Beautiful Fertility in the Eighteenth Century

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Introduction

The early modern language of reproduction was filled with agricultural metaphors: seeds, flowers, trees, blooming, fruit… Such descriptions imply the beautifulness of domesticated fertility, juxtaposing infertility with the implied ugliness of wilderness: barrenness, overgrown and over-tilled fields, rocky soil. There was something new about the eighteenth-century use of agricultural metaphors, however. As Mary Fissell has argued (1995), seventeenth-century metaphors (and the parallel complaints about cosmetics and dress) were attempts to control women's sexuality within the bounds of marriage. By the eighteenth century, the emphasis was on bodily control and healthy procreation. This was, after all, a century of landscaped gardens imitating wilderness by their design, while controlling and exploiting Mother Nature (Merchant 1980: 3-4; Simons 2011: 219-53). A wilderness might be innately fertile, but it could only yield abundantly when carefully managed, like Robinson Crusoe's "beautiful" homestead on his deserted island (Defoe 2007 [1719]: 90). Eighteenth-century procreation to support a growing nation required as much conscious effort as turning wilderness into productive, profitable land; to ensure true fertility, one needed to nurture their physical and moral beauty through the attentive practices of good health, or hygiene.

[Place Figure 1 near here.]

FIGURE 1: J. Chapman, Nymphs in a field among cornucopias, while workers scythe wheat, representing horticulture and agriculture (1810). Credit: Wellcome Collections/Public Domain.

Agricultural metaphors for reproduction implied connections between beauty, fertility and hygiene, as evident in the poetic response of physician and botanist Erasmus Darwin to the scientific binomial classification scheme developed by Carl Linnaeus. In part one of

Darwin's *The Botanic Garden*, Flora is a woman at her *toilette* (Figure 2)—an activity of hygiene and beautification (Darwin 1791[1790]). In part two, Darwin suggested reading the book "like pictures suspended over the chimney of a Lady's dressing room" (1791: vi-vii), evoking reading's sensuality and the toilette's intimacy (Haut 2004: 243, 248). Darwin's inclusion of Hygeia, the goddess of health and cleanliness, in part two underscores the role of hygiene in beauty (77, 80-81). When "Divine HYGEIA" assumed "bright DIGITALIS' dress and air; / Her ruby cheek, white neck, and raven hair," she opposed "Contagion with mephitic breath" (80-1). Appearing in relation to medicinal plants such as digitalis, Hygeia's beauty was juxtaposed with disease.

[Place Figure 2 near here.]

FIGURE 2: Flora attired by the Elements, appearing as a lady at her toilette, from Erasmus Darwin *The botanic garden. A poem in two parts. Part I. Containing the Economy of vegetation. Part II. the Loves of the plants* (London: J. Johnson, 1791). Credit: Wellcome Collection/Public Domain.

As with Darwin's Hygeia, beauty, hygiene, and fertility were closely linked in a range of eighteenth-century discourses. Hygeia's colors of red, white and black were meaningful attributes, being stock signifiers of beauty and health (Vaz da Silva 2007). The fertile body was, in turn, was made visible through signs of good health (Smith 2010a). Beauty, then, played a crucial role in identifying marriage partners during the eighteenth century. To what extent did women use beauty to signal their marriageability (and thus fertility)? What was the correlation between health and beauty in children? Beauty maintenance and fertility, this chapter argues, was integral to the reproductive lifecycle: preparing one's body for fertility, attracting a spouse, and child-rearing. Fertility went beyond reproduction; just as agricultural metaphors emphasised the lengthy process between tilling land and harvesting fruit, achieving fertility involved establishing good health in both parents and new-borns. Potential

parents needed healthy bodies to reproduce. Women's precautions during pregnancy might guarantee fetal health. Parents' (especially mothers') hygienic child-rearing promoted children's health. At each stage, beauty signalled good health.

This chapter situates England and France within a wider scientific and colonial context. Governments and natural philosophers in both countries emphasised the need for strong citizens to support empire-building and allay concerns over depopulation and degeneration. Healthy offspring were a national imperative (Blum 2002; Tuttle 2010). Nature—and fertility—needed careful management to be beautiful and useful. By the late eighteenth century, women were increasingly described as Mothers of the Nation, responsible for raising upright, moral citizens (e.g. Jacobus 1992; Schiebinger 1993; Mellor 2000; Smart 2011). Recent scholarship on enslaved women frames sex and childbearing as women's reproductive labor, somethingthat was also implicit in discourses about Mothers of the Nation. However, it is only when considering the treatment of enslaved women that activities such as making men comfortable through the provision of food, entertainment or sex and bearing children emerge clearly as forms of (female-specific) labor (Johnson 2020; Morgan 2004; Paugh 2017). Women in the metropole also undertook reproductive labor; they were responsible for maintaining personal and family hygiene to maximize their fecundity and the health of offspring. Drawing on medical treatises, recipes books, fortune-telling guides and fairy tales, I examine everyday assumptions about beauty, health and fertility. I argue that discussions about beautiful fertility—which centered on fertility identification, embodied morality and infant care—revealed broader anxieties about national morality and strength; debates about beautiful fertility, moreover, reveal women's internalization and sometimes subversion of national narratives about bodily control.

Rethinking Agricultural Metaphors

This chapter brings together scholarship on beauty, hygiene, reproduction, degeneration, nation-building and race. Work on early modern cosmetics situates beautification techniques within the history of medicine. Recipes for beautification enabled seventeenth-century Englishwomen to participate in medical and scientific discourse (Snook 2008). Cosmetics, as Katie Aske (2017), Morag Martin (2009) and Snook (2008) show, included waters and pomatums that beautified through cleanliness and good health. The social stakes were high. The face was a porous border, joining individual bodies to collective society, although cosmetics allowed women to hide disfigurement and disease (Festa 2005). Cosmetics were cheap and widely used in eighteenth-century France, but viewed with suspicion in England where painted faces were equated with prostitution, moral corruption and hidden disease (Martin 2009; Palmer 2008; Aske 2017). In this "age of disguise", only the ~~well-to-do~~middling sorts or elite could conceal their true selves beneath a "social skin" (Morgan and Rushton 2005: 40-1). Poor, criminal and female bodies were always visible, even when people controlled their physical presentation by choosing what to reveal, hide or change (Morgan and Rushton 2005: 40-1, 55; Gowing 2003: 44-5; Jorgensen 2018: 357). Beauty—or concealment—and hygiene overlapped.

Historians, however, have not examined the eighteenth-century concerns that women could use cosmetics to disguise infertility, in large part because beauty, health and fertility have been studied separately. Beauty and health have been considered together by Tim Reinke-Williams (2018) who looks at early modern women's descriptions of beauty alongside health and life-cycle and Margaret Pelling who notes that straight, strong, unmarked bodies were considered beautiful (1998: 204). Scholarship on early modern reproduction—from aphrodisiacs or miscarriages to fertility—has largely examined hygiene, or recipes for health, in terms of the body rather than beauty (Read and Evans 2015; Evans

2014; Oren-Magidor 2017). Historians of France have in contrast explored fears about degeneration (declining health of the French nation), with physicians and philosophes attributing degeneration, inscribed on weakened bodies, to urbanization and immorality. Social reformers aimed to restore order through hygiene's strict moral and physical control, while idealising female domesticity and successful reproduction (McAlpin 2014; Quinlan 2007; Vila 1998; Winston 2005). The English were less concerned with degeneration, but their linkages of morality, hygiene and national strength had similar gendered implications (Dabhoiwala 2007; Harrington 2001; Harris 2002). Hygiene had other political meanings. In their examinations of contagion and vermin, Franck Collard and Évelyne Samama (2015), Kevin Siena (2019), Louise Falcini (2018) highlight associations between cleanliness and class. That beauty and reproduction were forms of embodied morality, shaped by class, gender, nation and, of course, race, made any concealment of one's true physical status potentially threatening.

Beauty in eighteenth-century Europe meant whiteness: white skin, black hair and red lips. Descriptions of beauty rarely refer to race explicitly, but the absence is significant. As Kim Hall shows, terms such as fairness and darkness were embedded in a racialized understanding of self and other. Whiteness rather than blackness was everywhere (Hall 1995: 2, 62-122). Eighteenth-century sources suggesting that cleansing or whitening could correct dusky, tawny or black skin were imbued with cultural assumptions. Dark skin colour indicated lower social status (such as tanned labourers who worked outdoors) or foreignness (Hall 1995: 181-2). Discussions of race emerged in cases of black people with albinism or white patches of skin. Although physicians located skin color in a layer of skin (Koslofsky 2018), the *state* of being black remained inescapable; black people with white skin were still considered inferior and treated as sexually attractive curiosities (Hogarth 2018; Malcolmson

2018). Race was explicitly discussed and constructed in terms of beauty, surfacing in the association of beauty with whiteness, not blackness.

Dror Wahrman suggests that race, unlike gender, was peripheral in the eighteenth-century metropole (2004: 85-7). This chapter, however, builds on the work of Kim Hall (1995) and Kevin Siena (2019) who have argued that race and class (not just gender) were understood by Europeans as physiological before the late eighteenth-century. Considering fertility and its wider context of empire, however, highlights the intersections of race, class and gender within the metropole; it is no accident that Robinson Crusoe described his newly conquered, fertile island as beautiful. The framework of empire also sharpens French and English cultural differences and highlights the centrality of reproduction (to colonization both in the metropole and the colonies. While enslaved women in the colonies used medical knowledge, aesthetics and kinship practices to retain some control over their bodies and fertility, the descriptions received in the metropole via medical, travel and plantation literature emphasized their immorality, intractability and secretiveness—always the inverse of the ideal French of English woman (Johnson 2020; Morgan 2004; Paugh 2017; Schiebinger 2017). Eighteenth-century concepts of gender, class and race were increasingly embodied, whether in terms of skull size, skin colour, Linnean classification or hygiene (Curran 2011; Schiebinger 1991 and 1993; Seth 2018; Siena 2019). Intersecting discourses about the embodiment of race, gender and class shaped women's everyday experiences within the metropole.

A comparative approach enables me to consider the context for the iteration of similar ideas in a range of texts, many of which were read in both countries. Cosmetics, for example, were so clearly tied to morality in England that writers did not elucidate the implied relationships among good health, fertility, and beauty. The French, being more concerned with degeneration, made the associations explicit. I draw on several types of sources—

medical literature, fortune-telling guides, fairy tales, recipe books—that offered advice on choosing marriage partners, creating healthy babies, and ensuring a beautiful and healthy body. Although this chapter examines the metropoles of England and France, my analysis situates eighteenth-century discussions of beauty and fertility within the context of the construction of whiteness and colonization.

Fairy tales link themes across the chapter through familiar stories for (elite) eighteenth-century audiences in both countries. These popular texts were entertaining and didactic. In France, fairy tales gained popularity through late-seventeenth-century salon culture, often written by women and intended for adults. The English lacked their own tradition, translating French versions instead for an intended audience of children—or women (Harries 2001: 80, 97; Avery 2002: 144-6; Jones 2013). The most popular fairy tales that passed from France to England came via Charles Perrault, who published his *Histoires ou Contes du temps passé avec des moralitez*: *Contes de ma mère l'Oye* (*Histories or Tales of Past Times with Morals: Tales of My Mother Goose*) in 1697. Perrault's moral focus would have appealed to the English, given the centrality of their reformation of manners (a movement to reform morals, especially among the urban lower class) to state-building and social improvement. The English fairy tale tradition, then, occurred within an explicitly (white) masculinist and bourgeois framework (Dabhoiwela 2007; Harries 2001: 35-9; Schmiesing 2016: 228). Fairy tales provided readers with a framework to define and perform feminine beauty—even as men's bodies and behaviors were typically "the unmarked norm" (Jorgensen 2019: 54-5; Jorgensen 2018: 357).

Both fairy tales and beauty could be forms of resistance. Fairy tales written by women *could* be subversive. French women, for example, developed alternative versions of fairy tales emphasizing their perspective, enabling (female) readers to question "facts" and power structures while hinting at experiences of pregnancy and birth (Tucker 2003: 7-10; Harries

2001). English audiences might also have had a range of responses to fairy tales, even if not written down. As Morgan and Rushton emphasise, people could resist power (and narratives) by controlling their secret selves and manipulating how others understood their visible bodies (2005: 41, 55). This included middling sort and elite~~well-to-do~~ women, for whom beautifying their own and their children's bodies might offer social power and bodily control by allowing them choice over what they publicly displayed.

Beauties and Beasts: Identifying Fertility

Riquet of the Tuft

In 1696, "Riquet of the Tuft" appeared in both Catherine Bernard's novel, *Inés de Cordoüe*, and Perrault's collection of tales. The tale centres on an ugly prince who marries a beautiful princess. Translated into English in 1729, Perrault's version was republished regularly. The one in *Tales of Passed Times by Mother Goose with Morals* (1796), for example, begins with a Queen desperately trying to conceive. The resultant child, Riquet, was covered in hair, short, and hunchbacked, although a fairy gifted him intelligence. Nearby, the long-awaited twin daughters of another King and Queen were also visited by the fairy. The beautiful, but unintelligent, daughter was granted the ability to make a beloved beautiful; the ugly daughter was gifted intelligence, despite the Queen's pleas for her to be beautiful, too.

[Place Figure 3 near here.]

FIGURE 3: Riquet à la Houppe, shown with uncontrolled hair and hint of a hunchback, from *Les Contes de Perrault Précèdés d'Une Préface par J.T. de Saint-Germain* (Paris: Librairie de Théodore Lefèvre et Cie, 1884), p. 79. Credit: BNF Paris (via Gallica).

When Riquet saw the beautiful sister's portrait, he was determined to marry her. The beautiful daughter, however, had run away because everyone preferred her witty sister. Riquet encountered the princess in the forest and comforted her, saying that his magical gift meant he could share his intelligence with one person—all he asked was for her to marry him in a year. As the year passed, the now-intelligent princess gained friends and suitors, but she forgot the bargain until she was spirited away to a chamber, festooned for a wedding. Although she considered running away, the princess married Riquet; she had gained wisdom and wanted to remain intelligent. Fortunately, her gift meant that her bridegroom could become beautiful to her.

Bernard's version focused on the princess, not Riquet. Bernard introduced a handsome suitor, preferred by the princess. This story ended unhappily. Riquet's looks never improved and the princess used her intelligence to continue her love affair. After discovering the deceit, Riquet magically transformed his rival into a copy of himself. Bernard's version suggests that the tyranny of patriarchy is inescapable; women only lose autonomy through marriage. Perrault's tale, by contrast, emphasises the princess' agreeableness and submissiveness (Harries 2001: 37-8). Significantly, Riquet's appearance is at the core of both versions; fairy tales rarely describe men's bodies, with male deformities emphasizing underdog status or wickedness (Jorgensen 2018: 343, 353). Read alongside contemporary medical ideas, Riquet was a bad marriage choice physically—reproducing himself literally (according to Bernard) or ensuring better offspring by marrying a beautiful woman (according to Perrault).

Defining Beauty

The story raises several issues common to eighteenth-century writers: the necessity of beauty, the importance of intelligence, and the unity of beauty and good morals. The story would have particular resonances for an eighteenth-century woman, however. The long-awaited

children were imperfect, leading to maternal worry that their children's marital prospects would be affected by deformities of intellect or appearance. It was only through magic that Perrault's couple met and counteracted each other's deficiencies. As highlighted in Perrault's version, eighteenth-century mothers were responsible for producing healthy, perfect offspring.

Women's responsibility also emerged in medical literature. Surgeon and *accoucheur* Pierre Dionis wrote, for example, that sterile woman "are obliged in conscience to consult physicians or surgeons, to take medicinal baths, to take the waters, & to make and to follow what they prescribe, to have recourse to the saints, to make novenas & pilgrimages" (Dionis 1724: 72). Medical practitioners considered women's sterility (primarily caused by ill-health) to be more treatable than men's invisible infertility, which was often seen as resulting from poor seed quality (Joubert 1578: 206; Bourgeois 1642: 1-2; Mauquest de la Motte 1722: 12-4; Venette 1721: 297). Women internalized this responsibility to control reproduction through health maintenance. During pregnancy, for example, women needed to avoid excesses in food choices, exercise, sleep or emotions (Smith 2010a, 2010b; Oren-Magidor 2017). Indeed, physicians and popular culture considered maternal imagination to be one cause of birth defects. A woman's cravings for strawberries could cause her child to have a strawberry birthmark or her fright could trigger deformity or even miscarriage (Cody 2005: 120-44 *passim*; Smith 2010b). Self-management offered women the hope of fertility and the prevention of birth defects, but elicited self-blame if unsuccessful.

Healthy-looking women offered more reproductive certainty in another way, given the assumption that fertile women could be easily identified. Early modern medical discussions on the causes and symptoms of sterility emphasized patients' overall health (see for example: Bourgeois 1642: 14; Dionis 1724: 67-8; de Lignac 1774: 267, 362, 404; Flamant 1699: 6-7, 54; Joubert 1578: 206; Mauquest de la Motte 1722: 12, 18; Mauriceau 1694: 238, 306, 409, 484;

Venette 1721: 297). Infertility causes included age (too young or old) and changing or incompatible physical temperaments. Physical impediments included imperforated hymens or genitalia sizes, which might be treated surgically. Fertility problems, like poor health, had obvious visual cues (skin color, weight and height) and easily discoverable physical issues (diet, menstrual disorders, or uterine issues). Even temperaments were tied to body types. Short, thin women had trouble carrying babies to term; hot, dry women—identifiable by high color, thinness, lack of appetite and choleric temperament—burned off men's seed. A pale, heavy, slow-moving woman was excessively cold and moist, indicating difficulty in retaining male seed (De Serres 1625: 262-75; Liébaut 1651: 168-9).

Cultural expectations of beauty reflected medical ideas. For example, *The Art of Preserving Beauty* (1789) noted that white and red were the colors of health, while black eyebrows or hair were the ideal shade—colors that French women also enhanced cosmetically, according to physician Charles Augustin Vandermonde (A Physician 1789: 37, 167; Vandermonde 1756 t. 1: 18). In European fairy tales (and Darwin's description of Hygeia), these were also the colors of beauty and fertility (Vaz Da Silva 2007). External physical deformity also indicated sterility, with lame and hunchbacked women prone to miscarriage (Viardel 1674: chapters 9-10). But as Vandermonde worried, such deformities could be heritable (1756, t. 1: 67, 86). Even conduct books hinted at the importance of a healthful appearance. An English book on politeness, prudence and virtue for young men and women suggested that a young woman's "charming bloom" was the "best portion that can possibly be brought to a family; even a good stock of health to transmit to her posterity" (*The Young Gentleman and Lady* 1747: 110). Physical attractiveness—specifically moderation in size and weight and skin color—indicated one's bodily complexion and reproductive possibilities.

Women needed self-discipline to manage their health and fertility. Physician George Cheyne set the bar high, requiring perfect health: "nothing can produce *Fertility* in either Sex,

but what preserves perfect *Health*" (1742: 277). Treatments to promote fertility, like the ones suggested by Dionis (above), aimed to re-establish a woman's health or shift her normal bodily habit. Domestic remedies, which typically aimed to warm up women's physical temperaments, were demanding to use. Women might need to prepare (and take) several remedies, many of which were time sensitive—to be used during menstruation, before sexual intercourse, or for a set number of days (Smith 2010b). By mid-century, Cheyne and others argued that luxurious and sedentary lifestyles corrupted blood and constitutions, creating fertility problems. Treatments aimed to thin and sweeten the blood or tighten the constitution, but were essentially dietary changes, exercise, and cold-bathing (Cheyne 1742: 277, 280, 285-6). The real task, then, was to ensure health maintenance in the first place. Jean-André Venel's 1776 essay on health aimed at "girls destined for marriage" stipulated that "good health is the first of the necessary conditions for good generation" (11). The book defined good health, highlighting the various (usually reproductive) problems associated with debility. Venel repeatedly paired health and beauty, which shared the same principles, being "necessary to be full of life before being beautiful" (Venel 1776: 115). Women needed to be self-controlled to make their bodies (and, eventually, those of their offspring) healthy. The payoff, however, was substantial: the best method to safeguard the fruitfulness of one's family was to preserve its good health.

Overall, it was more difficult to be certain about men's fertility than women's, especially if a man's physical body appeared to be working correctly. In the eighteenth-century, impotence was one of the few reasons for annulling a marriage and, from mid-century, was related to widespread anxieties about population decline and degeneracy (Quinlan 2007). Legally, impotence referred to the ability to obtain an erection that could penetrate and ejaculate; this was the most obvious part of male fertility. The causes of impotence were attributable to ill health (e.g. gonorrhea, obesity, and ageing), anxiety, or anatomical deformities. The first two were treatable, but surgical intervention for the third

posed more problems than the surgical interventions for women, such as stretching a small vagina or perforating a thick hymen (Mauquest de la Motte 1722: 15; Venette 1721: 273-88). Few medical writers—like fairy tale authors—described the ideal male body, though Vandermonde indicated undesirable qualities: too great a height, stooped shoulders, hollow eyes, excess or insufficient weight. Such problems suggested inflexible body fibers and a sterile complexion (Venel 1776: 11; Vandermonde 1756 t. 1: 67).

Men's legs were highly visible in eighteenth-century clothing and, as such, were thought to offer clues into men's health, sexual prowess and reproductive ability (Harvey 2015: 812, 818)—but no matter how healthy-looking the body, a man's potency could remain ambiguous. In annulment trials, for example, medical practitioners examined men's and women's genitalia to determine health and functionality. Men like the Marquis de Gèvres, examined in 1712, who lacked the ability to fulfill their generative duties were problematic. The Marquis' "exterior parts serving for Generation, have the requisite Figure, Size and Dimensions," but since the medical examiners were unable to witness "Erection and Ejaculation" they could not determine potency (de Gèvres 1714: 7-12). The counsel for his wife, Mademoiselle de Mascranny, for example, wondered if "to be a Husband, 'tis enough to wear the Shape of a Husband" (13). Physicians and surgeons for both parties argued that the most certain signs of consummation could be found on the body of the wife—particularly an absent hymen--not the husband.

Male sterility was tricky for the simple reason that his seed (itself an agricultural metaphor) might be defective. In his well-known work on masturbation, Samuel-Auguste Tissot recounted several cases of healthy-looking men who had gonorrhea—defined then as constant penile discharge, not a specific infection—that was thought to be caused by nocturnal pollutions, masturbation or excessive sex. Overuse weakened the fibers in the penis and seminal vessels (Tissot 1766: 159, 164, 179, 183). Surgeon Louis François Luc de Lignac

identified damaging, but entirely invisible, results of alcoholic and sexual excesses on men's bodies (1774: 277-8). Cheyne argued that luxury and lechery inflamed the blood and juices, destroying the *animalculi* in semen (1742: 280). Physicians recognized that male sterility could be hereditary (weak family stock), although venereal disease was often the underlying cause (Mauquest de la Motte 1722: 816-20). Women's fertility, moreover, was subject to the wildness and caprices of men's debauchery, according to Cheyne. A husband who brought home venereal disease might destroy his wife's reproductive capabilities (1742: 282-3). Medical practitioners agreed that once the damage was done, it was difficult to reverse. Men did not need to be as obviously monstrous as Riquet to be a bad match.

Nature imagery permeated ideas about male reproduction. Contemporary erotica compared the penis to the tree of life in the Garden of Eden: strong, sturdy, and capable of making sons for the nation (Harvey 1999). Common reproductive metaphors emphasized men taking control of women's fertile bodies through ploughing, sowing or reaping (Simons 2011: 230-8). Time limited men's fertility. Late eighteenth-century pro-natalism suggested that part of the problem was men's failure to take their duty to procreate seriously; during "the springtime of [their] age," men sought pleasure, then discovered late-in-life Nature's fixed term for their fertility (de Lignac 1774: 262). Such metaphors suggested the need for an active, carefully planned manhood.

Even if a man escaped the infertility of old age or debauchery, he still might damage his family—or prospects for one. Eighteenth-century medical and political rhetoric emphasized the social and familial dangers of men's literal and metaphorical impotence, reflecting a deep-rooted anxiety in a changing political climate (Quinlan 2007). The problem with men's sterility was two-fold; it resulted from a lack of self-control—something that men ideally possessed—and it was often hidden. The effects of masturbation, debauchery and venereal disease on men's bodies were invisible. Men's fertility depended entirely on their

honorable behavior, even in private. This, perhaps, is where the redemption of Perrault's Riquet lay; he may have been ugly, but he was honorable.

Transforming Sleeping Beauty

Sleeping Beauty in the Wood

The theme of fertility was explicit in the original Italian version of Sleeping Beauty, "Sun, Moon and Talia", recorded by Giambattista Basile in 1634 (Ashliman 2013). In Basile's version, a travelling King was overcome by Talia's beauty and had sexual intercourse with her while she was asleep. Talia birthed twins while under the curse, only waking when one sucked strongly enough on her finger to draw out the enchanted straw. Her adversary was the King's jealous wife, who planned to feed her husband's twins to him; the first marriage was infertile, as no children are mentioned. On discovering his wife's cruelty, the King had her killed, living happily ever after with his children and new young wife (Ashliman 2013). In the later French and English versions of "Sleeping Beauty," the jealous, infertile wife from Basile's story is transformed into another monstrous, destructive older woman: the King's mother.

Perrault's "Sleeping Beauty in the Wood," also translated into English, contrasts a beautiful, fecund young woman with an ageing anti-mother who looks like a normal woman but is monstrous (Perrault 1796: 39-67). In this version, an ogress (or Queen Mother) and her relationship with her son and daughter-in-law has much in common with the trope of "malevolent nurturer" that appears in early modern witch stories, pointing to (intergenerational) women's disputes about food and childcare or an older woman's threat to patriarchal social order through sexual appetite or aggression (Willis 1995: 34, 88, 163, 168). The story begins with the christening of a long-anticipated baby girl. The King and Queen

invited six fairy godmothers but forgot the seventh. The new parents apologized, but the uninvited godmother cursed them: as the princess came to womanhood, she would prick her finger on a distaff and fall asleep for 100 years. Another fairy made the spell gentler; a prince's kiss would awaken the princess and the entire castle would fall asleep with the princess so she would not be alone. The parents tried to prevent the curse, but the princess eventually discovered a hidden room in the castle where an old lady (the uninvited fairy) was spinning. The curious princess pricked her finger, triggering the curse. Seventy years later, a prince from a neighbouring kingdom discovered the hidden castle. He was overcome by the princess' beauty and kissed her, breaking the curse. They soon married.

The princess initially remained with her family because the prince was terrified by his mother, who was an ogress with an insatiable desire to eat small children. When he became king, he brought his family to live with him, but soon had to leave for war. The Queen Mother began to covet the flesh of her grandchildren. She ordered her most loyal servant to kill her granddaughter for her dinner. The horrified servant tried to follow orders, but when the child embraced him as her friend, he decided to hide her and served his mistress lamb instead. The Queen Mother next demanded to eat her grandson. The servant again hid the child and served up baby goat. Finally, the Queen Mother planned to eat her daughter-in-law who, aged only twenty, was still appetizing. The servant hid the Queen and her children in a house in the woods, serving the Queen Mother venison instead.

[Place Figure 4 near here.]

FIGURE 4: The Ogress saying "What sauce? To the best. But still? With butter." She is depicted as an older woman with a stout figure, but wearing face paint and finery. Costume designed by Joly for Désaugiers and Gentil de Chavagnac, *L'ogresse ou La belle au bois dormant, folie-comi-parade* de Désaugiers et Gentil de Chavagnac (Paris: Théâtre des Variétés, 1811). Credit: BNF Paris (Gallica).

The Queen Mother, meanwhile, planned to tell her son that wild animals had killed his family. One day, walking in the palace grounds and sniffing for meat, the ogress heard her grandchildren's voices. Enraged by the betrayal, she ordered a large tub with vipers and toads to be placed in the courtyard, intending to toss the Queen, children and servant into it. Fortunately, the King arrived home just in time; his mother dove into the tub where she was "devoured by the ugly creatures." The King, his "beautiful wife, and his pretty children" lived happily ever after (Perrault 1796: 64).

The tale of Sleeping Beauty focuses on fertility, old age and disguise. Fertility and age run parallel throughout the story, with the uninvited fairy godmother and the Queen and the princess in the first part, and the ogress and her daughter-in-law in the second part. The fairy godmother not only punished the royal couple by attacking their new-born, but her spell affected their daughter just as she became fertile. The ogress wanted to eat her own grandchildren to destroy her family's lineage; her appetite was unreasonable and uncontrollable. Disguise is another theme, from the castle hidden by brambles to the Queen Mother's true nature. Although the prince had his suspicions, the servant's shock suggested that she had not always been so monstrous. Had her ogre nature only fully emerged with age?

Disguise and Embodied Morality

Old women and their barrenness were disquieting. Although their infertility was clearly visible, given their aged bodies, old women were associated with pure carnality: increased sexual urges, aiding star-crossed lovers, providing advice on fertility and pregnancy termination. Old women could be anti-mothers, destructively jealous of other women's fecundity (Botelho 2015). The real threat was non-reproductive sex, given that still-fertile middle-aged women could also be anti-mothers. Considered sexually enthusiastic and experienced, middle-aged women's maternal roles even enhanced their erotic appeal

(Sbaraini 2020). But their voracious sexuality could be socially destabilizing, being linked to their widowhood or adultery—and therefore non-productive. Within this context, cosmetics posed another problem; they disguised aging, disease and ugliness, making it difficult to identify women's fertility. Jonathan Swift, for example, satirized the tools of beauty in his poem "On a Beautiful Young Nymph Going to Bed" (1731). To hide her ageing and diseased body, the prostitute Corinna had a plaister, a crystal eye, a wig and plumpers (cork balls for her cheeks), in addition to cosmetics (Aske 2017: 511). The flipside of beauty and fertility was ageing and infertility in the early modern period. As with infertile men, the danger was that the truth of a woman's body (her age, health, fertility) might be hidden.

In popular and medical literature, the body revealed a person's true self; virtues and vices alike affected one's bodily state. One could tell a lot about a potential partner's health and fertility by their appearance. English discussions concentrated on the face, whereas French ones considered the whole body. The problem came when women disguised their true faces, just as the ogress did in Sleeping Beauty. Cosmetics, after all, could be used to fake good health; such concealment, however, was trickier if one took time to assess the body as a whole—but even then, women's clothing could hide more physical imperfections than men's (Harvey 2015: 816-7; Lanoë 2022). The most reliable indicator of beauty, then, was to be healthy.

[Place Figure 5 near here.]

FIGURE 5: Etching by P. Roberts after G.M. Woodward (ca. 1803-1806). A lady has prepared for bed by removing her wig, teeth and glass eye, which she orders the maid to look after. Credit: Wellcome Collection/Public Domain.

Vandermonde distinguished between imaginary and real beauty. Imaginary beauty was a matter of custom. Where the Chinese considered tiny feet beautiful, resulting in painful foot-binding, French women wanted tiny waists, resulting in tight corseting, poor health, and

deformities. Turkish men trimmed their hair but had long beards, while European men grew their hair long and trimmed their beards. These were superficial cultural differences (Vandermonde 1756 t. 1: 1, 9-12, 16). Real beauty, however, resided in the proportion and symmetry of the body. “When a man is well made,” Vandermande wrote, “he needs to be angular to have the muscles presented forcefully, the vigorous members expressed, and all traits well marked” (1756 t. 1: 31). Women should be graceful, with a sweet personality, astuteness, and a round face; their breasts were their most beautiful ornaments, and their stomach should be rounded, enclosing the generative parts (Vandermonde 1756 t. 1: 31-2, 41). Beauty was about moderation: a nose with medium nostrils; a medium mouth; a medium throat; cheeks that have some colour, but not too much; cheeks that are not too plump or too lean (Vandermonde 1756 t. 1: 36-40). Skin colour might be whitened or reddened and waists tightened by corsets, but one’s facial shape and musculature was harder to change, making visible one’s general health and reproductive potential.

Physiognomy, the study of one’s physical appearance to identify moral characteristics, had a long history. By the 1770s, it received an artistic, philosophical and scientific grounding in the influential work of Swiss poet and theologian Johann Caspar Lavater. He argued that luxury and excess on the one hand, and extreme poverty on the other, could “debilitate and disfigure the human constitution” (1800: 124). At the same time, fortune-telling through physiognomy was a fun parlour game, used to identify signs of fertility and character. Several books, such as *Every Lady’s Own Fortune-Teller* (1793), provided detailed clues for identifying the true character and reproductive potential of a prospective mate. Hair colour and texture, hairlines, eyebrow shape, and eye colour were all significant. A man who had smooth, plentiful, black hair supposedly was even-tempered, faithful, and affectionate, but not lewd (*Every Lady’s* 1793: 18). A red-haired woman would be glib, talkative, vain, impatient, fiery, and given to the pleasures of love. A hairline that

indented at the temples indicated a good breeder, whereas a hollow hairline in the middle of the forehead foretold few children. The man with small, thin eyebrows would be weak-minded, but kind to his family, and would have many children. But sunken eyes signalled lewd delight in love; such a man might have many children, but he would not provide for them. A black-eyed partner would be passionate and have many children, whereas a blue-eyed partner was temperate in love and would have few children, mostly girls (*Every Lady's* 1793: 20, 24, 38, 31, 34-5).

[Place Figure 6 near here.]

FIGURE 6: A fortune-teller using cards divines the future of a woman in fine clothes. Etching by Michael E. West after Johann Eleazar Schenau, 1737-1799. Credit: Wellcome Collection/Public Domain.

The signs of beauty were also the signs of a good marriage candidate. Ugliness correlated with undesirable characteristics. Drunkenness, lewdness, cruelty, and limited fertility were written throughout the rather unpleasant visage of a man with short, curly black hair; low hairline; sunken, blue eyes (*Every Lady's* 1793: 18, 24-5, 31, 34). A woman's beauty indicated fertility. A fair woman would be healthy, determined, passionate, and companionable. If she had an even, moderately placed hairline, she would be ardent and have many children. Her thick, even eyebrows would show her agreeableness, wit, tenderness, maternal instincts, and good constitution. Clear, large, full blue eyes showed a temperance, modesty, and pleasure in love and indicated the ability to produce many children (*Every Lady's* 1793: 20, 24, 26, 30). Beauty, then, went together with the potential for a happy family life for those who could identify the signs.

Fortune-telling through physiognomy brought its own problems, of course, as Hannah More's moral tract on *Tawny Rachel, or, the fortune teller* (1796) made clear. Tawny Rachel

came from a family used to "tricks and pilfering." A peddler of books, miscellaneous items, and fortunes, she claimed expertise in dream interpretation and moleosophy—fortune-telling by number and placement of moles (More 1796c: 3). More recounted several short stories that revealed Rachel's guile and her customers' credulity. For example, Rachel was able to manipulate the "ignorant and superstitious" Sally Evans who was preoccupied with knowing whether the two moles on her cheek foretold two husbands or two children (More 1796c: 6-14). More's larger project was to provide moral edification to servants through cheap books. The name "Tawny Rachel" was even resurrected in *Aunt Judy's Tales*, a children's book by Mrs Alfred Galty (1859), to refer to an old woman with "gipsy eyes" who was being taken advantage of by a medical charlatan, suggesting the wide circulation of the stories and character. The moral of More's tale was that women should avoid "cheats, imposters, cunning women, fortune-tellers, conjurers, and interpreters of dreams"; women should rely on their own good sense rather foolishly and sinfully consulting fortune-tellers—or relying on physiognomy (More 1796: 15).

More's story operates on another level. Rachel's tawny skin color suggests that More (and the reader) envisioned a black character; "tawny" was often used to describe black people in the eighteenth century (Block 2018: 2, 23-7, 70). Even if Rachel's skin color was an occupational hazard, early modern explanations for tanned or sunburned skin underscore its racialization. While climatic theory suggested that white Europeans could become permanently darker through exposure to tropical sun, literary tropes depicted sunburned characters as culturally or morally different than their fair European counterparts (Hall 1995: 93-7). For More, Rachel's character—immoral and deceitful—was rendered visible through her tawny skin color. Even as More depicted physiognomy as unreliable for the modern woman of 1796, her narrative nonetheless depended on a deeply-embedded cultural association between dark skin and a dark soul.

White, clear skin was also a sign of health, beauty and fertility. One of the easiest ways to identify someone's overall health and morality was to look at their skin, which suggests the reason for so many skin-whitening treatments (see also Lanoë 2022). *Every Lady's Own Fortune-Teller* drew on common knowledge by suggesting that blotchy faces showed weakness in mind and body, indicating addiction to drink and vice (1793: 42). In *A New Practice of Physic* (1728), for example, physician Peter Shaw provided remedies and explanations for skin problems. Some, like freckles or temporary sunburn, had no ill effect "except upon the eye" (335). Others could be more serious. Although chapped lips and hands might come from cold air, they might result from a scrofulous constitution or bad habits (341). And grubs, or black-heads, appeared with hard-drinking (336). In 1781, John Leake described in his *Medical Instructions* the other ways that the morbid humours of chronic diseases like King's Evil, scurvy, or venereal disease might cause a red or pimpled face in women. In other words, bad skin "is generally imputed to a cause not very favourable to their sex" (1781: 351). Worst of all, a poor habit of body, whether scorbutic, scrofulous or venereal, ruined the blood—and a woman's ability to nourish a pregnancy. The result was "*abortion* and *barrenness*", as the underlying disease would "poison the source from which a vegetable draws its juices, and instead of producing fruit, it will wither and die" (142).

Tensions between embodied morality and the art of concealment emerged repeatedly. There were many well-known cosmetics and treatments, as Catherine Lanoë has examined in her chapter; many of these simulated good health. Printed and manuscript recipe books abounded with beauty enhancers: rouges and powders, face and hand washes, mouth washes and tooth cleaners, creams and ointments. These could remove or conceal unsightly redness and spots, hide repugnant odours, or conceal one's advancing age. Many print and manuscript recipe books only had a small selection of cosmetic ones. For example, the printed cookbooks of Margaret Taylor and Elizabeth Price even had the same eleven

treatments in the section on preserving and improving beauty, including pomatums and cleansers, skin-whitening treatments, blemish and wrinkle removers and perfumes—though Taylor added ones for hair loss and tooth problems (Taylor 1795: 115-8; Price 1780: 112-4). While it was common for recipe authors to plagiarize, the inclusion of the same treatments suggests that they were useful types of remedies that readers expected to find. Importantly, Taylor's and Price's book titles emphasize that basic beauty care was part of being a "perfect cook" or "family companion."

Manuscript books were similar, but also included lip salves and face washes. The Johnson Family book (WMS 3082) is useful because it spanned the long eighteenth century (1694 to 1831) and includes recipes from family, friends, and newspapers. It reveals beauty treatments (though no cosmetics), such as a "rare lip salve" (fol. 161r), pomatums (e.g. fol. 84r), a skin remedy "to take out heat and Freckles" (fol. 196v), and tooth powders (e.g. fol. 202r). Specific beauty treatments typically formed a very small part of collections; there are, for example, just over 206 folios in the Johnson Family book, but relatively few 'beauty' recipes. There may be more treatments in manuscript collections than are initially apparent, however, as an examination of physician Pierre-Joseph Buc'holz's *The Toilet of Flora* (published in France in 1771 and England in 1772) suggests. Although Buc'holz saw professional perfumers as his main audience, he also promised to teach women "the means of preserving their charms" (1771: frontispiece, i; Martin 2009: 21). Both French and English versions specify on the title page that "scented waters" are included, along with baths, perfumes, pomatums, powders. Distilled scented waters were a staple, reflecting in part its wider audience of perfumers—but they also typically formed a large part of manuscript recipe books, being commonly used in food, drink, medicine and beauty treatments. Significantly, *The Toilet of Flora* explicitly focused on making the whole body (not just the face) beautiful, , indicating the usefulness of also broadly defining beauty treatments in

manuscript recipe books. *The Toilet of Flora* included stain removers for clothes, vermin removal, corn and wart treatments, plague preservatives, and eye remedies, along with cosmetics to darken one's brow or hair, redden one's cheek, or whiten one's skin. By this measure, the Johnson Family's beauty treatments expand to include wen removal (fol. 152r), smallpox, scurvy and plague treatments (fols. 180v, 184r, 179r), clothes fresheners and shoe black (fols. 197r, 90r) and scented waters (fols. 179v, 202r). True beauty was cleanliness and health, not just cosmetics. It is worth noting that recipe books had relatively few remedies to enhance fertility specifically, either focusing on good health or situating fertility within the broader context of health (Smith 2010a, 2010b). The Johnson Family, for example, included a recipe for Dr Stephen's Water, which made "people look young," comforted the spirits and helped palsy, dropsy and the stone (fol. 33r). This remedy, however, sometimes appeared in other recipe books as also aiding conception; its ingredients (e.g. nutmeg, cloves, mace, lavender, rosemary, thyme) aimed to warm and dry the body, pointing to an underlying problem of old age being cold and some infertility as being cold and wet (e.g. Hyde 1676-1690, fol. 52v). Canny readers of print and manuscript recipe books would have looked beyond the obvious cosmetics and skin treatments in their quest for beauty and fertility.

[Place Figure 7 near here.]

FIGURE 7: Title page for the 1771 French edition, *Toilette de Flore*. Credit: BNF (Gallica), Paris.

[Place Figure 8 near here.]

FIGURE 8: Title page for the 1772 English edition, *The Toilet of Flora*. Credit: Wellcome Collection/Public Domain.

The *Toilet of Flora* was marketed differently in each country. The French subtitle emphasised its naturalness, as "an essay on plants and flowers which can ornament ladies" (see Figure 8), while the English book described its contents as "most simple and approved

methods" (see Figure 9). The contents also differed, with the French version emphasizing rouges, powders and paints, whereas the English one only mentioned cosmetics after the main list. The English version instead detailed cosmetics of all kinds that "give Force to Beauty, and take off the Appearance of Old Age and Decay" and advertised opiates "for preserving and whitening the teeth"—neither of which were mentioned in the French title page. The French were upfront about cosmetics, situating them within the realm of natural. The English, however, focused on methods of cleanliness first. These were, in fact, well-established cultural differences, as contemporaries noted that French women embraced cosmetics, even using a stylized template, while English women preferred natural appearances (Festa 2005: 27, 29, 31).

But as the English *Toilet of Flora*'s promise to disguise decay and age suggests, using cosmetics could be a very skilled deception. Festa argues that cosmetics were more readily associated with deception in England than France; the very naturalness of cosmetic application in England was destabilising, whereas the careless application of heavy cosmetics in France underscored its artificial, public nature. It might have been easier to identify artificiality in France than in England, but the real danger was that cosmetic use of any kind obscured important differences in age (i.e. fertile potential), health and social status (Festa 2005: 37-9, 43). If a woman looked normal, like the ageing ogress who disguised her moral monstrousness, how could one identify problems? For many English authors, the answer was clear: one should achieve a natural beauty through good health rather than using cosmetics, which would poison the blood with lead and rotting teeth anyway. Leake argued that the great secret to improving beauty was, in fact, to improve one's health; "although Health does not altogether constitute Beauty; Beauty is the Child of Health" (1781: 18). The role of cosmetics was to mimic the glowing cheeks, reddened lips, lustrous eyes, and sweet breath that came from good health. Cleanliness was another useful tool. The well-known guide on *The Art of*

Preserving Beauty (1789), for example, declared cleanliness to be "the foster-mother of love; beauty, indeed, most commonly produces that passion, but cleanliness preserves it" (169). Indeed, *The Young Gentleman and Lady Instructed* ascribed health and morality to cleanliness, that "excellent preservative of health; and several vices, destructive both to mind and body, are inconsistent with this virtue" (1747: 162). Cheyne's famous regimen aimed to cleanse internally and externally; drinking milk, eating seeds and bathing in milk would purify the internal body by sweetening the blood. Long-term use, Cheyne promised, would bring "Bloom, Blush, and Brightness" by smoothing and whitening the skin (1742: 288-9).

The condemnation of women's use of cosmetics was deeply gendered, raced and classed (Festa 2005; Martin 2009; Snook 2008). However, it raises other issues of bodily control and self-fashioning. Skilful cosmetic application could improve a woman's chances of appearing healthy and fertile, especially if she were plain or sickly. Cosmetics were a useful commodity: novel, potentially exotic and inexpensive. By the 1780s, the use of ostentatious make-up was being replaced by natural appearance even in France (Martin 2009). This, however, was no simpler than the heavy use of cosmetics. Cleanliness was a virtue, requiring patience and effort; the preservation of white skin in the colonies was, for example, thought to signify a moral (and physical) difference between white women and Indigenous or enslaved women in the colonies (Festa 2005: 42). Judiciously-used cosmetics offered an artificial appearance of health and beauty, though they did not solve underlying problems. True, virtuous, natural beauty—and fertility—came from good health, all of which was closely entwined; beautiful fertility ultimately required sustained moral and physical effort.

Bear's Grease and Beautiful Babies

Tales of Beauties and Beasts

Our familiar *Beauty and the Beast* was written by Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont in 1756, then soon translated into English (1759) with sixteen editions by 1800 (*English Short Title Catalogue* entry). Gabrielle-Suzanne de Villeneuve wrote the original version for adults (1740), which emphasized transatlantic connections: a tale told during a sea journey from Saint-Domingue with several characters who became rich through colonial trade (Sago 2021: 61-2). Mme de Beaumont's story was specifically intended to provide moral edification for girls of the aspiring bourgeoisie, however. Her message was that girls should not over-reach themselves (as per Beauty's failed father and vain sisters) and that moral behavior (like Beauty's) might result in aristocratic marriages (Zipes 1981). But colonization is also implicitly at the centre of her tale, between the display of various trappings of colonial wealth and the Beast's parallelization with a Black servant (Sago 2021: 65). The English and French versions followed each other closely. Beauty represented ideal womanhood: "a charming, sweet-tempered creature" who "spoke kindly to poor people, and was of such an affable, obliging behaviour" (Beaumont 1797: 47). In poverty, she was industrious and sacrificed herself to save her father (Beaumont 1797: 47-8, 54). Yet also part of ideal womanhood, as Kiley Sago argues, was the ability to exercise racialized power (2021: 66). Beauty and the Beast is not about fertility, but it is about marital happiness (despite a disappointing match) and attracting good husbands through beauty and morality. The couple's after-story might, however, be suggested by contemporary morality tales that connected beauty, morality—and physical hygiene—to child-rearing.

Tales of beauty and conjugal bliss could even be used to sell products. Alexander Ross' advertising pamphlet for the wonders of bear grease is reminiscent of Riquet the Tuft or the Beast—themselves animal-like, disfigured, inferior Others (Ross 1795: 40-4; Mattfield 2021: 73-5). Bear's grease itself underwent unspoken transformations, from an animal

product to a malodorous grease used by indigenous North Americans to the sweetly perfumed ointment Ross sold in London (Tullett 2016: 311-2). In Ross' story, two beloved daughters, Arabella and Matilda, were born to a London family. Matilda lost her beauty through illness, but worked on moral improvement while she recovered. Matilda rubbed the bear's grease her parents gave her into her hair twice daily, which became lustrous and beautiful. She soon married a wealthy, kind gentleman. The couple used bear's grease, as did generations of their descendants who knew of its positive effects. Arabella, by contrast, refused to try the treatment; she lost her beauty as she aged and died friendless, embittered and unmarried. The moral? True beauty required careful physical maintenance and moral development, but it would result in a healthy, loving family. In the eighteenth century, moral and physical hygiene were entwined; parents needed to pay attention to both in child-rearing. Perfect children like Beauty did not just happen by accident; she was the stuff of fairy tales. For everyone else, the maintenance of beauty through hygiene was challenging.

Making Beautiful Babies

Declining fertility and population degeneration preoccupied late eighteenth-century medical men and governments. Growing interest in agricultural and animal improvement framed these discussions. The concept of good breeding combined nature and culture; ideas that shaped contemporary understandings of human and animal reproduction, from literature to economic treatises (Davidson 2009: 88). Ruth Perry has called this process the "colonization" of women's breeding bodies, joining reproductive concerns to processes of land enclosure, imperialism and industrialization (Perry 1991: 206). Although men were also considered to be part of the problem for declining fertility, increasingly it was women who were held to be most responsible. The difference was two-fold. Women were also considered responsible for their families' hygiene and their apparent fertility could be manipulated through beauty

treatments in a way that men's could not. By the second-half of the century, women were increasingly seen as the mothers of the nation, whose child-bearing and child-rearing would contribute to the strength of their country. Babies, like fertility, were seen in terms of agricultural metaphors; healthy parental stock was crucial for making beautiful babies. Leake described fetuses in terms of blossom that might be "blighted and destroyed before the fruit is perfectly set" (1781: 143), while William Cadogan, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Mary Wollstonecraft compared children to seeds, shrubs, flowers or plants (Cadogan 1748: 24; Rousseau 1773 [1762], I: 3, 5; Wollstonecraft 2005 [1792]: 95). Wollstonecraft considered the creation of womanhood in terms of botanical cultivation; women and luxuriant flowers might be beautiful, but the methods of creating them resulted in unhealthy and barren stock (Field 2011: 209-10). Excessive cultivation of nature could lead to degeneration, or feeble offspring from poor stock or problems caused by men's weak seed.

Both countries had steadily rising populations (if faster in Britain), suggesting that the real issue was whether they had the 'right' kind of growing populations. Perry, for example, examines the growing belief that children were a national resource to support the commercial and military needs of eighteenth-century Britain. Increasingly, middle-class ideals emphasized maternal care of children, treating motherhood—specifically within the home—as a state imperative after 1750 (Perry 1991: 206-8, 218). By the turn of the nineteenth century, the English simultaneously worried about seemingly unfettered growth in Britain (especially amongst the poorer urban class) and the lack of reproduction by enslaved people in the Caribbean colonies (Cody 2005: 290; Paugh 2017: 94; Schiebinger 2004: 142-9). The French "depopulation delusion" (Blum 2002: 192)—that their population was decreasing when it was not—was only real when it came to the French colonies during the temporary abolition of slavery between 1794 and 1802 (Quinlan 2007; Schiebinger 2017: 139-40).

Philosophes and physicians combined reproduction and morality in their fears of degeneration; the production of enfeebled, enervated offspring threatened national strength. While the poor were thought to breed excessively, the wealthy supposedly ruined their bodies and reproductive success through luxuries; urban living was particularly dangerous to health, regardless of class (Cody 2005; Quinlan 2007; Vila 1998). Physicians also criticized plantation owners' treatment of enslaved people, which destroyed health and fertility (Cody 2005; Paugh 2017; Schiebinger 2017). Concerns about degeneration need to be understood against the background of a real health crisis. Syphilis and other venereal problems ran rampant—and did affect fertility; an estimated 20% of London's population suffered from syphilis alone. Even if couples reproduced, there was no guarantee that offspring would be healthy (Szreter and Siena 2020). If a strong nation required a healthy citizenry, then both countries were right to be concerned.

[Place Figure 9 near here.]

FIGURE 9: The master and mistress of the house are suffering from the effects of late-night indulgence and the house is a mess. The steward walks away in frustration; there are unpaid bills in his pocket. The picture suggests a dissolute, ineffective, and enfeebled aristocracy, especially as the remainder of the series depicts their child as riddled with venereal disease. T. Cook, after William Hogarth, 'Drunk and Disorderly' from *Marriage à la Mode*. Credit: Wellcome Collection, Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0).

The health of the ruling elite troubled physicians who blamed family greed or women's carelessness for family degeneration and unmanly men. In *The Philosophy of Medicine* in 1799, Robert Thornton described the prevalence of hereditary diseases amongst the elite. Wealthy families tended to marry for money and overlooked "deformity, disease, ignorance, peevishness, and every thing that is disgusting to a generous mind" (Thornton 1799: 89). One needed to take care with marriage choices. Marriages between parties of disparate ages were problematic; an older man drained vitality from his young spouse and

created weak, languishing children through his poor seed or inherited deformities (Vandermonde 1756 t. 1: 75-9). Marrying girls off before they were physically ready was another common error, according to Venel, who suggested that people confused nubility (the onset of menarche) with fecundity (the physical readiness to carry a child) (1776: 56). Leake believed that the luxurious, sedentary lifestyles of wealthy families resulted in weakened offspring, but particularly blamed women for not being "attentive to the inestimable blessings of Health" (1781: 17, 141). According to Thornton, the danger was producing an unmanly ruling elite. The guardians of the state should have noble, generous and bold minds, with bodies "fit to encounter the fatigues of war"—but instead, elite "progeny must of necessity degenerate" from congenital syphilis or other health problems (Thornton 1799: 89). Poor parental health or marriage choices were inscribed on infant; the fertility of wealthy families was imperfect.

Venel argued that poor health caused women's fertility problems (1776: 202). Sickly or nervous women suffered from a range of problems: *fleurs blanches* (a whitish vaginal flow) and miscarriages; false pregnancies, molas or monstrous fetuses; milk production problems or fevers (1776: 11, 22-4, 26, 37, 45). Fortunately, women could take preventative measures to ensure healthy procreation, such as those in recipe books to strengthen constitutions and to prevent miscarriage. Physicians like Cheyne emphasised care during pregnancy, again suggesting his milk and seed diet to produce "the finest children" (1742: 287). Careful regimen could restore health and beauty—physical qualities passed on to her children. The goal was to carry babies, specifically strong and healthy ones, to term.

The care for the child after birth was also intensive, given the embodiment of morality. Parental neglect of children's physical health was also neglect of their moral fortitude, and vice versa. The good health of the nation's future citizens was otherwise at risk. As such, parents needed to pay close attention to hygiene during infancy and childhood,

which philosophers and physicians agreed was crucial for physical and moral health. Rousseau, for example, recommended cold baths, loose clothes and exercise to help children grow tall, strong and well-proportioned (1773 [1762]: 54-5). Wollstonecraft, too, connected cleanliness, physical activity and morality (2005 [1792]: 45, 69, 95, 144, 160, 185, 190).

Maternal breast-feeding, which many physicians thought was the best foundation for strong children, was an important part of hygiene. There was an early modern push to promote breast-feeding among urban and genteel French women, who typically used wet-nurses (Fauve-Chamoux 1983: 7-8). Breastfeeding debates, like those surrounding cosmetics, condemned women for choosing artificial (wet-nursing) rather than natural (maternal breastfeeding). Rousseau is often credited with the rapid decline of wet-nursing across Europe, given his promotion of maternal breast-feeding that would instil manly strength (Sussman 1982: 4-9). But medical writers had long made similar claims. William Cadogan, for example, suggested that maternal nursing provided infants with "More Health, Beauty, Strength, and Spirits" to strengthen "a puny valetudinary race" (1748: 5). Eighteenth-century discussions about breastfeeding inscribed maternal feeling on women's bodies. Women who did not breastfeed their own children were castigated for vanity, feminine superstition, or selfish independence (Perry 1991: 222, 224). And yet, breastfeeding's 'naturalness' situated women within the world of brute animals, not the world of male reason (Perry 1991: 214; Schiebinger 1993: 395).

In England, women embraced the image of caring, breastfeeding mother, which fit with the ideals of beauty and fertility. The push towards maternal breastfeeding was very successful in England, where an estimated 67% of genteel mothers breastfed in the eighteenth century (Pollock 1983: 215). According to English writers, breastfeeding made wives more beautiful in the eyes of their husbands (Perry 1991: 208, 217). Wet-nursing continued unabated in France—even during the Revolution when the French nation was depicted as a

nursing mother, Marianne (Jacobus 1992; Lastinger 1997: 422; Morel 1976 *passim*; Sussman 1982: 6-7). French wet-nursing needs to be seen within the context of the strong role and legal standing of the paterfamilias in French society—even as the Revolutionary era opened new possibilities for family gender roles (Desan 2004; Hunt 1992; Verjus 2010). In both countries, men were in charge of deciding whether or not women breastfed (Lastinger 1997: 430-1; Perry 1991: 224), although it would be mothers' duty to provide that care, as in all fertility-related matters. There were significant costs attached to women's provision of infant care—as the British government recognized in 1771 when it ended a short-lived national experiment in paying women to look after foundlings (Perry 1991: 208). French urban families certainly depended on women's contributions to their businesses, making it preferable to have their children wet-nursed (Sussman 1982: 104). Even so, women's participation in the nation was fixed to their domestic role of child-rearing; framed as a moral duty, maternal breastfeeding became unpaid labor for their families and nation (Perry 1991: 208-9, 220).

Cleanliness, with its links to beauty, health and morality, was fundamental to mothering and state-building. Medical literature explained the importance of children's good hygiene for their long-term health. In *The Compleat Family Physician* (1781), Hugh Smythson argued that many of the early diseases of newborns came from a lack of cleanliness, even though it was "a principal ingredient in the composition of health and beauty" (6). Vandermonde provided a detailed guide for early life, covering crib choice, bathing, fresh air and exercise. He opposed swaddling, arguing that infants were trapped in their liquid excrements, making them cold in winter or burned their skin, which could cause further disorders (Vandermonde 1756 t. 2: 2, 13-8, 27). Swaddling irritated their bones and compressed their blood flow in the moment, but also caused long-term damage to muscles, ligaments and bones. From an early age, children needed to move around and to do exercise,

which developed their spirit and physical strength (Vandermonde 1756, t. 2: 16-8, 118). Conduct books advised on middle-class ideals of domestic and family cleanliness, while poor, urban mothers were considered filthy and uncaring (Falcini 2018: 188-9). Eighteenth-century children who ended up in parish care were trained in personal hygiene, so that they could became useful members of society (Falcini 2018: 192-3, 207-13). Children's personal hygiene revealed women's worth in society.

[Place Figure 10 near here.]

FIGURE 10: Eighteenth-century apparatus to straighten a child's back, with adjustable shoulder rings. Credit: Wellcome Collection, Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0)

Another hygienic responsibility of mothers was to prevent or fix their children's deformities, just as the parents who used Ross' bear-grease and the mothers in Riquet had done. An important part of eighteenth-century sociability was to present the body beautiful—male and female alike--in public spaces. This, then, is part of the "social skin" described by Morgan and Rushton; the wealthy could easily conceal the truth of their bodies (2005: 40-1). Badly-chosen childrearing practices might cause problems. *The Art of Preserving Beauty* suggested that childhood deformities, such as weak stomachs and feeble chests, were caused by poor modern choices. Other practices deformed children, too; for example, pulling on children's ears as punishment would stop the ears from laying neatly on the head (1789: 63, 161). Instruction in careful bodily deportment was important—and gendered. Feminine docility and politeness was conveyed through posture, singing or needlework. Girls were trained to be graceful, soft, modest and controlled (Ylivouri 2013: 175-6). But such performances required a normative body; visible disability was anti-social, ostensibly disruptive to polite interactions. Parents were enjoined to use artificial means, such as painful postural devices for children or steel stays (Figure 10), that improved their shapes. Such

technologies could correct deformities, removing barriers to the children's social success (Turner and Withey 2014: 777, 779-80, 784, 788). The technologies were not merely artificial enhancement, but a form of bodily maintenance. Here, too, agricultural metaphors were used. Youth, like nature, needed to be controlled; bodily machines helped to cultivate nature. Bodies needed constant care, just as nature benefited from weeding and planting, meaning that some artifice was acceptable to bring order to unruly nature (Schillace 2013: 120). Parents, especially mothers, needed to ensure their children's bodies—not just their behaviors—were sufficiently self-disciplined and suitably polite to advance in society.

Conclusion

Concerns about degeneration and empire building in eighteenth-century England and France meant that the duty of producing strong citizens and raising healthy families fell to women. The optimum sign of good health was the body beautiful, which women needed to cultivate carefully: promote fertility, prevent deformity, provide cleanliness, ensure morality. The apparent visibility of women's fertility and health (or the potentially easier concealment of any problems), when compared with men's, meant that beauty maintenance was interwoven throughout the female life-cycle. The healthy body reflected one's interior world; for those who knew the signs, morality became obvious on and through the body. Indeed, even if a woman did bear a child, her poor health—or her husband's—could be passed onto the new generation. The drive to ensure fertility began long before marriage and conception. Women needed to demonstrate beauty, health and morality to attract a good husband. Conception required vigilance. Those struggling to conceive needed self-control to return their bodies to a state of good health and after birth, mothers were responsible for their children's hygiene.

Beauty maintenance was more than skin deep, but an important tool for marriage opportunities and family success. Although the demands of creating a fecund body and

making beautiful babies were often oppressive, expertise in beauty and hygiene might also give women the ability to resist patriarchal demands through the control of their own and their family member's bodies. Resistance, however, was also circumscribed by class and race; only white middling sort and elite European women and their households could meet the required standards of cleanliness and morality that might accord them some control over their visible identity. Although physicians recognised that men often had fertility problems, too, men's problems were less visible and more difficult to treat—both physically and socially. A man who led a debauched and dissolute life did not just ruin his own body, but his family's prospects and national strength. Women increasingly were responsible for familial, even national, health. Fairy tales, conduct literature and medical treatises all agreed on standards of beauty, and the importance of women's external and internal beauty.

There were, of course, cultural differences between England and France. In France, beauty came from one's physique, while cosmetics were widely used and appreciated; the French were initially less bothered by the superficial changes, perhaps because identity was already so deeply embodied. In England, from early on, beauty was derived from a natural appearance and cleanliness. Cosmetics posed a problem for the English who believed real physical problems could be hidden, making it an issue of deceitfulness. The relationship between cleanliness and morality only began to emerge in the later part of the eighteenth century in France, tied to a growing concern with depopulation throughout the empire (and the moral duties of motherhood). This chapter situates the metropole within the empire to draw out the intersections of race, class and gender in discussions of fertility, which emphasized the seemingly existential threat posed by degeneration and depopulation. Not all fertility was desirable or natural, nor was all beauty equal. The acute concerns with beauty, morality and hygiene reflected an increasingly middling-sort construction of the nation.

Beauty and fertility were framed through Nature in both countries. Fertility had long been described in agricultural and natural terms, but these had particular resonance in the eighteenth century. Agricultural developments showed that nature could be controlled and, crucially, that careful breeding could create the best stock. This tied into depopulation concerns, pointing to the necessity of trying to create a strong population—and strong nation. It also suggested ways in which turning away from nature—ignoring the age of fertility or indulging in luxury—were creating an unnatural society. But with careful attention to better self-management, individuals (especially women) might avert such problems, not just for themselves, but for their families and their nation. Women had always provided domestic caregiving, but the growing concern with degeneration and nation-building was new, making it imperative that mothers be healthy and oversee child hygiene in order to create beautiful, strong babies. The success of women's families and nations were on their shoulders—whether stooping or straight.

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