

7 (67)

- 1a. A globo veteri
cum rerum faciem
traxissent superi,
mundique seriem
prudens explicuit
et texuit
Natura,
iam preconceperat
quod fuerat
factura.
- 2a. In hac pre ceteris
totius operis
Nature lucet opera.
tot munera
nulli favoris contulit,
sed extulit
hanc ultra cetera.
- 3a. Nature studio
longe venustata,
contendit lilio
rugis non crispata
frons nivea.
simplices siderea
luce micant ocelli.
- 4a. Ab utriusque luminis
confinio,
moderati libraminis
iudicio,
naris eminentia
producitur venuste
quadam temperantia;
nec nimis erigitur
nec premitur
iniuste.
- 1b. Que causas machine
mundane suscitans,
de nostra virgine
iam dudum cogitans,
plus hanc excoluit,
plus prebuit
honoris,
dans privilegium
et pretium
laboris.
- 2b. Et, que puellulis
avara singulis
solet partiri singula,
huic sedula
impendit copiosius
et plenius
forme munuscula.
- 3b. Omnes amantium
trahit in se visus,
spondens remedium
verecunda risus
lascivia.
arcus supercilia
discriminant gemelli.
- 4b. Allicit verbis dulcibus
et osculis
castigate tumentibus
labellulis,
roseo nectareus
odor infusus ori.
pariter eburneus
sedet ordo dentium
par nivium
candori.

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| <p>5a. Certant nivi, micant lene
pectus, mentum, colla, gene;
sed, ne candore nimio
evanescant in pallorem,
precastigat hunc candorem
rosam maritans lilio
prudentior Natura,
ut ex his fiat aptior
et gratior
mixtura.</p> | <p>5b. Rapit michi me Coronis
privilegiata donis
et Gratiarum flosculis.
nam Natura, dulcioris
alimenta dans erroris,
dum in stuporem populis
hanc omnibus ostendit,
in risu blando retia
Veneria
tetendit.</p> |
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- 1a. When the gods above extracted the shape of the world from the ancient mass, and Nature sagaciously unfolded and interwove the chain of the universe, she had already visualized what she had intended to create.
- 1b. As she set in motion the causes of the world's fabric, she had long been pondering my maiden, and she adorned her the more and gave her more distinction, presenting her as the preferment and reward of her toil.
- 2a. In her the work of Nature shines forth more brightly than in the rest of her entire labors. On no other did Nature bestow so many gifts of favor, but raised her above all else.
- 2b. And those dainty gifts of beauty which she usually bestows in miserly fashion on each and every maiden, she diligently imparted more lavishly and fully on her.
- 3a. The girl's snowy brow, lent boundless charm by Nature's zeal, rivals the lily and is unlined with wrinkles. Her ingenuous dear eyes shine with starry brightness.
- 3b. The modest playfulness of her smile attracts to itself all the eyes of her suitors, promising them deliverance. Twin delicate arches mark her eyebrows.
- 4a. From the vicinity of each eye with studied and controlled balance the line of her nose extends charmingly with a certain restraint. It neither juts out too sharply nor is unduly bulbous.
- 4b. The aroma of nectar breathed into her rosy mouth lends enticement to the sweet words and kisses from her dear lips, with their controlled pouting. The line of her teeth, like ivory, sits evenly, matching the whiteness of snow.
- 5a. Her breast, chin, neck, and cheeks vie with snow in their gentle glow. But so that they may not fade into pallor through excessive whiteness, Nature in her greater wisdom disciplines this whiteness by marrying the rose to the lily, so that the two may form a more suitable and pleasant compound.

- 5b. Coronis steals my heart from me, endowed as she is with the preferment of gifts and sweet blossoms of the Graces; for Nature, nurturing my waywardness more sweet, whilst flaunting her before all folks to astound them, has stretched out her love nets in that charming smile.

THIS POEM is found in Heidelberg 357, London Arundel 384, and Florence Laur. Plut. 29.1 (F) (in part), as well as in B.

The poet (probably Peter of Blois; see Introduction, section 2) draws the inspiration for his composition from contemporary philosophical writing. Of particular significance is Bernard Silvestris' *Cosmographia* (ed. Dronke, trans. Wetherbee; useful analyses in Wetherbee, *Platonism and Poetry*, and in Stock, *Myth and Science*). In Bernard's poem "Nature pleads that something more beautiful be made of the primal chaos" (Wetherbee). Like Ovid in his *Metamorphoses*, Bernard depicts a creation not *ex nihilo* as in Genesis but *a globo veteri*. Noys, the divine Wisdom personified in the *Cosmographia*, describes Nature as *uteri mei beata fecunditas*, which "oversees the processes of generation and renewal in the universe" (Wetherbee). This comes close to her role in the first stanza of this poem. The *Cosmographia* was published probably in the 1140s (according to Stock); Peter of Blois, born ca. 1135, could have been composing his amatory poetry within twenty years of its publication. A second work reflecting close similarities with this poem is Gerald of Wales' *De Mundi Creatione* (ed. Brewer), as the comments below indicate. Thirdly, though it would be hazardous to suggest direct influence from Alan of Lille's *De Planctu Naturae* (ed. Häring, trans. Sheridan) or his *Anticlaudianus* (ed. Bossuat, trans. Sheridan), it is notable that the first of these poems projects Nature as God's deputy and the source of moral law, and the second depicts Nature's design of creating the perfect man—as, here, she creates Coronis—as the crowning glory of her work. Hence the awareness of the existence of these philosophical works clarifies the backdrop of intellectual ideas against which this poem can be read.

- 1a. **globo**: For the sense of "mass" see Virgil G. 1.473. Munari ("Mediaevalia I–II," 288) rightly cites Bernard Silvestris' *Cosmographia: Megacosmos* 1.1ff: *congeries informis adhuc, cum silva teneret, / sub veteri confusa globo primordia rerum / visa Deo Natura queri. . . .*
superi: The non-Christian flavor of the myth of creation is reinforced by the Classical aura of the plurality of gods.
mundique seriem: In his excellent edition of the Arundel manuscript, in which this poem appears, McDonough prints *mundi que seriem / prudens explicuit / et texuit, / Natura iam preconceperat. . . .*

- 1b. **causas machine mundane**: Cf. Prudentius *Hamart.* 247ff., *nec mirum, si membra orbis concussa rotantur, / si vitiis agitata suis mundana laborat / machina*. This itself is perhaps a reminiscence of Lucretius 5.96, *moles et machina mundi*.
dans privilegium: McDonough well compares Bernard Silvestris' *Cosmographia: Microcosmos* 3.1, where Noys in promising man a unique endowment speaks of *quodam quasi dignitatis privilegio et singularitate*.
- 2a. **extulit hanc super cetera**: The possible reminiscence of Paul (Phil. 2:9, *nomen quod est super omne nomen*) suggests a divine status for the lady.
- 2b. **puellulis**: "Mere maidens," in contrast to the excellence of his favorite.
- 3–5. The description of the girl's beauty is a conventional feature paralleled in many of these lyrics. Systematic analysis of the physiognomy of the loved one is a feature of the instruction offered by the rhetorical manuals of the period. Matthew of Vendôme's *Ars Versificatoria* 1.56ff. (ca. 1175) (ed. Munari, trans. Galyon) gives two formal examples of how to describe women's beauty. Geoffrey of Vinsauf's *Poetria Nova* (ca. 1200) (ed. Faral, trans. Nims), in retailing such details (554ff.), calls the practice *res quasi trita / et vetus*. Such close descriptions of female beauty are found as early as Maximian *Elegies* 1.93 in the sixth century, and in less concentrated form earlier in the Classical poets. See Brewer, "The Ideal of Feminine Beauty"; and Häring, "Die Gedichte und Mysterienspiele des Hilarius von Orléans."
- 3a. **crispata**: Cf. Persius 3.87.
siderea luce: The phrase is borrowed from Ovid *Met.* 4.169.
- 3b. **omnes . . . visus**: Cf. 9.3, *omnes in se trahit visus*.
verecunda risus lascivia: In this oxymoron too the parallel with 9.3 is manifest, prompting the suggestion of identical authorship. See further stanza 4b below.
arcus . . . gemelli: McDonough well compares Gerald of Wales' *De mundi creatione* 1.347 throughout this description: *prodit in arcum / forma supercilii . . . naris naturae vultum supereminet arte, / nec trahit hanc modicam, nec nimis in vitium*.
- 4a. **naris eminentia . . . quadam temperantia**: See the previous note. Matthew of Vendôme (1.56) likewise defines the ideal nose as neither too big nor too small. In his allegiance to this rhetorical theory our poet comes perilously close to bathos.

- 4b. **castigate tumentibus labellulis**: The correspondence with 9.3, *labia Veneria tumentia*, cannot be fortuitous. Maximian (see note at 3–5 above) has *modicumque tumentia labra*.
roseo ori: Cf. Ovid *Met.* 7.705, *roseo spectabilis ore*; Virgil *Aen.* 9.5, *roseo Thaumantius ore*.
nectareus odor . . . eburneus ordo: Gerald of Wales (see 3b above) has *nectaris odor . . . eburneus ordo*.
- 5a. **nivi**: Ablative, = CL *nive*. Cf. 17.15, *tamquam massa nivea gula candescebat*. The throat is singled out for separate treatment in Matthew of Vendôme's exempla (see notes for stanzas 3–5 above).
precastigat: First in ML.
rosam maritans lilio: See comments at 4.2.
- 5b. **rapit michi me**: Cf. 15.4 (and Horace *Carm.* 4.13.20; also CB 104.2.1, *michi me subripuit*).
me Coronis: This is the superior reading in the Arundel manuscript; B has *nectar diis*. The literary pseudonym, which reappears in 12.3a, is adopted from Ovid *Met.* 2.542. The girl in Ovid was loved by Apollo; when she was unfaithful to him, she was delated to him by a bird and, though pregnant, was transfixed by the god's arrow. The parallel is hardly apposite here, though Coronis in no. 12 is a girl who yields.
privilegiata: The verb is a ML creation from *privilegium*.
dulcioris . . . erroris: The "sweeter sin" is the spokesman's, not the girl's.
in risu blando . . . retia Veneria tetendit: The parallel with 9.3, *blandi risus . . . labia Veneris*, is again close. Cf. Ovid *Her.* 20.45ff., *retia . . . quae tetendit Amor*.

8 (68)

1. Saturni sidus lividum, Mercurio micante,
 fugatur ab Apolline risum Iovis nudante;
 (iam) redit ab exilio ver coma rutilante.
2. Cantu nemus avium
 lascive canentium
 suave delinitur,
 fronde redimitur;
 vernant spine floribus
 micantibus,
 signantibus
 Venerem, quia spina pungit, flos blanditur.