The Heraldic Shield and the Woman's Body in the *Blasons Anatomiques du corps féminin* (1543)

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Abstract

In the French Renaissance, the term 'anatomical blason' (*blason anatomique*) designated a highly descriptive love poem praising a single part of a woman's body, while in heraldry, the noun 'blason' defined the ensemble of ornamental components constituting the shield. Just as the French verb *blasonner* meant to describe and to interpret the shield's material and symbolic parts, so could this verb be used in amatory poetry to signify the act of lauding the details of the beloved's anatomical parts. This study examines the structural analogies between heraldic shield and the anatomical blason, addressing how the technical terms defining the shield's components such as partitions, points, charges, tinctures, and the achievement could be given analogous expressions in the anatomical love poetry.

Keywords

anatomy – blason – heraldry – shield – projection – *picta poesis*

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For Liana De Girolami Cheney

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In 1535, the French poet Clément Marot, suspected of aiding the Protestant cause, fled persecution in France and took refuge at the Court of Ferrara. In this rarefied atmosphere he initiated a public challenge of a poetic nature. Having composed his epigram *Beau Tetin* (usually referred to as the 'blason on the *Beautiful Breast*'), he invited his fellow French poets to emulate his work in a poetic competition (Fig. 1).¹ He sent his epigram to the French court, and according to his *épître* 'A ceulx qui, après, l'Epigramme du beau Tetin, en feirent d'autres' (To those who after the epigram on the 'beau Tetin', composed others), his challenge was highly successful.² In Ferrara, Marot received blasons on 'the Blond Head of Hair' ('la Chevelure blonde'), 'the Heart' ('le cueur'), 'the round Thigh' ('la Cuisse ronde'), 'the Hand' ('la Main'), 'a beautiful eye skillfully deciphered' ('un bel œil déchiffré doctement'), 'a Mind' ('un Esprit'), 'The Mouth' ('La Bouche'), 'a Tear' ('une larme'), 'the Ear' ('l'Oreille'), and 'an Eyebrow of beauty non pareil' ('un Sourcil de beauté non pareille').³ It is very probable that the authors of these blasons were Jean de Vauzelles, Albert le Grand, Jacques Le Lieur, Claude Chappuys, Antoine Héroët, Lancelot de Carle, Victor Brodeau, and Maurice Scève.⁴ Underlining the spirit of competition, Marot wrote: 'But the Eyebrow whose beauty so well sung/ So much satisfied the Court/ That the Princess to its author/ Awarded for this occasion the Laurel Crown'.⁵ The laureate to whom Marot refers is Maurice Scève, and the Princess is Renée de France, the wife of Ercole II d'Esté, Duke of Ferrara. This couple offered a safe haven to those who found themselves 'en rupture de ban' and orchestrated a court that was 'a beacon of European culture' ('un phare de la culture européenne').⁶ Collected and printed in 1536, these epigrams enjoyed enormous success up to 1568–1572, first as an annex to the *Hecatophile* of Leone Battista Alberti with a collection called les *Fleurs de poésie françoise*,⁷ then, in 1543, as an independent edition 'Pour Charles Langelier' in Paris. Most poems were preceded and illustrated by a woodblock *pictura* showing the body part praised by the author. This edition was augmented by a work titled *Contre-*

1 Gorris, 'Un franzese numinato Clemente', 39–364.

2 Marot, in Rabelais, *Oeuvres complètes*, 1:418–421.

3 Marot, in Rabelais, *Oeuvres complètes*, 1: 419.

4 Saunders, *The Sixteenth-Century Blason Poétique*, 310–326. Henceforth references to this work will be abbreviated as *BP*.

5 'Mais du Sourcil la beauté bien chantée/ A tellement nostre Court contentée,/ Qu'à son Auteur nostre Princesse donne/ Pour ceste foy de Laurier la Couronne'. Marot, in Rabelais, *Oeuvres complètes*, 1:419, vv. 21–24.

6 Gorris, 'Un franzese numinato Clemente', 340.

7 *Hecatophile*.

blasons de la beauté des membres du corps humain by Charles de La Hueterie⁸ and is directly opposed to the *Blasons anatomiques* since its goal was to vilify the flesh and praise the spirit. Independently from La Hueterie and with completely different intentions, Marot sent out another invitation to his French colleagues for a second poetic challenge, this time to imitate him in writing anatomical poems based on a new and opposite model. This consisted of systematically reversing the expressions for beauty in the *Beau Tétin* to descriptions of ugliness in the *Laid Tétin*.⁹ Marot wished to display his versatility and ingenuity. So, in the blason on the 'Ugly Breast' ('Du Laid Tetin'), what was once the breast's function to offer the infant intimacy and nutrition (v. 32) now becomes more suitable food for Lucifer's child in Hell: 'Tetin propre pour en Enfer/ Nourrir l'Enfant de Lucifer'.¹⁰ In contrast, La Hueterie's intent in his *Contreblasons* was to morally excoriate the *Blasons anatomiques* with the 'satirical voice of a preacher'.¹¹

Marot was not completely original in his poem on the breast or in his criteria of beauty. In the *Roman de la rose*, Guillaume de Lorris's description of Dame Oyseuse singled out the breast's whiteness, while the thirteenth-century *Sault d'amours* its roundness and whiteness, and the fourteenth-century *La lande dorée que le vicomte d'Aunoy fist* its smoothness. Gratien du Pont in his *Controverses des sexes masculin et féminin* (1534) wrote a poem on the ideal physical features of the female body that praised firmness and separation between the breasts (BP, 54). Devoting an entire poem to the breast is not without precedent, since we find this in Roger de Collerye's 'Petit tetin mamelle ronde' (1536, BP, 56). Nor is it unique to the French anatomical blasons to deploy a head-to-foot order in describing the human anatomy, since we find this in Geoffrey de Vinsauf's *Poetria nova* (1210). Almost immediately the *Poetria* became one of the standard textbooks of rhetoric in England and was later incorporated into pedagogical programs on the Continent.¹² The originality of Marot and the anatomical blasonneurs has been precisely defined by Saunders, who observes that

The great difference between the *blasons anatomiques* and their predecessors ... is that the blasons are love poems, and this basic fact necessarily

8 *Sensuivent les Blasons anatomiques du corps féminin*.

9 Marot, in Rabelais, *Oeuvres complètes*, 1:418–421.

10 Marot, in Rabelais, *Oeuvres complètes*, 1:455, vv. 19–20.

11 *Anatomie d'une anatomie: Nouvelles recherches sur les Blasons anatomiques du corps féminin*, 33. This will be my edition of reference, henceforth abbreviated BA.

12 Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages*, 170–175; Gallo, 'The Grammar of Rhetoric', 68–84. See also Roulon, 'Le sonnet 130 de Shakespeare'.

alters the entire emphasis of the way in which this terminology is used ... He is no longer evoking 'the breast' in general terms, but very specifically (or supposedly, at least) the breast of his mistress as seen through the directly involved eyes of the poet-lover.

BP, 67

Among the first definitions of the blason by Thomas Sébillet, Pierre Delaudun Daigaliers, and Claude de Boissière,¹³ the one by Sébillet is the most complete. In effect it takes into account the *Beau Tetin* of Marot and the origins of the heraldic genre:

The Blason is a perpetual praise or continuous vituperation of what one proposes to blasonner ... For as much as one blasons the ugly as well as the beautiful, and the bad as well the good; witness Marot in his Blasons of the beautiful and the ugly Breast ... And as the painter and the poet are germane cousins, by the rule: *Pictoribus atque Poëtis, etc.* I only have to push the similarity a little to believe that the Blason of Colors on heraldic arms, had been the origin of painting our Blason in poetry.¹⁴

One can add to this definition that the *Blasons anatomiques* are characterized by continuous praise in the form of a litany on a part of the female body usually preceded by a *pictura*. This body part is the object of a combined description and subjective interpretation by the poet-lover.¹⁵ On the historical level, just as the herald blasons or describes the colors, partitions, and symbols following the rules of heraldic science¹⁶ so does the blasonneur deploy an epigram to describe and praise a part of the woman's body.

13 *L'Art poetique françois de Pierre Delaudun Daigaliers*, 72–73; Boissière, *Art poétique reduict et abrege en singulier ordre & souveraine methode* ... 1554.

14 'Le Blason est une perpetuelle louange ou continu vitupere de ce qu'on s'est proposé blasonner ... Car autant bien se blasonne le laid comme le beau, & le mauvais comme le bon: tesmoin Marot en ses Blasons du beau et du laid Tetin ... Et comme le paintre & le Poète sont cousins germains, par la regle: *Pictoribus atque Poëtis, etc.* me faudroit peu pousser pour croire que le blason des couleurs aux Armoires, nous eut este origine de peindre en Poésie nostre Blason'. *Art poétique françois*, fols. 65^v–66^r.

15 Saulnier, *Maurice Scève*, 1:72–87. See also Saunders, 'La Beauté que femme doit avoir'. Recently concerning blason and shield, see Berthon 'L'Invention du blason', 136–137.

16 Pastoureau, *Traité d'Héraldique*, 62–63. Also D'Haucourt and Durivault, *Le Blason*, 24–25; and Brault, *Early Blazon*, who states: 'By the end of the thirteenth century, the language of heraldry had become relatively fixed and was to remain largely unchanged for the next two centuries' (3).

Two of Scève's blasons allow us to make a connection between the heraldic shield and the anatomical blason or, in other words, to bring out the main abstract relationship between the two. In the last two lines of the *Blason du Front*, the blasonneur says:

O forehead, you are the shield awaiting its distinctions,
Where my life is, and my death, open to all.¹⁷

BA, 48, vv. 17–18

In heraldic terminology, the *table d'attente* is a shield that has no charges, no partitions, no figures that appear ready to receive the enamel coating of its field and the signs and symbols of its arms.¹⁸ From another perspective, the term designates the shield of the aspirant who has not yet composed his arms. This shield is symbolized by a surface of gold or silver, whereas white indicates an absence or a space to be filled. In an analogy with the anatomical blasons, one can imagine that the ornamental frame at the head of the epigram is a white space that awaits receiving an image of the woman's forehead. This image will then be displayed by and in the *pictura* as well as by the vivid metaphors of the accompanying epigram right below. One could say also that the *pictura* of the part of the woman's body is a kind of anatomical mannequin animated and colored by the reactions of the poet-lover.

In Scève's *Blason on the Neck* (*Blason de la gorge*), the poet-lover fills the *table d'attente* with symbols, figures, and colors that blason, in heraldic terms, the upper part of the woman's body—the neck, the chest, and the higher parts of the stomach. Speaking to the neck, he uses conceits as expressions of praise that are played out on/with a chessboard:

You widen into a white stomach,
Which is a chessboard that checkmates
Not only men but the gods,
Who above you play with you with their beautiful eyes.
Neck that serves as a shield for my lady,
By which Love several times was vanquished,
For no one knows how to draw his arrow so strong and stiff
That he has moved her cold will.¹⁹

BA, 73, vv. 23–30

17 'O front, tu es une table d'attente/ OÙ ma vie est, & ma mort très patente.'

18 De Foras, *Le Blason*, 410: 'on appelle ainsi des écus d'un seul esmail soit couleur, soit metal, sans être remplis ny chargés, d'aucune figure'.

19 'Tu t'élargis en un blanc estomac,/ Qu'est l'échiquier, qui fait échec et mact/ Non seule-

The eyes of the blasonneur-lover take a descending movement, going from the neck to the chest and the stomach on which he projects the image of a body-as-shield decorated with chessboard. From this quotation flow several heraldic associations: the shield of combat charged with a chequy partition,²⁰ the battle of love in *amour courtois*, the body of the woman as the field of battle, the strategy and tactics of lover and beloved suggested by the game of chess, and finally, the chessboard, that for this collection of poems serves as a visual symbol for the cutting up of the body.²¹ The board is divided into boxes or semi-autonomous squares, kinds of compartments with sharp angles that, taken symbolically, suggests a dissection of the woman's body in the work as a whole. Scève's two blasons suggest a poetics of the woman's body based on the heraldic shield and its fundamental structures such as the *table d'attente*, the partitions, the charges, the colors, and the factors inherent to combat, competition, and *amour courtois*.

The most evident sign bringing together the heraldic shield with the anatomical blason resides in the fact that the zones of the *écu*, called *points*, follow a *cap en pied* order that are named by words designating parts of the body. In French they are 'le chef' (the head), 'le flanc dextre' (the right flank), 'le flanc senestre' (the left flank), 'le coeur' (the heart), 'le nombril' (the navel), and finally 'la pointe' or 'pié' (the foot).²² But the most striking similarity between the zones of the shield and the *mise-en-page* of the body parts of the woman is that they are deployed in divisions, partitions, and compartments. Let us first examine the shield.

The four fundamental partitions of the shield bear names that correspond to the four basic types of strikes of the sword by a knight against his adversary. These partitions are described from the knight's perspective holding up his shield and looking outward, so that for the onlooker or reader, his left is our right. The blows delivered by the knight can be *parti* (from high to low), *coupé* (horizontal), *taillé* (diagonal, descending from the left of the *chef* towards the

ment les hommes, mais les dieux,/ Qui dessus toi jouent de leurs beaux yeux./ Gorge qui sert à ma dame d'écu,/ Par qui Amour plusieurs fois fut vaincu,/ Car onc ne sut tirer tant fort et roide/ Qu'il l'ait mué de sa volonté froide,/ Pour non pouvoir pénétrer jusqu'au coeur'.

20 According to Pastoureau, *Traité d'héraldique*, 363, the word *échiqueté* designates a 'partition formed by horizontal and vertical lines cut at right angles and constituting a chess or checkerboard of alternated enamels'.

21 On this blason, see Vickers, 'Members Only'. See also Clément and Larue, *La Femme coupée en morceaux*.

22 Pastoureau, *Traité d'héraldique*, 320. See also Slater, *The Complete Book of Heraldry*, 82; and D'Harcourt and Durivault, *Le Blason*, 46.

right angle of the *pointe*), and *tranché* (diagonal, descending from the right angle of the *chef* towards the left angle of the *pointe*).²³ One can multiply these fundamental partitions by two, which gives a shield of four rectangular quarters. One quarter can be further sectioned into *reparti*, *recoupé*, *retaillé*, *retranché*. The idea of compartments can be extended by analogy into isolated metonymies of the body represented on the shield, but in very stylized ways: the heart in the form of a tear, eyes one on top of the other, a hand in fist position, an arm springing out from the side of the shield, and busts of the bodily unit consisting of higher chest, neck, and head.²⁴

In the *Blasons anatomiques*, one finds that the ornamental frame containing the image of the body part is a kind of compartment. As each part of the body is blazoned separately, the part appears isolated and enclosed. In Marot's *Beau Tetin*, the part itself is reduced to the minimum, the head of the woman is effaced, and only the torso and the upper arms remain, while the rest of the body is severed by the lower border of the frame. In the epigrams, the rhyme scheme, termed *plate* or *suivie* (AA, BB, CC, DD, etc.), is a succession of semi-autonomous units of meaning in which each new switch of the lover's perception is parceled out two verses at a time. For example, Antoine Héroët in his *Blason of The Eye* (*Blason de l'Oeil*) begins his litany with the address as follows. (I have put in parenthesis the last French word of each line to bring out the rhyme.)

Eye, not an eye, but a golden sun. (*doré*)
 Eye, as God, honored with my eyes. (*honoré*)
 Eye that with its firm support and sweep (*taille*)
 Would surpass ten years the duration of a battle. (*bataille*)
 Eye depriving me of the look that it owes me (*doit*)
 Seeing me better than if it were really looking at me. (*regardoit*)²⁵

BA, 50, vv. 1–6

From one blason to another there is only discontinued juxtaposition, for the head-to-foot order is not integrated by transitions or body ligaments. Finally, each epigram, deployed vertically under its framed *pictura*, creates a typographical block that transforms the body part into a long, impersonal rectangle.

23 D'Harcourt and Durivault, *Le Blason*, 46–48; Fox-Davies, *A Complete Guide to Heraldry*, 82.

24 D'Harcourt and Durivault, *Le Blason*, 68.

25 'Œil, non pas œil, mais un soleil doré/ Œil, comme Dieu, de mes yeux honoré./ Œil qui ferait de son assiette et taille/ Durer dix ans encore une bataille./ Œil me privant du regard qu'il me doit,/ Me voyant mieux que s'il me regardoit'.

The partitions of a shield delimit the zones of its field, and the figures or motifs on the field are called *charges*. According to the historian J.P. Brooke-Little, 'anything placed on the field is a charge; thus a shield with three lions on it is said to be charged with three lions, each lion being a separate charge'.²⁶ The principal functions of the charges are to identify the owner of the shield, to singularize his/her traits, the family or group, and to symbolize, exhibit, and vaunt his/her attributes, distinctions, and honors. When Scève projects an *écu* on the image of the woman's neck decorated with a chessboard, he has in effect 'charged' the woodblock illustration. By conceiving the body part image in its frame as a kind of mannequin ready to receive the poet-lover's poetic description and praise in the epigram, he suggests a model for the composition of charges in the anatomical blasons. Like the unlimited charges of the heraldic shield, the repertoire of metaphors in the anatomical blasons presents an open field of choices. But in following Scève and by analogy the heraldic shield, one can arrive at three important characteristics of charges in the anatomical blasons: (1) the *éclat* or vividness of the images projected on the *pictura*-mannequin (relations of colors, forms, lines, and contours); (2) the signature of the distinctive style of the blasonneur in his epigram that in heraldry corresponds to the symbolism of the distinctive attributes of the titular painted on his/her *écu*; and (3) the symbolism of the charge that lends to the body part of the woman other levels of meaning as we have seen in the *Blason de la gorge*. Let us examine this *Blason de la gorge* in the light of these three traits.

In regard to the vividness of the charge, the verbal image projected on the beloved's neck is a chequy shield that attracts our eyes by the geometry of its squares that can be covered alternatively with a metal or a color, properly speaking. The history of heraldry bears witness to several variations of this luminous contrast, since we see chequy shields of gold and azur, gold and gules, azur and silver, silver and gules, silver and sable, or gold and sable.²⁷ In the *Blason de la gorge*, the colors are even more striking since they illuminate with wit and praise a vignette of a battle between the lover pursuing the woman and the beloved who aggressively wards off her pursuer and brings swift victory over her adversaries. One might say that by turning the tables and winning checkmate and match ('echec et mact', *BA*, 73, v. 25), she has converted defense into offense. Without doubt, the signature of the blasonneur-poet is his mannerist style²⁸ that turns a body part into an artificial object such as an *objet-d'art*,

26 Brooke-Little, *An Heraldic Alphabet*, 19.

27 *Blason des Armoires*, online.

28 See Mathieu-Castellani, *Anthologie de la poésie amoureuse*, 51: 'From the world the mannerist [writer] receives only flashes, and if he tends to magnify every detail to the detri-

work of sculpture or architecture: the neck is a 'pilier' (a 'pillar', v. 9), an 'autel' ('altar', v. 13), an 'échiquier' ('chess board', v. 24), an 'écu' ('shield', v. 27), a 'pupitre' ('lectern', v. 33), and a 'un armoire sacré' ('holy reliquary', v. 37). The woman's neck as 'pilier' reminds us of Parmigianino's *Madonna dal Collo Lungo* (c. 1535, Pitti Gallery, Florence) with elongated features, not only the neck but also the arms, fingers, and legs, with an outsized column standing behind her left shoulder. As for the symbolism in the *Blason de la gorge*, the chequy shield, sign of an intellectual battle, is a nodal point of tensions principally because the poet-lover attempts to exercise his powers of ingenuity and praise to seduce the woman, only to undergo checkmate and match.

However, one finds an important difference between the charges in the heraldic shield and those of the anatomical blasons. The shield gives us a tableau of charges more or less frozen and stable as to their kind, form, and position. But in the epigrams of the blasons, the reader must follow a succession of images of the illustrated body part line after line, each transforming the perception of some originally stable referent. As we have seen in Scève's *Blason de la gorge*, the verbal figures of the neck constantly unfold into new metaphors such as a pillar, shield, chessboard, altar, reliquary, and lectern. From an optical perspective, this phenomenon is similar to what heraldry terms the *le roll d'armes*, used for record-keeping and display. The roll, which could be an illuminated document,²⁹ deploys a collection of coats of arms, either vertically or horizontally, each shield accompanied by the name of the person bearing the arms. One of the most important of these is the *Armorial Le Breton*, a collection of armorial components and shields from the thirteenth century to the fifteenth.³⁰ In *Feuillet 5* of the *Armorial*, one finds twenty *écus* drawn and painted on parchment by anonymous heralds. They represent the arms of Christ, of Pope Calixte, diverse European sovereigns, and peers of France. What is the relationship between such *rolls d'armes* and the anatomical blasons? Just as the unrolling in constant variation of the shields depicts the particular attributes of the *titulaires*, so the epigram's continually changing metaphors projected on the *pictura* constantly reconfigure a woman's body-as-shield.

As I have already noted, the charges have the function of representing the distinctions of the *titulaire*. The notion of ownership is thereby claimed, giving

ment of the work as a whole, it is because the visual field is singularly narrowed'. See also the concepts of 'intellectual and visual tension' as a mannerist trait in Cheney, 'Bronzino's *Pygmalion and Galatea*', 500; and Giordano, 'Bronzino's Art of Emblazoning', on part/whole relations, 340–341.

29 Slater, *The Complete Book of Heraldry*, 36.

30 *Armorial Le Breton*, online.

the shield a quasi-legal status that often confirms the proof of hereditary rights linked together by the chain of family bodies.³¹ But in the *Blasons anatomiques*, one may ask who is the possessor of the woman's body. Sometimes the body feature praised is related to the woman as a whole, such as is found in Vauzelles's *Blason des cheveux*, where the head of hair is attributed to a 'belle creature' (beautiful creature, *BA*, 45, v. 58). However, in certain other poems, great powers are attributed to the body part itself or to something contiguous with its anatomy and physiology such as we find in Scève's *Blason de la larme* (*Blason on the Tear*). Not only can it appease the gods but it can also 'prolong the term of life' ('prolonger le terme de la vie', *BA*, 53, v. 23; v. 29). But the *Blasons anatomiques* strongly imply a competition of poets who vie with one another to produce the most striking work. The legendary status of the *Concours des blasons* to which Marot attests where Renée de France awards the poetic laurel to Scève gives primacy of ownership to the poets. They gain in prestige, reputation, and accompanying material rewards. But that is not their only or sole claim to ownership. It is the poet-blasonneur's power to conceive the beauty of the woman and complete his creation. His main 'charge' is one that is not directly seen in the concrete sense but is present everywhere, viz., to become another Pygmalion who invents, animates, and manipulates a fragmented being of whom he is the owner and beneficiary.

In examining the relationships between heraldry and the anatomical blason, it is important to take into account the role of colors. According to Pastoureau, the three indispensable elements of the coat of arms are the field, one or several figures, and two or several colors.³² According to traditions and rules, colors were divided into two groups: metals (gold and silver) and tinctures (*gules*-red, *azur*-blue, *vert*-green, *sable*-black, *pourpre*-purple).³³ There was a restriction called the law of tinctures that prohibited metal from being placed on a metal or color on a color.³⁴ No doubt this was a requirement to avoid confusion in the *mêlée* of battle. If the field were red, a lion could only be gold or silver. It could not be blue, black, green, or purple. Inversely, if the field were gold, the lion could be red, blue, sable, and so on but not silver. There was another restric-

31 Mathieu, *Le Système héraldique français*, 13; 'certain characteristics distinguish clearly the coats of arms of the Middle-Ages from pre-existing emblems. Serving most often as distinctive signs of families, to groups of persons united by ties of blood, they are generally hereditary'. Mathieu later explains: 'Simply associated with individuals at their origin, coats of arms became for the most part, family emblems hereditary in nature from the second half of the twelfth century' (97).

32 Pastoureau, *Traité d'héraldique*, 318.

33 Slater, *The Complete Book of Heraldry*, 72.

34 Fox-Davies, *A Complete Guide to Heraldry*, 67.

tion involving two groups of colors, the first being white and yellow, the second red, blue, black, and green. It was prohibited to juxtapose or superimpose two colors of the same group. Pastoureau notes that this prescription was widely respected and constituted the main rule of syntax of the shield's interior.³⁵

Since the anatomical blasons are generally printed on a page of black print and white background, they would lack the presence of the eye-catching luminosity of red, blue, yellow, or green. However, this fact would not deprive them of the ability to express vivid colors through poetry, since heraldry itself, by the practice of blazoning (the formal description of the elements of coats of arms), made overwhelming use of the verbal and, specifically, the written medium. As a practical matter, several thousand arms of the medieval period were only known verbally by 'the blazoned description' and did not need to be represented by an image as such, whether painted, drawn, or engraved.³⁶ Furthermore, by virtue of the fact that such descriptions did not require mention of nuance or tonality but simply the names of the tinctures and metals, then color is largely an abstract, intellectual, or conceptual notion.³⁷

About 80 percent of armorial bearings from the medieval to the early modern period are found on documents or monuments, and when heraldic colors could not be used, systems of hatchings, dots, or checkered patterns came to represent specific colors. From the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries in France, England, Switzerland, and Germany, theoreticians of blazoning and arms used erudite systems to represent colors by planets, precious stones, letters, or virtues.³⁸ Hatchments and checkered designs may have been used on seals for the same purpose, but it is also known that they were employed to break up the monotony of large uniform surfaces and to distinguish the field or fields by the contrast of their own designs.³⁹

The aforementioned points show that heraldic colors were as a matter of practice frequently represented through verbal description, hatchments, or symbols, so there is no break with heraldic traditions of representing color in the anatomical blasons through poetry. Similar to heraldic blazoning, the written text of the blason uses the names of colors and thereby stimulates readers' imagination to project them onto the body part mannequin in the framed illustration. In fact, as Saunders has shown, there is a clear lineage from the mid-fifteenth century onwards that unites heraldry, color, and the

35 Pastoureau, *Traité d'héraldique*, 318.

36 Pastoureau, *Traité d'héraldique*, 315.

37 Pastoureau, *Traité d'héraldique*, 319–320.

38 Pastoureau, *Traité d'héraldique*, 111–112; Fox-Davies, *A Complete Guide to Heraldry*, 60–61.

39 Pastoureau, *Traité d'héraldique*, 111.

anatomical blason. Sicile, the *Hérault d'armes* of Alfonso of Aragon, authored the hugely popular *Le blason des couleurs en armes* that concentrated on each of the basic colors of heraldry, their virtues, symbolism, and associations with precious stones and days of the week. Frequently accompanying this work was the anonymous *Second traité du blason des couleurs en général et especial*, which greatly widens Sicile's exclusively heraldic study by treating colors as such in many different contexts and offering a chapter on women's dress that served as the basis for Olivier de la Marche's *Parement des dames*. This work is done in verse with illustrations in miniature that analyze individual women's garments from head to foot with their color symbolism, such as black slippers signifying 'simplicité' (*BP*, 21–23). Thus the *Parement des dames* looks back to heraldry and forward to the anatomical blasons by virtue of its combination of illustration and verse bringing together color symbolism and poetry with women's dress, which is contiguous with the body (*BP*, 24).

Common to heraldry and the anatomical blasons are the acts of displaying, vaunting, and conferring distinction upon the *titulaire*, and color is one of the most dramatic means of producing these effects by magnetizing the eyes. A useful way of reading color in the anatomical blasons is to return to visualizing the woman's body in relation to the main divisions of the shield. Just as the anatomical blasons show a head-to-foot progression, so does the heraldic shield have a bodily order of vertical positions from chief (head) point to honor point then to the heart and navel points and ending with base points. In the blasons, colors are suggested by the *picturae* of body features or figuratively through an image in the epigram sometimes emblematic. We begin our description of color in the anatomical blasons with the equivalent of the chief point: Vauzelles's *Blason on the hair*. Reminiscent of heraldry, he sees the hair as 'honoring' ('honorer', *BA*, 43, v. 11) the Lady by decorating her head ('chef', *BA*, 44, v. 11) and with dramatic appeal asks the reader/onlooker to admire its 'color' ('couleur', *BA*, 44, vv. 16–17). It is not 'fine gold' ('or fin', *BA*, 44, vv. 15–16) but better, a divine color ('couleur divine', *BA*, 44, v. 17) that gleams and illuminates with a varied and diaphanous clarity that cannot be any aspect of a profane gaze: 'Qui luit en eux, et qui les illumine/ D'une clarté diverse et dyaphane,/ Qui n'appartient à un regard prophane' (*BA*, 44, vv. 18–20). As for the emblematic image, we read that when the long, naturally curly strands separate, they disperse and scatter, configuring a 'milky way' ('une voie lactée', *BA*, 44, v. 19).

Below the chief point and near to the honor point is Scève's rising sun of the forehead ('là se lève le Soleil', *BA*, 48, v. 10), and this is followed by his *Blason du sourcil* that praises the ebony eyelash: 'Sourcil tractif en voûte fléchissant/ Trop plus qu'ébène, ou jayet noircissant' (*BA*, 48, vv. 1–2). Dense in information like the shield's colored symbols, we have at once Cupid's bow and arrow,

the arch of architecture expanding into the arc of the celestial vault, the hardness of jet reflecting the woman's beauty and cruelty, and the state of perpetual tautness and foreboding conveyed by the present participles of 'bending' and 'blackening' that structure the *rime suivie*. In the same area of the honor point falls the tear drop, a symbol used in heraldry and also in Scève's *Blason de la larme*, which is colored 'argentine' (BA, 52, v. 1) and shaped like a small pearl ('une petite perle', BA, 52, v. 5). At roughly the same level as the heart point is Marot's *Beau Tetin*, whose completely new white satin ('satin blanc tout neuf', BA, 74, v. 2) creates a luminosity like the brightness of a shield against which the breast's colors emit various shades and textures of red in 'rose' (74, v. 3), cherry ('cerise', 75, v. 8), and strawberry ('fraise', 75, v. 9) that contrast with the white of the ivory ball ('boule d'ivoire', 74, v. 6) and the breast that gives milk ('qui de lait t'emplira', 75, v. 32). Placed in the shield's position of the heart is Le Grand's *Blason du Coeur*. Despite engendering the desire for precious culinary cannibalism ('Sweet, dainty morsel of delicate flesh'; 'Petit morceau de chair friant', BA, 76, v. 14), it 'gives color to countenance by its warmth' ('C'est luy qui donne la couleur/ Au visage par sa chaleur', BA, 78, vv. 67–68). Of additional interest is that the red of the heart stands as the backdrop of a compendium of symbolic qualities not unlike blasons representing or epitomizing virtue and chivalry: nobility ('noble coeur', 76, v. 1), constancy ('constant', 76, v. 2) courtesy ('coeur courtois', 76, v. 17), alliance ('l'alliance', 77, v. 25), charity ('il a moyen d'aider', 77, v. 29), efficacy ('puissance', 77, v. 33), honesty ('plein d'honnêteté', 78, v. 57), clothed in honor ('un coeur d'honneur revêtu', 78, v. 60), and having won battle in love and war ('un coeur donc de tous vainqueur', 78, vv. 77). From here our eyes descend to the shield's navel point with the anonymous *Blason du ventre* (*Blason on the stomach*), whose colors beam through sculptural or architectural qualities such as the stomach held aloft by two columns of white marble (the woman's legs) that are stout and upright ('deux colonnes/ De marbre blanc, grosses et bonnes') (82, vv. 37–38). Below the navel point is Chauffour's *Blason du Con*. Having already mentioned 'la toison de Colcos' in an erotic context as a geographical periphrasis for Jason's quest for the Golden Fleece (84, v. 7), we also note that the *con* is a fashionably appointed amulet: 'Well buckled with a small vermillion button/ Or with a Ruby serving as a clasp' ('Bien embouché d'un bouton vermeillet/ Ou d'un Rubys servant de fermaillet', 84, vv. 13–14). A *fermaillet* among other things was a collar or chain worn about the neck such as gentlewomen wore to ward off witchcraft.⁴⁰ However, puns such as 'embouché' meaning 'mouthed' and the reddish hues of the *con* reverse

40 See *Dictionnaire of the French and English Tongues*, s.v. 'fermaillet'.

the sense of protection and make the outside appear as the inside. Finally, we arrive at the base point of the body-as-shield with two blasons on the foot, one by François Sagan and another that, though not attributed, may very well be that of Lancelot de Carle. Carle's blason is appropriate to the heraldic base point position since the *pied* supports the entire body. The tone of the poem is one of poetic competition, midpoint between the facetious and the credible, with an attitude of superiority and challenge. Since it is the last poem to praise an individual anatomical feature, the author exploits its concluding position to demonstrate its power over the other body parts previously emblazoned: 'C'est luy qui a sur les autres pouvoir' (110, v. 28). Its colors are implied in its being a consummate work of art ranked with 'gold, good health, and riches': 'le pied est un chef-d'oeuvre parfait,/ Qui est autant necessaire d'avoir/ Qu'or et santé, richesse ni avoir' (114, vv. 128–130).

There is another fundamental analogy between heraldry and the *blasons anatomiques*. Both have as their primary function to identify, designate, show, and distinguish. In other words, their function is essentially deictic. From all times there existed symbolic marks that were used in armies to identify and distinguish combatants. Between the eleventh and the twelfth centuries, the armored headpiece of the knight and the *coiffe* of his suit of mail tended to cover his face. To restore identification, distinctive marks of the knight were painted on his shield or he could wear a crown and/or crest 'to make himself recognizable'.⁴¹ Michel Pastoureau informs us that in tournaments, the heralds played a role similar to our reporters, in identifying the participants by their shield and in communicating the main facts of their arms. In the course of battle, the heralds—in reconnaissance of friend or foe and when combat ceased—identified the dead and counted the prisoners.⁴² One of their functions was to scrupulously 'blasonner' (describe, interpret) the armorial bearings on the shield to confirm the status of the *titulaire*. At the beginning of the fourteenth century, the heralds codified and formulated the description and rules of heraldic vocabulary and grammar. The verb *blasonner* signified nothing other than designating and identifying according to a precise method all the details of a shield including the figures, positions, attitudes, attributes, and

41 According to Mathieu, *Le Système héraldique français*, 15: 'The coats of arms appeared nearly everywhere and the same time in feudal Europe. This is explained by the necessity for the Twelfth Century combatants, to recognize one another in battle. The Knight's armament was such that he became absolutely unrecognizable, even for those who knew him well, since the helmet covered the face nearly entirely. Therefore they thought about more rational ways to use decorations on their shield and insignias'.

42 Pastoureau, *Traité d'héraldique*, 61.

colors. This coding and recording done in highly detailed fashion was at the same time a statement about the structure and composition of an image, and the image itself.⁴³

In addition to partitioning, dividing, and compartmentalizing the parts of the woman's body and projecting charges on the image of the body part in the *pictura*, this deictic function of pointing out, designating, identifying, showing, and localizing goes to the heart of the *Blasons anatomiques*. The reason is that this act of multiplying the angles, sensations, and dimensions through which the poet-lover perceives the charges nourishes what may be called the *oeil dévorateur* (devouring eye) of the blasonneur. Just as the herald scrupulously reads and interprets all the details of the *écu* and reveals what is not seen at first sight, so the blasonneur takes pleasure in an obsessional enumeration of the delights and powers of the woman's bodily features. In dizain 290 of Scève's *canzoniere* titled *Délie, objet de plus haute vertu*, his poet-lover covets the beauties of the woman and regrets that he is not the hundred-eyed Argus of Greek mythology: 'Why am I not, therefore, more than Argus, all eyes?' ('Que ne suis donc plus, qu'Argus, tout en yeulx?', v. 10).⁴⁴ Cécile Alduy rightly names her study on the obscene anatomical blasons an 'Archéologie d'un gros plan' (Archaeology of the Close-Up).⁴⁵ Close-ups are characteristic of the anatomical blasons and vary in subject and tone. A graphic example of this deictic function is found in *Blason du Con* (BA, 83–84), likely written by Claude Chauffour. He transforms obscenity into close-up *mignardise* playing on the word 'mouth' and the color of ruby red to poetize on the clitoris. One sees that the framed *pictura* and the accompanying epigram focus our eyes not only on the interior of the organ ('Bien embouché d'un bouton vermeillet'; 'Well-mouthed by a pretty red button', 84, v. 13) but also on and around its setting ('bien assis, hault monté'; 'well-set, high-lifted', 84, v. 10), capturing its form and thickness ('Petit mouflard, petit con rebondi'; 'Little plump, little fleshly con', 83, v. 1), its tension ('joint et serré'; 'joined and tight', 84, v. 15), its tactility and color ('la toison de Colcos'; 'The fleece of Colchis', 84, v. 7), its positions and movements ('Soit le corps droict, assis, gambade, ou joue'; 'Either when the body is up straight, seated, tumbling, or playing', 84, v. 17), and its solidification into a precious stone ('un Rubis servant de fermaillet'; 'a Ruby serving as a red clasp', 84, v. 14). A poem with a more medical aim is Scève's *Blason on the Sigh* (*Blason du Soupir*), at the same time physiological and anatomical.⁴⁶ It makes the reader observe the

43 Pastoureau, *Traité d'héraldique*, 315–318; 320–321.

44 Defaux, Maurice Scève, *Délie: objet de plus haute vertu*, 1133.

45 Alduy, 'Archéologie d'un gros plan', 163–192.

46 Hunkeler, *Le Vif du sens*, 111–135.

sigh both from the exterior and interior of the chest to confirm the reciprocity between the lungs and the respiration:

Where do you go, sighs, when you leave
 So emptily that nothing returns
 Except a wish always to sigh
 Such that the lungs can no longer breathe.⁴⁷

BA, 70, vv. 13–16

On the more amusing if not facetious side, Victor Brodeau's *Blason de la bouche* ('Blason on the Mouth', BA, 61, vv. 41–42) makes the reader look inside the woman's mouth to see how effectively it is fitted, trimmed, and well-lined with two rows of white teeth: 'Bouche garnie par dedans/ De deux râteaux de blanches dents.' The suggested conceit in the word *rateaux* (teeth of a rake) is the heraldic sign of the portcullis whose grills and lattice-work offer the mouth mobile protection. Finally let us return to the *regard dévorateur* of Scève when his poet-lover believes himself capable of reading the aesthetic and anatomical intentions of the Creator with regard to the proportion, size, and relative position of the human (woman's) neck:

The lofty craftsman of this admirable body
 Having formed it in members variable,
 Put its beauty in the most eminent place,
 But in order to not to close it too abruptly,
 Or complete everything in such a small space,
 Continued the beauty of the face
 By a very white neck, the likeness of ivory.⁴⁸

BA, 72, vv. 1–7

As we have seen from previous examples of the *Blasons anatomiques du corps féminin*, one of the most praised attributes of the woman's anatomical features is their efficacy, power, and force that bring forth effects that not only astonish but also challenge the expected limits of body parts. While the poet-blasonneur

47 'Où allez vous, souspirs, quand vous sortez/ Si vainement que rien ne rapportez/ Fors un desir de tousjours soupirer,/ Dont le poumon ne peult plus respire'.

48 'L'haut plasmateur de ce corps admirable/ L'ayant formé en membres variable,/ Mit la beauté au lieu plus eminent,/ Mais pour non clore icelle incontinent,/ Ou finir toute en si petit espace,
 Continua la beauté de la face/ Par une gorge ivorine et très blanche'.

often praises the woman's aesthetic qualities, this is not primarily a work that primarily brandishes beauty such as we find in Agnolo Firenzuola's *Dialogo ... delle bellezze delle donne* (1541).⁴⁹ Firenzuola uses concepts such as grace, measure, and harmony with close inspection of size, position, texture, and angles to determine the best of beautiful body parts from four women participants in the *Dialogue*. It does have in common with the blasons an emphasis on the individual body part, but the blasonneurs are far more interested in the force of an anatomical unit to deliver its function with strong effects. Reminiscent of Rabelais's encomium of the ear as the superior organ of learning,⁵⁰ Le Grand's *Blason on the ear* (*Blason de l'oreille*) points out that it is never closed ('jamais close', 55, v. 27), has the merit of hearing and knowing all ('le crédit/ De tout ouïr, de tout savoir', 56, vv. 72–73) and even vies with the eyes since in certain ways it sees better than the eye: 'Oreille trop plus clair oyant/ Que l'oeil ne peut être voyant' (55, vv. 41–42). Similarly, Le Grand's *Blason on the Heart* (*Blason du cueur*), praising the remarkable capacities of that faculty and organ, provides what can be taken as the motto of the entire collection when he asserts that the beloved's heart makes one undertake things that seem impossible: 'C'est un cueur qui fait entreprendre/ Choses qui semblent impossibles' (77, BA, vv. 42–43). Héroët's *Blason on the Eye* (*Blason de l'oeil*) sees the eye as self-reflexively communicating that it is bedazzled by what he terms 'its own fact' ('Oeil de son fait luy lui-mêmes ébloui', BA, 51, v. 15) where 'fait' connotes act, action, feat, achievement, and a *fait accompli*. Not only anatomy but also physiology is invoked in Scève's *Blason de la larme* where the tear has the power to defer death ('Vu que la mort elle peut différer', BA, 53, v. 22) and prolong the term of life ('Et prolonger le terme de la vie', BA, 53, v. 23). In Vauzelles's *Blason des cheveux* (*Blason on the hair*), the poet describes the act of 'Magdaleine' using her hair as a cloth to wash the feet of Christ:

49 Firenzuola, *On the Beauty of Women*. In the second *Dialogue*, the character named Celso who leads the discussion states to the other participants, Mona Lampiada, Mona Amorriscia, Selvaggia, and Verdespins: 'And so, in order to draw a woman who is, if not in everything at least for the most part, perfect, it is necessary, as I said at our other discussion, to take the best particular beautiful parts from all four of you and to create from them a woman as beautiful as we wish' (45).

50 In Book 3, Pantagruel says to Epistemon: 'There must be some reason why Nature has made our ears open, and placed no door or cover over them, as she has done over our eyes, our tongue, and the other openings in our bodies. Her purpose is, I believe, that all day and all night we shall continually be able to hear, and through our hearing perpetually to learn. For our hearing is the most educable of all our senses'. Rabelais, *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, 332.

Ah! beautiful hair, who would not know and understand so well
 As you how from the heavens to attract and draw out
 Divine Humor? One would say that Magdaleine
 Did not err when for linen and for wool
 Took and used her hair to attract that humor
 That she knew to be so salutary for the soul.⁵¹

BA, 46, vv. 65–70

As Elsa Kammerer has observed, these lines stress not Magdaleine's act of repentance and humility as recorded in Luke 7:38 and John 7:6 but the cooperative power of her hair to transfer Christ's 'Divine humor' into her body to gain her salvation. Part miracle, it is also a psychological and physiological act, what Kammerer calls 'un accomplissement physiologique' (a physiological accomplishment),⁵² the act of knowing how to attract and take from heaven the divine sap as if drawing nourishment from a spiritual tree. These points on the efficacy of the body part are highly relevant to the final poem under discussion, *The Blason du corps*, that is prefaced by a discussion on a structure of the coat of arms called the 'achievement'.

Historians of heraldry show that the heraldic shield is conceived as a whole. Its contents constitute the necessary components of its meaning. 'The one indispensable element of a coat of arms is the shield; many coats of arms consist of nothing else, but no coat of arms exists without a shield'.⁵³ However, the shield could be more fully realized by adding exterior ornaments around it. This is the visual glory of the coat of arms that in English is called 'the complete achievement'. According to Fox-Davies, 'the correct term for the whole emblazonment is an 'achievement', a term employed to signify the whole but which can correctly be used to signify anything which a man is entitled to represent of an armorial character'.⁵⁴ The concept of the achievement is paradoxical, since on the one hand it is not essential to the identity of the armiger, but on the other hand it symbolizes more completely the honors that the *titulaire* has the right to proclaim. The functions of decorations placed outside the shield varied considerably and could be used as ornamentation primarily to show heredity,

51 'Ah! beaux cheveux, qui bien saurait comprendre/ Comme savez du ciel attraire et prendre/ Divine humeur? On dirait Magdaleine/ N'avoir failli quand pour linge et laine/ Prit ses cheveux pour celle humeur attraire,/ Qu'elle savait à l'âme salutaire.'

52 Kammerer, *Jean de Vauzelles et le creuzet Lyonnais*, 55.

53 'Heraldry', 6.

54 Fox-Davies, *A Complete Guide to Heraldry*, 46–47. Also 'Heraldry', 6; and Aveling, *Heraldry: Ancient and Modern*, 6.

rank, title, order, alliance, moral or psychological outlook, and, in the case of the *cri de guerre*, exhortation.⁵⁵

The basic achievement of any armiger is the combination of the shield of arms, helmet, crest, mantling, and wreath.⁵⁶ Surmounting the shield is the helmet that could indicate rank, and atop the helmet is the crest. The crest was a development from the 'fan shaped erection upon the helmet'⁵⁷ used for head protection in battle. Hanging from the top of the helmet is the mantle or lambrequin, a loose piece of cloth that protected against the sun, deadened the adversary's blow, or served as decoration for jousts and tournaments.⁵⁸ Flanking and holding the shield were supporters, frequently male human figures such as 'the man in armor' or 'the wildmen' holding clubs with wreaths about the loins. These were generally stylized and not representations of actual persons but functioned to provide secure footing for the shield on what were called 'compartments'.⁵⁹ Finally the complete achievement could be decorated with badges, mottoes, *impreses*, and emblems. The second half of the fourteenth century through the fifteenth witnessed a growing vogue for these forms, especially among French, Italian, and British families, and this continued to the Renaissance, which made fine distinctions between emblems and devices.⁶⁰ Particularly colorful in expression were mottoes that could be placed in banderoles below the shield. They could take the forms of rebuses, anagrams, affirmations, or puns such as the English family James that played on its name with the motto 'J' aime à jamais' (I love forever).⁶¹

There is an equivalent of the heraldic achievement in the *Blasons anatomiques du corps féminin* positioned towards the end of the collection. It is titled *Blason du corps* (*Blason on the body*). Just as the heraldic shield galvanizes its components to proclaim its honors and radiate its splendor, so the *Blason du corps* calls forth the anatomical parts previously but separately praised in individual blasons to celebrate in one poem the perfect union of body and soul. To the Body the speaker says, 'Your soul will not have perfection/ If you not be together in glory/ Conjoined both of you in gracious accord' (*BA*, 131, vv. 16–18).⁶²

55 Pastoureau, *Traité d'héraldique*, 216.

56 Slater, *The Complete Book of Heraldry*, 53.

57 Fox-Davies, *A Complete Guide to Heraldry*, 246.

58 Brooke-Little, *An Heraldic Alphabet*, 138.

59 Fox-Davies, *A Complete Guide to Heraldry*, 336.

60 Pastoureau, *Traité d'héraldique*, 218–219.

61 Cited from D'Haucourt and Durivault, *Le blason*, 125.

62 '... l'esperit n' aura perfection/ Tant que soyez ensemble glorieux,/ Conjoinsts tous deux par accord gracieux' (*BA*, 131, vv. 16–18).

First of all, the *Blason du corps* has a unifying function. Just as the achievement constitutes the ensemble of the titular's ornamental honors, the *Blason* unfolds as an assemblage passing in review the parts of the woman's body that had been separately blazoned (Fig. 1). In the following section of the blason, the tone of litany characteristic of fetishizing beautiful features now functions ironically to bring continuity to re-uniting the body:

Ô beautiful neck, ô whiteness so purely perfected.
 Ô breast so firm that so much I desire.
 Ô beating of my heart and my chest,
 When the force of love foretells your breath,
 Ô sweet hand, soft, white and plump.
 When you take me, I feel the flowing of my blood throughout my
 body.⁶³

BA, 132, 39–44

Second, just as the achievement constitutes the crown of the shield, it is the Corps, in this *Blason*, that bestows perfection to the totality of our being:

You have this power, ô body, of such an effect
 That without you nothing would be perfect,
 Nor would our soul be known.⁶⁴

BA 131, vv. 9–11

Third, similar to the achievement that ties the particular distinctions of the *titulaire* to the ornaments of glory, so the *Blason* is structured like a panegyric that vaunts the perfections of each body part:

Forehead more lustrous than white ivory

BA, 131, v. 27

Sweet smiling eyes, pleasing in appearance

BA, 131, v. 29

63 'Ô belle gorge, ô blancheur tant unie./ Ô dur tétin de quoi j' ai tant d' envie./ Ô battement de coeur et de poitrine,/ Quand fort amour anticipe l' haleine,/ Ô douce main, molle, blanche et charnue,/ Quand je te prends, tout le sang si me mue'.

64 'Tu as puissance, ô corps, de tel effet,/ Que sans toi seul rien ne serait parfait,/ Ni l' esperit de nous serait connu'.

Flesh delicate and gentle to the touch.

BA, 132, v. 53

... mouth round and bright red,
Full and sweet, unlike any other⁶⁵

BA, 131, vv. 31–32

One must take note that the achievement and the shield itself present a paradox between part and whole. According to what we have already seen, the achievement is not necessary to the most important significance of the shield; this is the purpose of the shield itself and its contents. However, this non-necessary achievement allows the enumeration of all the honors that are the owner's by right. In the *Blason du corps*, as in the collection of the *Blasons anatomiques du corps féminin*, we encounter two similar paradoxes. The *corps* is praised as an ensemble but is communicated as an assemblage of body features passed in review like a catalogue. This leads to another problem illustrated by the *Blason du corps*, namely, that two different sources of power are claimed. If it is the body as a whole that bestows perfection, the blasonneur nevertheless cites the *con* as the ultimate source of power since it incarnates the principle of generation:

Ô con, ô con, it is you that possesses the power!
Alas, in you alone lies the only perfection
Of the human race and of its creation,
Only you bear the secret of nature.⁶⁶

BA, 132–133, vv. 64–67

It would not surprise anyone that the physical characteristics of the heraldic shield parallel the anatomy of the human body or that there are longstanding precedents for imitating the blazoning of shields in heraldic poetry. What is surprising is that there exist such close resemblances between the *Blasons anatomiques du corps féminin* and the shield itself as a structured, material object. In both there are indeed tensions between the part and the whole that play seesaw between analysis and synthesis. In this relationship, it has proved useful to find a concept midway between part and whole. That is what I have

65 'Front plus poli que n'est le blanc ivoire' (BA, 131, v. 27); 'Yeux doux, rians, plaisants en apparence' (BA, 131, v. 29); 'Chair délicate et douce à l'attoucher' (BA, 132, v. 53); '... bouche ronde et vermeille,/ Epaisse et molle, à nulle autre pareille' (BA, 131, vv. 31–32).

66 'Ô con, ô con, que tu as de puissance!/ Las en toi gît seule perfection/ Du genre humain et sa création,/ En toi seule est le secret de nature' (BA, 132–133, vv. 64–67).

termed the semi-autonomous part or the partial whole. The shield's symbolic attributes gain in prestige by addition since the achievement allows its *titulaire* to manifest and proclaim ownership of as many honors as he/she can rightly claim. At the same time, the semi-autonomous part of the woman's anatomy gains by subtraction. The isolated anatomical part set apart from the body as a whole makes a claim for superiority over other body parts, and as we have seen in the *Blason du corps*, one part, the *con*, has primacy over the entire body. Mirroring the competition of war and tournaments, the anatomical blasons emerge from a poetic *concours* that spurs the blasonneur's imagination to see enormous power, efficacy, and force in body parts that challenge their putative limits. The tone is set when we read in the *Blason de la gorge* that the woman's neck deploys its shield as an offensive weapon, not only as defensive protection. This is a reversibility that signals the re-valuation of the part. In this sense the exceptional amount of powers attributed to the semi-autonomous body part bears an equivalent to the great amount of information condensed in the *armoire*. As Pastoureau observes, the shield is 'polycellulaire',⁶⁷ capable of 'dividing and subdividing itself in an infinite number of compartments, juxtaposed or superposed' to order and calculate large quantities of historical facts. In the blason and the shield, the compression and reduction in size of the physical object(s) correlate with greatly augmenting the capacities of both the *écu* and poem individually. In addition, these powers are mutually enriched since the symbolism of the shield and the anatomical component of the woman come to merge even as their metaphoric connotations create complementary differences. In the *Blason de la gorge*, just as the neck and upper chest of the woman aggressively take the offensive and become the body part-as-shield, the body part then becomes a weapon, the execution of tactics suggested by chess, the defeat of the aspirant's advances, and the vanquishing of *Amour* (Cupid). There is an additional level of meaning in the fusion of body and shield. From the lover's perspective, the symbolism of the chessboard/shield as a defeat drives him back into the posture of resuming, at least for the moment, more intellectual and religious compliments to woo the woman. That is, he projects onto the woman's shield more symbolic icons than originally named, such as a 'holy reliquary', and a 'lectern' for reading religious 'épîtres' delivered by 'Venus' that modify the more direct sexual approach (*BA*, 73, vv. 33–34; v. 37). Though the compartmentalized charges of the shield and the woman's anatomical components are semi-autonomous parts of the whole, they are presented as limitless in information and power.

67 Pastoureau, *Traité d'héraldique*, 321.

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FIGURE 1
 Clément Marot, 'Blason du
 Tétin', from *Sensuivent les
 blasons anatomiques du
 corps féminin ...* [Paris]: Pour
 Charles Langelier, 1543, 55: 20
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