

Ilina Jakimovska

ilina@iunona.pmf.ukim.edu.mk

THE GOOD, THE BEAUTIFUL AND THE UGLY: CRITERIA FOR EVALUATION OF CORPORAL BEAUTY IN MACEDONIAN TRADITIONAL CULTURE¹

Abstract: Combining socio-biological, anthropological and philosophical theoretic approaches with ethnographic data from the region of Macedonia, this article tries to detect the relevant criteria for evaluation of corporal beauty in the frames of Macedonian traditional culture.

Key words: body, beauty, Macedonia, oral folk tradition, socio-biology, anthropology, ethnology

*And ugliness and discord and inharmonious motion are nearly allied
to ill words and ill nature, as grace and harmony are the twin sisters
of goodness and virtue and bear their likeness.
Plato, Republic*

To tame the concept of beauty is a difficult task - it is almost as difficult as taming beauty itself. It is an intuitive, abstract and flexible notion, and it varies not only in a cultural and a historical sense, but also on the level of individual preferences. Thus, we can only speak of a *dominant* concept of what beautiful is, in a certain culture and in a certain historic period, but not about all possible variations of 'beauty', which sometimes include even the - ugly!

Since the intention of the article is to shade light upon the treatment of the body in Macedonian folk culture, the focus will be put upon detection of those parameters that are relevant for evaluating corporal beauty, their relation to other aspects of corporality (for example youth or health), as well as the poten-

¹ The article is derived from the PhD thesis titled "The body in Macedonian folk culture: regulation, education, surveillance and punishment" defended at the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology, University St. Cyril and Methodius, Skopje, Republic of Macedonia, 2008.

The Good, the Beautiful and the Ugly..

tial social consequences of being evaluated as beautiful or ugly. The dominant aesthetic preferences do not exist in a vacuum, but they are a reflection of the promoted world-view of a certain culture during a certain historical period - the promotion of an aesthetic ideal is always related to the promotion of some other (visible or non-visible) quality that has almost no connection to pure aesthetics, but penetrates the area of ethics, psychology, and even, in the most general sense, the area of the political and of politics. Thus, it is difficult to speak about the corporal and not to speak about the non-corporal aspects of beauty: in a Platonic sense what is pleasurable to the eye is the same thing that is pleasurable to the intellect and the moral sense. Or, with other words, the beautiful body is only the one that also possesses - a beautiful soul!

Is such an association of the body and the soul relevant when it comes to the aesthetic ideal of the Macedonian folk culture? Which parameters are crucial when evaluating someone as beautiful or ugly? The informants were puzzled when I asked them "How does a beautiful woman look like?" - for them beauty seemed to be something which is taken for granted and something that cannot, or even more, should not be discussed: "Well, a beautiful woman..This is self-evident. She should be beautiful from head to toe. That is a beautiful woman"² But when the question was altered to "Which woman is considered *good*?", then we got more precise answers that included the adjective "beautiful" in the wider package of features that are deemed desirable when it comes to a woman. Still, even in these statements it is not entirely clear if the ones talking about a 'beautiful' girl or woman think about her corporal characteristics, or about some other of her attributes, as for example hard-working or honest, attributes which make her 'beautiful' in the sense of 'good'. "The girl is good if: she is healthy and beautiful (so that everyone who sees her praises her), clean and hard-working (she gets up early), she is from a good family and she is honest", says Jeremija Pavlovic in his ethnographic materials dedicated to Maleshevo and its population (Pavlović 1928: 222). In this quote 'beautiful' means 'beautiful in a physical sense', but it is only one of the criteria for evaluating a girl as good, that is, desirable (as a bride or daughter in law). Filipovic's note on the ideal girl bears the same meaning: "The ideal girl is strong, with beautiful face, beautiful body, good behavior, and it is especially appreciated if she is dark-haired and from a good family".(Filipović 1939:153). The following quote also illustrates the obvious replacement of the term 'beautiful' with the term 'good' in the sense of 'honest': "If she is not engaged she cannot walk with boys, otherwise she will never get married. My girl, she is not engaged yet, if she walks down the road with a guy no one would marry her afterwards. People would say, this girl has been with a man, she

² Informant: Rada Daskalovska, maiden name Ognenovska, born 1937 in the village of Gjavato, Bitola; recorded by I.J. on 21.08.2006 in Gjavato.

is not *beautiful* (my italic). And no one wants her any more. She will stay by herself."³. The fact that this statement was given by a Macedonian with Islamic faith does not influence our point, since girl's honesty is a value of a high rank for Macedonians with Islamic, but also for Macedonians with Orthodox faith - religion, in this case, religions, through their authority can help the establishment of this value and its protection. However, the value itself does not stem from religion, but it has to do with the basic rules that govern inter-human relations in a certain social context, and those can be, but are not always, exclusively related to religion.

In the older ethnographic materials beauty, in an exclusively corporal sense, is mentioned in the context of describing physical characteristics of certain population. In absence of relevant anthropometric data, the descriptions of certain parts of the body that include expressions such as "stunning", "appropriate", and "beautiful" sound extremely abstract and subjective. However, due to the fact that those are included in articles written by researchers that come from a similar cultural context as the one that they are describing, and that those articles are targeted mainly to readers belonging to the same cultural 'niche', such a terminology does not come as a surprise - on the contrary, it confirms the thesis that the concepts related to beauty or ugliness of the body are treated as if their meaning is self-evident. The same situation, the problem of 'translation' i.e. interpretation of concepts, often applies when researchers use terms related to age, such as "child" or "old man", thinking that what it means to be a child or an old man in the language of the informants (in a qualitative, but as well quantitative - chronological sense) is the same for everyone else, including the researcher and his/her readers. However, much more than in cases related to age, the researcher should be reserved and delicate when it comes to qualifying something as beautiful or ugly in certain culture, based exclusively upon his/her own aesthetic preferences - this could not only confuse someone who comes from a context with different aesthetic preferences than the ones of the researcher, but it can also present a distortion, even offence directed towards the fundamental values of the described culture. Equally as declaring that something is 'primitive' or 'civilized', 'clean' or 'filthy', 'good' or 'bad', declaring that something is beautiful or ugly is always a form of a value judgment, even if this judgment is made entirely unconsciously and without any attempt. The opposition consisting of two members (beautiful-ugly), is then extended in the following way: the good, the beautiful, the civilized and the clean is hierarchically placed higher in relation to the bad, the ugly, the primitive and the unclean. "We have a high regard for the

³ Informant: Dzemila Cherenovska, born 1952 in the village of Chelebija, married in Dolno maalo - Muchina, Golo Brdo, Albania. Field notes taken by Ana Ashtalkovska, recorded 07.05.2003 in the village of Trebishte, Golo Brdo, Albania.

The Good, the Beautiful and the Ugly..

culture of a provincial town in England from the time of Shakespeare, when we read that in Stratford, in front of the house of his parents there was a huge pile of garbage; when we see paper tossed all around the Vienna forest we cannot restrain ourselves from exclaiming 'barbarian' - which is contrary to cultural. Impurity of any kind cannot be related to culture; our prescriptions related to it are associated with the body as well, we are stunned by the information that the Sun King stank and we shake our head with surprise when we are shown, at the island of Isola Bella, the miniature sink where Napoleon washed himself every morning. We are not surprised when the utilization of the soap is considered as a measure of culture" (Frojd 1996:37), says Freud in his "Culture and its discontents", implying that the unclean is not only a result of a lack of hygiene but also a result of lack of culture, and in its frames, a result of low aesthetic awareness. According to this world-view, cities and forests that sink into garbage, equally as someone's unclean body, are not only filthy but also - ugly! In the 'Western' world view such grouping of terms has even further consequences - it positions man, culture and the mind in the first, dominant group of concepts, and nature, woman and the body in the second. Thus, the same way as defining something as unclean does not only refer to lack of hygiene, defining something as beautiful does not present only an aesthetic, but also an ethical comment.

We stumbled upon such an example in the notes of Pavlovic. Namely, when he describes the corporal features of the Maleshevo population, he says: "Men are *most beautiful* in the village of Umlen, and women are *most beautiful* in Negrevo, People in Robovo are fair, hairy and have thick eye-brows, with relatively big moustaches. Their facial features are *proportional*. Women have *beautiful* and thick hair" (Pavlović 1928:417; my italic) The described Maleshevo inhabitants were, or they would probably be, if they would knew about this article, pleased by their position on the 'beauty-scale' of Pavlovic, although the ones from the villages of Maleshevo who were not mentioned in this flattering list could be offended by the fact that someone else, and not them, is declared as 'the most beautiful'. Still, what do the terms 'beautiful' and 'proportional' really mean - according to which criteria certain type of hair or face could be declared as such? And even more, how do we define the average beauty so that we could judge what is less and what is more beautiful than that? Did Pavlovic met literally all Maleshevo people and had in some way 'measured' their beauty, turning it into a digit? Did he, in the course of such action, take into consideration only the young men and women, or also the elderly and the children? Such rhetorical questions are also provoked by another study: the one of Jovan Hadzi-Vasiljevic, dedicated to the Kumanovo region, in which Kumanovo people are declared as having a "medium beauty" (sic!), while women are "proportionally more beautiful than man" (Hadži-Vasiljević 1909:83). However, what is most interesting for us in a sense of an anecdote,

is taking such superficially described bodily structure as a basic argument for defining the national affiliation of certain population: "The corporal structure of most of the Maleshevo people (male, female, adults and children) which is visible from different photographs in this article, is clearly pointing to the fact that they are a part of the Serbian tribe. Most Vladimirci inhabitants are boney, have a distinctive face, with big and thick moustaches. When they put on their folk costume they look like the well-known historic figures from the time of Karadzordze, and from Shumadija region" (Pavlović 1928) What Pavlovic is saying in fact is the following: both Maleshevo people and the Serbians are beautiful people, *ergo*, they are brothers! At the same time there is an interesting note made that the ones that 'spoil' the beauty of the native population are the immigrants, i.e. - the Others! Those 'recently arrived' people are described as being not so high, kind of chubby, with heavy lips. Although he does not say that they are in fact ugly, the reader cannot but make such a visual association.

In a situation where informants are confused when we ask them to describe what 'beautiful' is, and where the researchers are most often biased, leaded exclusively by their own definition of beauty, what remains to be done is to turn towards the material which we know for sure will provide us the necessary data. Beauty is always related to the longing to grasp it, to drawn in it, to enjoy it - and isn't that associated to love and its strivings? Love folk poetry is such a hymn of beauty, seen through the sometimes misty prism of love. The longing towards the loved one is in fact a longing directed towards his/her (beautiful) body: "Oh, you beautiful and good-looking girl!/I want to be your slave for three years./To see your slim figure./To see your black eyes, the thin eye-brows/Your red cheek, your honey lips/Your white throat, your white breasts" (Miladinovci, 1983, poem number 360, "Oj ti mome ubavo lichno") The erotic tones of these verses are quite subtle, but in this case their artistic form and value is not in the focus of our attention. What interests us is the aesthetic ideal that they promote and favor. After reading through the collections of love folk songs and detecting the ones of such genre in the collections of a more general type, it became evident that such an ideal type really exists. The metaphorical descriptions of the ideal (female) beauty are repeatable and almost identical from song to song. Most of them are contained in the above cited verses - the body of the desired female partner in these songs is always 'slim', her eyes are black and her eye-brows thin, her face is red (pinkish) and her skin (especially at her throat and breasts) is soft and white. The red color of the cheeks (the face) is associated with health, in contrast to, for example, yellow, gray or white. On the other side the white colored skin of the body is associated with purity and care - if the skin is white and gentle it means that it hasn't been touched by cold weather and the sun, which for an environment where daily chores, for both

The Good, the Beautiful and the Ugly..

women and man, are done mostly in open air is an ideal which is difficult to attain.⁴ Almost all love songs include variations of the above mentioned descriptions: "Why is the white city (Beligrad) white?/There is a reason for it/Mara with the white breasts (Belogradka) lives in it/She has a face as the shiny sun/Her eyes are like black grapes/Her eye-brows are like leeches/Her throat like the moon/This is why the white city is white" (Miladinovci, 1983, poem number 375, "Beligrado shcho mi se beleit") The adjective 'white' is often an addition to personal names of the girls described as beautiful in oral literature (white Rada, white Neda etc.), although it can also be found as a personal name itself (Bela - White). Although it is difficult to speak about 'variations' of white, still this whiteness is not the same one that is associated with illness and death - the one that is associated with the white body of the deceased or the bloodless vampire. Besides being a counterpart of such a 'deadly' whiteness, this beautiful white color is a counterpoint of the black, demonic, impure - if the adjective 'white' in front of the personal name was associated with 'beautiful', the adjective black' (as in the case of the character Crna - Black Arapina) is related to something that is repulsive, foreign and dangerous. If the white color of the skin is rare, and thus appreciated, and if what is black is not desired, then according to the same logic ('beautiful is something that is rare and is not black') an aesthetic ideal on the territory of Macedonia should be not black, but blue eyes!! But in this case what is rare is declared dangerous. Blue and green eyes can cast a spell, while black eyes are beautiful. Maybe an explanation for such a preference lies in the fact that black eyes visual seem bigger, while according to a number of researches big eyes are considered an aesthetic ideal in 37 world cultures! Namely, the study of David Buss (Buss 1989) shows that the generic 'beautiful woman', whose photo-robot is obtained through a comparative analysis of the aesthetic preferences of the researched cultures has, among other things, a small nose and - big eyes! His explanation, which is in the best tradition of the evolutionary psychology, is that big eyes are a part of the female beauty since they are associated to - fertility. Having in mind that in the process of aging (or in a case of a difficult disease) eyes tend to 'sink' and look smaller, making the nose look bigger, those are in fact the markers of youth, and thus of fertility. What his study is trying to prove at a wider plan,

⁴ In Western Europe, during the 18th century, the difference between the tanned and the white female skin is noted as an essential feature for separating the 'beautiful' female members of aristocracy from the 'ugly' peasant women: "Being in the open air and the hard physical work of the peasant women gives them such strength that cannot be seen at another place: they are less delicate and less attractive - almost always quite tanned" (Flandrin, Jean-Louis: "Kinship, Household and Sexuality", Cambridge University Press, 1979, 114).

including cultures located at six continents and five islands, is that the physical indicators that indicate youth and health (smooth skin, a good muscle tonus, thick hair, full lips and big eyes) and are considered attractive, are related to the reproductive capacity of women in *all* cultures. Namely, it is logical that even if there would be such a culture that would favor old age, infertility and illness, it would soon exterminate itself. Thus, Buss proclaims that the above mentioned indicators of female beauty (youth-fertility-health) are universal, although he admits the existence of culturally defined variations of the criteria on female attractiveness that are not related to reproductive capacity. That sexual attractiveness of women is based upon visual signs that point to her health and reproductive potential is confirmed by other researches that in the last few years concentrate upon the so called 'WHR' or waist-to-hip ratio, as a clinical but also a visual indicator of female fertility, which men in fact intuitively 'calculate' when they decide if a woman is attractive or not. (Tovee M.J., Misy, D.S., Emery J.L. and Cornelissen P.L. 1999; Kirchengast 2005; Weeden&Sabini 2005) A lower WHR, which means slimmer waist and in relation to it wider hips, indicates a higher statistical probability that a certain woman is 'real', i.e. fertile. Illustratively speaking, a female pear-shaped body has an advantage versus the apple-shaped one. The "liking" is in fact a positive result of the calculation, that points to the fact that a certain woman is fertile and therefore 'beautiful'. In other words, according to these theories, saying that a woman is 'beautiful' is the same as saying that she is 'fertile': beauty is just a cultivated concept that is based not upon pure aesthetics, but upon pure - biology! "Science of aesthetics examines the conditions, according to which something is experienced as 'beautiful', but it cannot explain the origins and the nature of beauty; most commonly the failure is covered with weighty and empty words. Unfortunately, psychoanalysis knows even less about beauty. The only thing which seems sure is that it stems from the sexual feeling; this would be a typical example of an urge with a blocked aim" (Frojd 1996:25), wrote Freud long time before the above mentioned research, defining what was defined before as 'pure biology', as - 'pure sex'. The fact that biology could be perverted when falling into the hands of culture (i.e. fashion industry) is illustrated by the dominant aesthetic ideal of female beauty at the current global fashion market. Anorexic models whose bodies seem gender neutral, kind of childish, reflect another obsession of contemporary culture - the obsession with the ideal of youth, that is defined as beautiful even when it is still not fertile (independent of the fact that a more detailed analysis of the proportions of these models show that even though their body weight is lower their WHR is absolutely the same as the one of their weightier colleagues). Being slim is a criterion for judging the beauty of the female body not only at the catwalks, but also in TV commercial that participate in the creation and sustain-

The Good, the Beautiful and the Ugly..

ning of the socio-cultural expectations regarding this ideal. The MA paper of Emilija Petreska "Norms covering the ideal look of the female body in TV commercials promoting losing weight products in the Republic of Macedonia" (Petreska 2005) is one of the rare works that deal with this problem in Macedonian context. Although this work concentrates upon communicational aspects, focusing primarily upon the analysis of the contents of the commercials of local and foreign production (their visual, verbal and textual messages), and not their real influence exercised upon Macedonian audience, still it is clear that in our environment, when faced with such an aggressive marketing, cannot stay immune to the pressures and expectations on how female and male bodies should look like, according to the norms of Western culture.

Another important element in the estimation of female but also beauty in general is symmetry - proportionality and symmetry are of crucial importance for our visual perception and experiencing something as 'beautiful'. These elements create an intuitive, even an instinctive feeling of tranquility, versus asymmetry that is associated with chaos and agitation. One of the explanations for such a reaction is given by psychology - a person in principle tends towards balance, and the outer one, the visual balance that is a result of proportionality and symmetry, is associated to the desired inner condition of his spirit: "The balance of the visual appearance, not only of pictures and sculptures, but also of buildings, furniture and ceramics (and of other people - my note), are experienced as a reflection of our wider desires and efforts" (Arnhajm 1987:37). The second explanation, that does not exclude but on the contrary confirms the first, is a biological one - corporal symmetry is a result of the evolutionary adaptation of the living organisms to the environment. If animals would be asymmetric (and not as they are - bilateral symmetry), if for example they would have two right legs and one left, they would have problems with pertaining balance and running, in one word for them it would be impossible to survive. If animals are asymmetric, it is most often a result of a disease, injury or some kind of disorder - the same goes for humans, where the asymmetry of the face, for example, could be a sign of some illness or of biological aging. This explains why the above mentioned proportionality of the face is one of the criteria for estimating beauty.

The analysis of the concepts of male and female beauty in folk culture corresponds hundred percent to the socio-biological interpretations. In this manner we in fact obtain a sequence of few key concepts relevant for a socio-biological, but also for a cultural interpretation of female beauty: beautiful is what is fertile, fertile is most probably what is young, versus the old which is infertile and thus - ugly. This was expressed in a very simple but at the same time astonishingly accurate way by one of our informants: "They say that if the man is older this is better. Since a man is always a man, while

if the woman is older her mandate to create a family runs out faster (laughing)".⁵ In the mentioned sequence (beautiful-fertile-young) we recognize those parameters that were detected as relevant during the description and estimation of female beauty in Macedonian folk culture, but now we would add to this sequence another element, which was already mentioned, that goes hand in hand with fertility and youth, and that is health. It now becomes clear that what is old and sick is marginalized and despised, but when it comes to women it is also considered ugly. Surely we don't want to say that there are no aesthetic preferences that refer to man, or that they are irrelevant. It is only a matter of absence of such a material that refers to male beauty as such, i.e. there are no descriptions of their bodily features that could be interpreted as referring to beauty as a concept. However, the image of the desired (and thus 'beautiful') man is clear: the desired bachelor should be able to exercise harder physical activities, he should thus possess a corresponding physical stature, a look that would 'signalize' that he could actually perform hard work. "My man was short, but beautiful", says an informant about her husband, "everyone said in the hospital when he came to visit, how did you manage to marry such a handsome guy. He was blond and red, and his hands, not like mine, they were like a concrete block, this wide. He was short, I was even taller than him".⁶ For our informant her husband's big and strong hands (wide 'as a concrete block') is obviously a more relevant criterion for judging the beauty of (her) man, and they compensate for his short stature ("my man was short, but..). In oral folk tradition, and also in the statements of the informants, I have not found a description of the desired corporal features of man, in the sense of preferred facial form, preferred eye-color, eye-brows' or mouth form, as it was the case with women. What women find important is more in the domain of the personality and less in the domain of corporal traits: "The maiden has asked God:/God, give me the wings of a swan,/God, give me the eyes of a hawk,/So that I could fly over Ljiljan mountain/To fly into the king's palace,/To see the king's army/To choose a hero for myself/That does not drink wine and brandy/That rides a beautiful horse/That has a clock ticking under his arms,/That carries a hawk on his shoulder". (Hadži-Vasiljević 1909:399). The interpretation of this list of desired characteristics is that the described man is serious (he does not drink wine and brandy), he is brave and proud (rides a beautiful horse) and, having in mind that he possesses a ticking clock - he is rich! We

⁵ Informant: Rada Daskalovska, maiden name Ognenovska, born 1937 in the village of Gjavato, Bitola; recorded by I.J. on 21.08.2006 in Gjavato.

⁶ Informant: Stoja Pop-Janevska, maiden name Metelovska, born and married in the village of Brajchino, Prespa lake region, born 1928, married 1946. Recorded in Brajchino 22.05.2005.

The Good, the Beautiful and the Ugly..

suppose that if this girl would find the described guy (which in fact happens at the end of the poem), she would not mind at all if he would have, besides a horse and a watch, a twisted nose or small eyes. What is the reason of such a gender difference in defining the desired features of the partner? Maybe men are more 'corporeal' in their longings and expectations from women, or they are much more open in expressing and describing (in details) their aesthetic preferences, even in a more subtle, poetic form. Maybe female expectations and desires related to the body are not suitable for being expressed through such a public discourse as the one of the folk song, so that they obtain a more abstract, metaphoric aura, in comparison to men's desires that are pretty concrete. And finally, maybe men and women really want different things?

Evolutionary psychology and socio-biology offer a solution to this dilemma too - fertility of men does not decline so drastically from puberty to old age as in women, so that visual indicators for their aging do not automatically signalize a lower fertility or total infertility. Thus, physical appearance of men (as an indicator of his age) is not of crucial importance for women, who is concerned not so much with his age, but with his will and ability for 'parental investment' - providing food, territory, shelter and protection for her and her child. Thus, women, much more than men, find features as ambition, hard working and capacity for providing resources appealing when it comes to potential male partners (Buss 1989:2) Thus, when it comes to men there are not visual indicators for their fertility, but there are indicators for their physical strength, i.e. health - criteria that as we have already seen play a crucial role in defining female, but also male beauty. In order to obtain the necessary resources he should be healthy: "To be healthy and strong, to be able to work and to perform every day heavy physical chores, is an ambition of each Poreche man and woman. For them this means not only physical well-being, but also high social appreciation, that stems from the awareness of one's own value and the positive attitude of the environment. The healthy and strong person has an open life career, while the weak and the ill are the ones that cannot hope for much. This opinion is reflected in the criteria related to Poreche peoples' beauty: beautiful women are those that are strong, tall and red-cheeked; the ideal of male beauty is a strong, hard working 'argach'" (Obrembski 2001:115) This ideal of the strong, muscled, brave and proud man follows us through the whole history of mankind, and it is valid even today, when the utilization of technology minimizes the importance of physical strength, and to a certain level the importance of health, as criteria for judging the working ability of man. Obviously, something that was crucial for the survival of mankind from its beginnings, that is physical pertinence, reflected upon the notion of beauty of men - providers of food and shelter, cannot be changed overnight, even with the aggressive mediation of contemporary culture that, among other

things, promotes equal opportunities of men and women to perform this 'provider' role. Re-conceptualization in this sense is taking place but slowly and gradually - men in contemporary advertisements are still presented as having strong muscular bodies, they are physically tough, but on the other hand this image is often 'softened' with a historically atypical feature - father's gentleness.

Beauty, as we have already seen, produces self-confidence and 'high social value', but it could also be a curse! Evaluating something as 'beautiful in an explicit, public and direct way could be an open 'channel' for bad spells, especially if it is done with a feeling of envy and with a power to cast a spell. This is why, especially when it comes to children, praising their beauty is totally avoided, or immediately after passing a compliment over their physical appearance the one who is giving the compliment spits three times and pronounces an appropriate oral formula ('mashala' or 'da go serat kokoshkite' - may the chicken shit upon him). These are procedures that aim towards neutralizing evil, which selects as its victim everything that is innocent, good and beautiful. It is exactly due to neutralizing these negative forces boys are given names that have a protective function, like Grden or Grdo (Ugly).

When it comes to girls and women, their beauty could be a reason for an increased surveillance upon them, but also to present a key reason for their sometimes miserable fortune. Namely, girl's beauty, in a situation when she came from a poor family, was an element of social exchange - a beautiful and poor girl for an ugly but rich bachelor. In a poem contained in the collection of folk poetry of Anton Stoilov, a beauty decides to turn into a nun, since her parents do not want to marry her with the one she loves. But due to her beauty she is not accepted even in the monastery: "Oh nuns, my sisters!/Do you have a shelter for me/for me and for the soldiers?/They say to her:/-Grozdeno, white Grozdeno/We have a shelter for you,/for you and for the soldiers,/but you are beautiful,/you will burn our monastery". (Stoilov 2000) The same motif is found in the Zen koan titled "The clear vision of Ryonen", that has almost the same content as the above mentioned Macedonian folk song - a girl named Ryonen was so beautiful that when she turned seventeen she accompanied the empress, as one of the court ladies. But the beloved empress died unexpectedly, and Ryonen turned to Zen Buddhism. Her parents did not support her and forced her to marry, promising her that she can become a priestess when she gives birth to three children. The condition was fulfilled when she turned 25. Then she shaved her head and went her own way. Arriving at the city of Edo she requested the authorities of the monastery to accept her as a pupil. The teacher declined her because she was too beautiful. She tried another monastery but without any success - she was told that her beauty would only cause troubles. Then she decided she would mutilate herself: she burnt her face with a hot iron stick. Thus her beauty, and her problem, disappeared in a blink

The Good, the Beautiful and the Ugly..

of an eye. What is identical in both examples, that belong to totally different cultural contexts and traditions, is the burden that corporal beauty could present in obtaining higher, spiritual goals. The body, especially the beautiful one, and the sinful temptations that it presents to his/her owner, but also to the ones close by, should be thrown away in the name the beautiful and pure soul. This is obviously a similar stand-point of Zen Buddhism and Christianity.

Besides describing the beautiful woman, oral folk tradition clearly describes woman's features that are considered ugly. Such is this song that mocks the very short, very tall and 'yellow' women, at the same time advising towards higher surveillance upon the beautiful ones:

"The one who has a short wife,
Should not gather wood-logs,
He has a wood-log at home
The one who has a tall wife,
Should not use ladders
His ladders are at home
The one who has a yellow wife
He should not go to the graves
The dead are at his home
The one who has a beautiful wife
He should stay at home"

(Hadži-Vasiljević 1909:391)

A similar song, but in a 'male' variant, is comparing in a very illustrative way, the desired and the non-desired man. Titled "Features of an old bachelor and a crazy, young guy", it features a girl who is angry to the village match-maker because he matches the best girls with the worse guys, and the bet guys with the worst girls, but mostly because he matched herself with "an old geek/an old blind dog/his head is echoing like an empty pumpkin/his lungs are bumping as watermelon/his breath smells like a goat/you lie on his hand as on a thorn!". On the other hand, the beautiful and young boy is 'white and dewy': "His breath smells like early white basil/I lie on his hand as on a pillow/I touch his skin-it feels like silk!" (Stoilov 2000:122). "Starost-grdost" (Old age-ugly age) says a Macedonian proverb..

However, beauty is not just a parameter for classification of people into beautiful and ugly - it is also a criterion for making a difference between humans and non-humans, i.e. supernatural creatures. Extreme beauty or ugliness, that goes beyond human measure, is one of the features that define these creatures as non-human - their bodily characteristics are indicators of their divine or demonic nature. However, the beauty of a certain mythological personage does not automatically indicate its goodness. Beauty seduces, dizzies, posses-

ses a huge power and is thus dangerous, and man has dual feelings towards everything which is at the same time attractive and potentially dangerous - he desires, but at the same time is scared by beauty. This is true by all means when it comes to the fairy, which is practically the only anthropomorphic, female personage that is described as beautiful, but at the same time, following the above mentioned association of beauty with danger, as highly perilous. The fairy has a striking face, blue or greenish eyes, long blond silky hair, she is almost naked and, as a contrast to the stereotype of the 'common', earthly women - she is lustful in her dancing, aggressive in her seducing of the desired men, revengeful when someone would harm her, and emancipated when someone tries to 'tie her up'. In her character, to paraphrase Freud's classification of dreams, we detect a existence of a male 'dream-fear' simultaneous with a male 'dream-desire', a longing for domination but also a feeling of being challenged by what is difficult to conquer and to possess - beautiful but independent, powerful woman. Such women (epitomized in the character of the fairy) are conquerors without any scruples, they are irresponsible even towards their own children: marriage between them and the 'common mortals' are always doomed to failure since freedom is more precious to them than the social bonds that the family imposes. Gjurgja the fairy is a paradigmatic example - after being given to a certain Dimo, as a reward for his heroic deed, three-day continuous music playing to accompany the fairy 'oro', she abandons him and their child, using exactly the argument of maternity which usually (when it comes to 'common' women) presupposes ultimate attachment: "Open, oh Dimo, your chimney and your doors,/Now Dimo, I will not go anywhere,/Since I have a male child'./And Dimo was cheated, and he opened,/Twice she blinked, the third time she fled away/And she left the male child/And she went from wherever she came". (Miladinovci, 1983, song n. 2, "Oro mi igrate trista samovili"). The personage of the fairy could also be a pre-text for interesting interpretations from the aspect of psychoanalysis, feminism and gender studies. The deconstruction of the established model of behavior, the liberation from the role of subordinate wife and emotionally attached mother, probably was, and still is, a dream-wish of many women, who at the same time risk to be defined as 'not beautiful' (in the sense of not honest), 'free', i.e. - bad mothers and wives. In this case desire mixes with fear, but the fear is related to other women. This image of a *femme fatale* that bluntly destroys the stability of the social structure, flirting with other women's husbands and breaking their marriages, is extrapolated from the description of the fairy in the book "Folk mythology of Macedonians": "It is very dangerous if a fairy 'enters' a certain man. She would penetrate his heart and he would not be able to maintain any other relations with other people. If he was married, the marriage would fail" (Vražinovski 1998) Such an obsession is not reflected only upon the social and physical life of the 'victim', but

The Good, the Beautiful and the Ugly..

also upon his physical look - the beautiful, healthy and strong man in the hands of the fairy becomes pail and sick. Fairies are women, and they are associated with nature, with the body, the primitive, the animal and thus with everything that is dangerous. Such a categorization of woman in the same category with the above mentioned elements is far from being specific only of Macedonian folk culture. Classification of objects in the universe of the Aboriginal tribe Duirbal, for example, is based upon four crucial categories: *bai* - male persons and animals, *balan* - women, water, fire and war, *balam* - plants and *bala* - everything else that doesn't belong to previous categories. This example has inspired George Lakoff to name his important work from the field of cognitive linguistics "Women, fire and dangerous things" (Lakoff 1987) Even a superficial look upon the descriptions of women in Macedonian traditional culture - no matter if it comes to demonic or earthly creatures - leads to the thought that Australia and Macedonia in a more general, anthropological sense, are not so far away from each other.

But women are dangerous not only when they are beautiful, but also when they are ugly. For example, the witch is presented as an old women in menopause, or a woman that has never given birth, with an unpleasant, ugly look. If the pair youth-fertility associated to female beauty, its counterpart, old age-infertility associates with female ugliness. In the area of Skopje people believe that the witch is in fact a soul of an old woman that goes out from her body after she is asleep in a form of light, and that it runs away only from a certain thorn from a plant called 'chalija'. So the ones who want to chase her away should wave with this thorn in the direction of the light, and would thus be able to recognize the woman-witch in the morning, since she would be badly scratched after her soul would re-enter her body (Filipović 1939:245) Witches, besides being described as old, are characterized as women that have a mean look, a cross above their eyes and merged eye-brows, their skin is dark blue, they are bearded or with hairy lips, bloody eyes, hairy legs and a tail. (Vražinovski 1998:238). We found recent materials from Slovenia which contain similar description of the witch, that points towards the proximity but also to the currency of the notions related to this character in a wider, Balkan context. The witch in the field notes registered in the period 2000-2001 is described as having an unusual and thus unpleasant look, with warts and other marks on her face, with a long nose and a toothless mouth and joint eye-brows (Mencej 2005:252). She is ugly in an aesthetical but also in an ethical sense - her outer look in fact reflects her impure and evil interior, the 'filthy' body corresponds to the filthy soul. The association of ugliness with the demonic nature of the female characters is proved through a number of examples. Filipovic, besides the belief in 'the plague', which is presented as an old and messy woman, registered a belief in a creature that is presented as an awful woman with long ('big) hair, that lives in rivers and waters, in this case in the river Vardar

and the Katlanovo spa, and murders people using her hair to draw them (Filipović 1939:242)

The conclusion of the text so far is that beauty is an important criterion for judging the general attractiveness of woman. But is it a crucial one? Is it more important that the woman is beautiful, no matter if at the same time she is lazy, or is it more important that she is a good house-wife? There is no rigid answer to this question, and as in relation to many other life issues folk proverbs reflect opinions that are somewhat contradictory - in some of them beauty, and in others hard work, smartness and good character are advised as being relevant for choosing a future female partner or evaluating a choice that has already been made. "May the woman be ugly, but her house tidy", "Beauty does not keep a house in one place", "Beautiful woman are not hard working", is said in a couple of proverbs that are immediately faced with their opposites - "She is a good house-wife, but what good is that when she is ugly like hell" and "Beauty may not keep the house together, but still one desires beauty" (Cepenkov 1980, proverbs number 480, 2565, 2567, 3998 and 5028) The contradicting messages that they contain is only a reflection of life experience according to which, when a woman is in question, God does not give two 'goods' at the same place - or at least not too often.

In a philosophical sense beauty, together with true and goodness, form a triad of so called fundamental values, which is the basis of one of the central discussions in the history of Western thought, continuously provoking the centuries old controversy on the absolute and the relative, the objective and subjective, the universal and the particular. Starting from the sphere of beauty, subjectivity and/or relativity moves primarily towards the judgments on good and bad, and then towards the ones related to truth, but never in the opposite direction. The discussion rounds-up in our times, when the good and the truthful, similarly as the beautiful, is increasingly becoming a matter of personal taste and a generally accepted opinion. In the same context we speak about the 'normalization' of the utilization of technology for making bodies more 'beautiful': aesthetic surgery, according to contemporary theory that deals with decolonization of female bodies and the bodies in general, is increasingly exiting the sphere of the secret, the mysterious, the deviant or the pathologically narcissist and becomes - normal! "This change leads towards an expected inversion of the domains of the deviant and the pathological, so that women who are thinking about not using aesthetic surgery are the ones who will be stigmatized or considered deviant" (Morgan 1998:327). Technology fulfils human desires and needs, but at the same time generates them, proclaiming that the engineering practices undertaken are not only possible, but also necessary. One of the consequences is the revalorization of the concept of the 'ugly', that now includes everything that is 'common', everything that has not undergone artificial intervention, that is authentic, 'natural', in a negative connotation of primi-

The Good, the Beautiful and the Ugly..

tive: "The role that is prescribed to technology is often the one of transcendence, transformation, control, exploitation or destruction, while the technologies object or process is conceptualized as inferior or primitive, such that needs a technological transformation or exploitation in the name of a 'higher' goal, or that deserves extinction, since it is harmful or evil" (Morgan:329) This article tried to look at the human body through the eyes of traditional culture - the body that is still untouched by the surgeon's knife, fashion industry and other 'colonizing' forces, that technologies and exploit it, at the same time changing (perverting?) not only the concept of 'beauty' but also the one of 'good.

References:

- Arnhajm, Rudolf (1987), *Umetnost i vizuelno opažanje: Psihologija stvaralačkog gledanje*, Beograd, Univerzitet umetnosti u Beogradu.
- Buss, David (1989), *Sex Differences in Human Mate Preferences: Evolutionary Hypotheses Tested in 37 Cultures*, *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, n. 12, 1-49.
- Kirchengast, Sylvia (2005), *Evolutionary and Medical Aspects of Body Composition Characteristics in Subfertile and Infertile Women*, *Acta Medica Lituanica*, vol. 12, n. 1, 22-27.
- Lakoff, George (1987), *Women, Fire and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal about the Mind*, The University of Chicago Press.
- Mencej, Mirjam (2005), *Vaška čaravnica*, *Etnolog - Glasnik slovenskega etnografskega muzeja*, br. 15, Ljubljana, 245-277.
- Morgan, Kathryn Pauly (1998), *Women and the Knife*, in: *Body and Flesh: A Philosophical Reader* (Donn Welton, Ed.), Blackwell Publishers.
- "The Great Ideas: A Synopticon of Great Books of the Western World" (Robert Maynard Hutchins, Ed.), *Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc.*, vol. 1, 1952 (entry: beauty).
- Tovee M.J., Misy, D.S., Emery J.L. and Cornelissen P.L. (1999), *Visual Cues to Female Physical Attractiveness*, *Proceedings of the Royal Society London*, n. 266, 211-218.
- Weeden J. and Sabini J. (2005), *Physical Attractiveness and Health in Western Society: A Review*, *Psychological Bulletin*, vol. 131, n. 5, 635-653.
- Vražinovski, Tanas (1998), *Narodna mitologija na Makedonice*, Skopje, Institut za staroslovenska kultura - Prilep i Matica Makedonska.
- Miladinovci (1983), *Zbornik na narodni pesni*, Skopje, Makedonska kniga.
- Obrembski, Jozef (2001), *Makedonski etnosociološki studii*, Skopje, Matica Makedonska.
- Pavlović, Jeremija (1928), *Maleševo i Maleševci*, Beograd, Štamparija Sv. Sava.
- Petreska, Emilija (2005), *Propišaniot idealen izgled na ženskoto telo vo televizijskite reklami za slabeenje vo Republika Makedonija*, MA thesis defended at the Institute of Sociological, Political and Legal Studies, Skopje.

Ilina Jakimovska

- Stoilov, Anton P. (2000), Makedonski narodni umotvorbi, Skopje, Institut za makedonska literatura..
- Filipović, Milenko (1939), Običaji i verovanja u Skopskoj kotlini, Srpski etnografski zbornik, knj. LIV, knj. 24, tom 1, Beograd, Etnografski institut.
- Frojd, Sigmund (1996), Neugodnoto vo kulturata, Skopje, Zumpres.
- Hadži-Vasiljević, Jovan (1909), Južna stara Srbija: istorijska, etnografska i politička istraživanja", knj. 1, Kumanovska oblast, Beograd.
- Cepenkov, Marko (1980), Makedonski narodni umotvorbi, knj. 8, Poslovice i pogovorki, Skopje, Makedonska kniga i Institut za folklor.

Ilina Jakimovska

DOBRO, LEPO I RUŽNO: KRITERIJUMI ZA EVALUACIJU TELESNE LEPOTE U MAKEDONSKOJ TRADICIJSKOJ KULTURI

Kombinujući sociobiološke, antropološke i filozofske teorijske pristupe sa etnografskim podacima iz Makedonije, u ovom članku učinjen je pokušaj da se pronađu relevantni kriterijumi za ocenjivanje telesne lepote u okvirima makedonske tradicijske kulture.

