameful. There is then a double modesty, the chaste modesty, and the shameful modesty. Chastity and shame are the shining lily and the red rose. Chastity affects the face with its whiteness, shame floods the cheeks with its blush. Shame is the guardian of chastity, and charm is equally its ornament" (*Tractatus VII. De Salutatione Angelica: Gratiam hujus venustatis adornat gratia coloris, candoris pariter et ruboris. Color pudor est. Est nutem geminus pudor, pudor pudicus, et pudor verecundus. Pudicitia et verecundia lilium candens et rosa rubens. Pudicitia suo candore faciem afficit, verecundia suo rubore genas perfundit. Verecundia custos est pudicitiae, et decus pariter et ornamentum ejus*) (Balduinus Cantuarensis 1855, col. 471b-c).

[48] It should be remembered that this was not the only council that had taken place in Gallic territories on the subject of images. Already in 767, under the reign of Pipin, a synod on the same subject had been convoked in the town of Gentilly (Thümmel 1999).

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