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English 551

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Annotated Bibliography: *works cited*

Real Women are Ugly: The Relationship Between Beauty, Ugliness, and Sovereignty in *The Wedding of Syr Gawen and Dame Ragnell for Helpyng of Kyng Arthoure, Sir Launfal, and Pearl*

Brewer, D.S. "The Ideal of Feminine Beauty in Medieval Literature, Especially 'Harley Lyrics', Chaucer, and Some Elizabethans." *Modern Language Review* 1 (1955): 257-69.

This article traces the occurrence of feminine beauty beginning in classical Greek and Latin literature and then mainly focusing on descriptions of beauty in medieval literature. Early in the article the author establishes the prototype for the description of a beautiful woman from a poem by Maximian in the sixth century and then follows the same description through medieval literature. The author gives special attention to the Harley Lyrics and Chaucer. Some of the conclusions reached include the idea that physical beauty is linked with moral beauty, that the medieval poet needed only to touch on a primary detail or two in order to suggest the entire beauty, and that the beautiful, medieval heroine was an interesting mixture of a woman who was superior to her worshippers but also a being who, at the same time, needed protection and was inferior to her male counterpart.

Curry, Walter Clyde. *The Middle English Ideal of Personal Beauty; as Found in the Metrical Romances, Chronicles, and the Legends of the XIII, XIV, and XV Centuries*. Baltimore: J.H. Furst, 1916.

Curry catalogues each physical attribute of beautiful men and women in Middle English literature listing specific references in the literature of descriptions of characters' beautiful hair, eyes, faces, mouths, skin, etc. Each physical characteristic has its own chapter with applicable excerpts from poems. When applicable, he writes of the characteristics of an ugly countenance as well by contrasting it with the accepted form of the beautiful, again referring to specific lines in Middle English literature.

Davis, Rebecca A. "More Evidence for Intertextuality and Humorous Intent in *The Wedding of Syr Gawen and Dame Ragnell*." *The Chaucer Review* 35.4 (2001): 430-9.

Rebecca Davis draws parallels between the poet of *The Wedding* and Chaucer based on the narrative devices that they both use in regards to humor and narrators who are guilty of inaccurate descriptive passages. She refers mainly to Chaucer's *Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale* when referring to intertextuality in *The Wedding* but mentions other poets and pieces of literature throughout the article. The author insists that *The Wedding*-poet creates a poem that

would have been funny to a medieval audience citing the first descriptive passage of Dame Ragnell and her behavior at the wedding feast as chief supporting arguments. Davis also adds that the name Ragnell appears in *Patience* as the name of a devil and thus is further evidence that a medieval audience would have recognized the name and had reason to laugh at Gawain agreeing to marry her. Through an intertextuality study she seeks to prove that *The Weddyng* would have been a largely humorous poem to a medieval audience.

Donnelly, Colleen. "Aristocratic Veneer and the Substance of Verbal Bonds in *The Weddyng of Sir Gawen and Dame Ragnell* and *Gamelyn*." *Studies in Philology* 94.3 (1997): 321-43.

The importance of verbal bonds and keeping one's word constitute the essence of nobility according to Colleen Donnelly. Her main claim is that both *The Weddyng* and *Gamelyn* use characters who are social pariahs to expose the triviality and superficiality of aristocratic values. These characters, through the poets' use of satire and humor, show that the truly noble characteristic of chivalry and aristocratic life is the importance of verbal bonds rather than superficial qualities such as physical appearance and table manners parodied in the poems.

Eco, Umberto. *Art and Beauty in the Middle Ages*. Trans. Hugh Bredin. New Haven: Yale UP, 1986.

This is a work which seeks to explore the philosophies leading up to and including the middle age aesthetics. The author's stated purpose is to how the theories contemporary to the time actually compared to the true sensibility of the culture and the actual artistic products of the time. Eco wants to find out how far aesthetic theory diverged from the truth of the age to discover the relations between theory and culture. Sections include Medieval Aesthetic Sensibility, Transcendental Beauty, The Aesthetics of Proportion, The Aesthetics of Light, Symbol and Allegory, Aesthetic Perception, The Aesthetics of the Organism, Development and Decline of the Aesthetics of the Organism, Theories of Art, and Inspiration and the Status of Art.

Forset-Grupp, Sheryl L. "A Woman Circumvents the Laws of Primogeniture in *The Weddyng of Sir Gawen and Dame Ragnell*." *Studies in Philology* 99.2 (2002): 105-22.

This article studies the situations and laws under which lands were acquired, inherited, or seized in the Middle Ages in order to arrive at a theory explaining how and why Dame Ragnell goes after the same lands which Sir Gromer Somer-Joure, her brother, attempts to regain from King Arthur in *The Weddyng*. The author concludes that according to the land laws and primogeniture, as Ragnell transforms herself from the hag into the admired beauty and obedient wife, she assures her son, Gyngolen, the very same family lands she acquires out from under her brother in her marriage to Sir Gawain by her eventual death. The author also makes some interesting feminist interpretations of Ragnell's unsightliness and what her ugly appearance allows her to accomplish within a male dominant society.

Geoffrey of Vinsauf. *Poetria Nova*. Trans. Margaret F. Nims. Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1967.

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Geoffrey of Vinsauf originally wrote his *Poetria Nova* between 1200 and 1215 in much the same style as Matthew of Vendôme's *Ars Versificatoria*. Geoffrey strove to cover principles for writing poetry for the poet-in-training, to provide model exercises in form, and criteria for the analysis of poetry as well. *Poetria Nova* is arranged in the style of a rhetorical manual first addressing invention, arrangement, expression, memory, and delivery. He also spends time on discussions of grammar. There is a passage on the art of description which lends itself to the subject of the description of female beauty in medieval literature.

Hass, Robin. "A Picture of Such Beauty in Their Minds': The Medieval Rhetoricians, Chaucer, and Evocative Effictio." *Exemplaria* 14.2 (2002): 383-422.

Robin Hass uses Michel Foucault's theory on desire as an element of discourse, Roland Barthes's discussion of textual pleasure, Teresa de Lauretis's theories on gender construction, and Laura Mulvey's ideas on the gaze as they relate to the gendered body and the sexual gaze of both the male observer within the text and the reader in medieval literature. She also calls upon Matthew of Vendôme and Geoffrey of Vinsauf and their theories on medieval description, particularly of the female body and how it relates to the male gaze and male desire. Hass claims that women's bodies are constructed as sites of desire which require a masculine gaze. She concludes that fictional rape is one consequence of this type of description of the female body in medieval literature and that rhetorical structure constructs a rape culture.

Matthew of Vendôme. *The Art of Versification*. Trans. Aubrey E. Galyon. Ames: Iowa State UP, 1980.

Matthew of Vendôme wrote his *Ars Versificatoria* in about 1175. It functioned as a sort of handbook for the writing of descriptive Latin poetry and metrical verse as well as a book that discussed poetic theory. Aubrey Galyon states that it was probably used as a text book for the classes that Matthew taught in Orléans which is also where he wrote it. The book has four sections covering writing descriptions, the elegance of diction, writing figures and tropes, and finally execution of material and correcting student work.

Specht, Henrik. "The Beautiful, the Handsome, and the Ugly: Some Aspects of the Art of Character Portrayal in Medieval Literature." *Studia Neophilologica* 56 (1984): 128-46.

This article focuses on three features of the descriptive "formal portrait" in medieval literature. Specifically, the author addresses formal descriptions of the handsome youth, the beautiful woman, and the ugly human being as they occur in the literature. He uses Matthew of Vendôme's *Ars Versificatoria* to lay the groundwork for the structure of physical descriptions. While Specht does indeed address the descriptions of the handsome youth and the beautiful woman, he spends most of his time examining the descriptions of ugliness in medieval literature. His main argument is that rather than merely denoting low moral character, ugliness was also used to denote a low social status of a character without necessarily implying low moral values.