



Pulchrum esse

The role of beauty in the educational programme of the Parisian St. Victor School

Wanda BAJOR*

ABSTRACT

Educating a human being is a task that has always stood close to philosophy and sometimes has become philosophy itself, as in the life work of Socrates following the motto with heroic consistency: “Know thyself” (*scire te ipsum*). European culture adopted this principle and incorporated it into its intellectual-spiritual tissue in various guises over the centuries. During the Middle Ages, in the works of Christian thinkers inspired by Neoplatonic philosophy (such as in the views of the scholars of the Saint Victor school in Paris), this tradition was combined with the motif of “being beauty” (*pulchrum esse*) and enriched by aesthetic thought; beauty with all its richness of form and expression, together with truth and goodness, as Plotinus wanted, marked out the path of man; “renewal” and showed him the ultimate goal of *beatum esse* — being happy. The sensitivity and aesthetic sophistication of the Victorine authors of the 12th-century theory of education breathe freshness and an Epicurean *joie de vivre*, which certainly creates the potential to appeal to contemporary man.

KEYWORDS

medieval aesthetics; theory of education of the 12th century; humanism of the 12th century; St. Victor School

* Ph.D. (habil.), associate professor, Institute of Philosophy, The John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin. E-mail: wanda.bajor@kul.pl.

The intellectual output of the Parisian school of the Abbey of St. Victor is fully embedded in the 12th-century Renaissance, characterised by the expansion of knowledge and the development of schools together with the growth of literary production and the birth of Gothic art. Founded at the beginning of the 12th century by an eminent teacher of the liberal arts and theology William of Champeaux (c. 1070–1121) and developed by its flagship master, Hugh of St. Victor, it became a prestigious centre of intellectual and spiritual life, held in high esteem among the ecclesiastical as well as the political elite of the time. Its fame was above all due to the original curriculum created by Hugh, which was a kind of Christian *paideia*, containing comprehensive teaching integrated with a specific philosophy of life, which meant that the school maintained an excellent level of study and enjoyed an excellent reputation, attracting young people in large numbers.

THE IDEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK OF VICTORINE PEDAGOGY

According to the motto “literature and manners”, education in medieval cathedral schools followed the ancient model of *studia humanitatis*. The school of Saint Victor continued the ideals of the 11th-century humanism, in its original harmonisation of Christian theology with old-style humanism. Their ideal was the Christian wisdom, which was open to all the riches of secular culture, while at the same time taking a bold approach to matters of spiritual life. Preaching inside and outside the abbey, reforming other institutions, teaching, writing and copying works on a large scale, correspondence, academic pastoral care — using all these means the Abbey of Saint Victor spread a certain pedagogical programme almost throughout the whole of Europe (Poirel, 2010: 18).

This programme was outlined by Hugh of St. Victor (1096–1141), among others, in his famous study guide entitled *Didascalicon*. The original feature of this project is the integration of all disciplines of study, secular and ecclesiastical, both theoretical and practical, erudite or technical, into the curriculum. The aim was to integrate all disciplines of knowledge into a holistic and unified wisdom, encompassing both secular sciences inherited from the ancients and the ecclesiastical disciplines, ranging from biblical sciences through speculative theology to moral and spiritual life. This ideal could be summed up in two sayings by Hugh: the first, abbreviated in the famous invocation *omnia disce* — “Learn everything. Later you will see that nothing is superfluous” and the second — “Do not look down upon these least things” (Hugo de Sancto Victore, 1939: 114; see Janecki, 2017: 161–164).

In fact, Hugh’s programme extends and updates the pedagogical programme created by Alcuin and introduced by Charlemagne; at the same time, it is an extension of the process established by Augustine’s *De doctrina christiana*.

In this sense, *Didascalicon* restores and modernises the cultural project of the Carolingian Renaissance and even of the patristic tradition keenly interested in reconciling classical culture with the Christian faith. In this way, secular sciences not only become legitimate but even necessary as the natural foundation of Christian wisdom. Thus, the arts of the *trivium* (grammar, dialectic and rhetoric) are applied to the analysis of the “*verba-words*” of Scripture, while the arts of the *quadrivium* (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, music) and physics are useful for a better understanding of the “*res-reality*” that the Scriptures express through these words. For the fullest possible exploration of the sacred texts, it is necessary to rely on a universal and unlimited culture in which all the resources of the secular and sacred heritage are combined (Porwoll, 2021: 30–33; Sicard, 1991:18–20; Wielgus, 1990: 305, 320).

In this perspective, *Didascalicon* encourages the acquisition of general culture, and the exhortation “Learn everything” invites not to read and learn everything without discernment, but rather not to despise any branch of knowledge. For there is no science or discipline, however mundane it may be, that does not make its own special contribution to wisdom. And this is because reading, learning and teaching share in the work of redemption. Through original sin, man was wounded in all his dimensions: his body was affected by sickness and death, his capacity to know by error, and his capacity to love by selfishness. As a result of this, human beings, although remaining essentially good, are nevertheless weakened in their powers and disjointed in their functioning. Therefore, humans need healing, re-education and renewal in all their dimensions. Just as the technique is good by virtue of the fact that it compensates for the weakness of this mortal body until it is renewed in the immortality envisaged by God, diligence in studying and the exercise of virtues are good due to the fact that they gradually reproduce in the soul the wisdom that is a kind of foretaste of the contemplation of the chosen. Knowledge and reason are therefore in no way suspicious, but on the contrary, they are directed towards man’s salvation. *Omnia disce* is not only a summary of Hugh’s manifesto of encyclopaedic humanism, but it is also an invitation to renew the image and likeness of God in man through study. The idea is here not so much to reduce all cognition to what is contained in books, but to make the intellectual operation of reading the principle of all inner progress (Janecki, 2017: 163–164).

What characterises the school of St. Victor more than anything else is undoubtedly its sense of universality. What other currents separate, with the Victorines is methodically structured, reconciled and reunited. Against the dominant tendency, at least among the Parisian masters of the time, to specialise and technicise the disciplines, the school of St. Victor decisively maintains their interdependence and complementarity. Nothing human should be left out of its pedagogical project, which is why even the mechanical arts find a place there. Even these, in their own way, fit into the Victorine sense of

universality, such as navigation, which, as Hugh explains: “Haec secreta mundi penetrat, litora invisita adit, deserta horrida lustrat et cum barbaris nationibus et linguis incognitis commercia humanitatis exercet” (Hugo de Sancto Victore, 1939: 107).

A particularly original feature of the Victorine process of education, which is part of the humanist affirmation of nature, is the aesthetic thought that permeates it, an especially strong emphasis on beauty included in all its categories and manifestations. It is no wonder given that Hugh, the creator of the educational programme of the Abbey of St. Victor, is one of the finest aesthetes of the Middle Ages with an extraordinary sensitivity, who developed his phenomenology of beauty in two works: *De tribus diebus* and *In hierarchiam coelestem* (Baron, 1957: 434–437). As Dominique Poirel (Poirel, 2013: 247–248) states, the question of beauty is at the heart of Hugh’s spirituality, and hence it could not be absent from the educational programme. For beauty, as understood by the Victorine master, does not only have a decorative function, but much more — its contemplation can be the principle of the most rigorous scientific research as well as of the most ardent spiritual life, in its anagogical role leading to God. For this reason one speaks of Hugh’s aesthetic theology, with references to Platonic inspirations, especially the question of divine beauty and the participation of all beings in its beauty (Coolman, 2020: 207).

THE FORMATIVE ROLE OF BEAUTY

Symbolic theology, attributing a theophanic character to beauty, harmonises perfectly with Victorine pedagogical ideas. In his commentary on the *Celestial hierarchy*, Hugh expresses the view that beauty is characterised by its capacity to form (*formifica*), the consequence being that contemplated beauty forms man, transforms his interiority, because beauty makes beautiful the one who admires and loves it.¹ And since the beauty of the phenomenal world does not keep the attention to itself, but refers man to his Creator, it thus becomes a book written by his hand, reflecting in itself the beauty and wisdom of God. Therefore, the admiration of beauty is the admiration of wisdom: the balance of forms, the play of colours, the harmony of sounds, the sweetness of sensual experience — all these show the inner order, the holistic and benevolent thought that conceived them (Poirel, 2013: 258).

In view of the above, admiration for man — the most beautiful work of the Creator — also stems from the fact that only he has the capacity to appreciate the beauty of creation and to transform the sensual pleasure flowing from it into the joy of the whole person — body and soul, intelligence and emotions.

¹ Hugo de Sancto Victore, 2015: 483: “Quare videlicet pulchritudo ‘formifica’ dicitur, quoniam sibi conformat conuersos a se, ut pulchri fiant amantes pulchritudinem ueram”.

He is the closest being to the Creator, truly bearing within himself the image and likeness of God. In man, two ontologically different worlds meet, his complex half-bodily, half-spiritual nature makes him the knot of the universe — and this is where his unique vocation comes from: contemplation of the beauty of the sensual world and delight. This in turn leads man to recognising the friendship between sensual beauty and the intelligible world to which he belongs through his spirit, and this is how he understands his dignity.²

Beauty goes hand in hand with love: in knowing oneself one discovers in oneself the image of God (*imago Dei*), which is the hidden beauty of the soul. Thus, self-love (but not egoistic love) and the love of God fuse together, the soul in its very essence recognising that it has been created for others. This flows from the nature of love manifested in the desire to give and emanate. This is the Christian sense of love — the most ecstatic one, as self-giving, which is reflected in the vocation of the person, realised in relation to others.³ In Victorine pedagogy it is reflected in their careful attention to the individual-community relationship, hence Victorine humanism is sometimes referred to as “political”. This high social culture of the Victorine canons was also grounded in the adopted rule of St. Augustine, who valued most highly such values as concord and fraternal loving benevolence, kindness and humanity. It was therefore a matter of great importance to build a consensual, harmonious community, as was observed by one of the Victorine authors, Godfrey: “a sweet life shared is joined to the most gracious and delightful consent”.⁴

² Hugh reflects on this question in a commentary to *Super Ierarchiam beati Dionisi I*, 1 (PL 175, 935A–B): “Propter quod et sanctissimam nostram hierarchiam perfectissima sacrorum dispositio coelestium hierarchiarum super mundana imitatione dignam iudicans, et dictas immateriales hierarchias materialibus figuris, et formalibus compositionibus varificans tradidit, ut proportionaliter nobis ipsis a sacratissimis formationibus in simplas, et non figuratas ascendamus altitudines et similitudines. Quoniam neque possibile est nostro animo ad non materialem illam ascendere coelestium hierarchiarum, et imitationem, et contemplationem, nisi ea, quae secundum ipsum est, materiali manuactione utatur. Visibiles quidem formas invisibilis pulchritudinis imaginationes arbitrans, et sensibiles suavitates figuras invisibilis distributionis, et immaterialis luculentiae imaginem materialia lumina, et secundum intellectum contemplativae plenitudinis discursas sacras disciplinas, et adunati ad divina, et ordinati habitus earum, quae hic sunt, dispositionum, ordines, et Jesu participationis ipsam divinissimae eucharistiae assumptionem, et quaecunque alia coelestibus quidem essentiis super mundane, nobis vero symbolice tradita sunt. Propter hanc ergo nostram corrationalem theosin misericors perfectionis principium, et coelestes hierarchias nobis manifestans, et comministrum earum perficiens nostram hierarchiam ad virtutem, nostramque similitudinem deiformis earum sanctificationis sensibilibus imaginibus super coelestes descripsit intellectus, in sacris eloquiorum compositionibus, ut nos reduceret per sensibilia ad intellectualia, et ex sacre figuratis symbolis in simplas coelestium hierarchiarum summitates”.

³ A detailed analysis of the concept of “love” in the thought of Hugh of St. Victor is presented in: Mercury, 2021: 127–142.

⁴ In *Microcosmus* (Godefroy de Saint-Victor, 1951: 172, 192) he referred to ancient concepts of man as a social being: “Cum naturaliter homo sociale animal sit, naturaliter sibi invicem

This was served by peace in the soul, building up another person by word and by example. There is even a “political” sense of beauty — good and beautiful customs in themselves are a support and a sign of inner peace, thus serving the good relationship between the individual member and the whole community, strengthening the peace of the whole community. Everyone is responsible for the order and harmonious coexistence between brothers, as external behaviour sustains brotherly love. A social being by nature, man is bound together by natural ties to form a community in which he can live a peaceful and happy life, a blessed life (*vita beata*) (Jaeger, 2017: 92–93). The joy and pleasure of earthly existence is a promise and foreshadowing of a future life which is even more joyful. And on the way there, the vocation of the canon is to “contemplate divine beauty and allow it to take shape in order to radiate it all around, to the limits of the universe” (Poirel, 2021: 273).

THE HERMENEUTIC CIRCLE BETWEEN *PSYCHE* AND *PHYSIS*

As stated above, in moral formation aimed at the re-formation of the soul in the image and likeness of God, the Victorins in particular cultivated the pursuit of harmony between inner and outer life. Consequently, a special feature of their ethics as well as their pedagogy is adherence to the principle that the state of the outer life corresponds to the state of the inner life and, vice versa, the “invisible” interior of man shapes what is visible in his physical form. This correspondence between the external and the internal, the visible and the invisible (*per visibilia ad invisibilia*), related to Neoplatonic symbolism, is a characteristic of Hugonian pedagogy. According to Hugh, body and soul participate in a hermeneutic spiral of cognition and virtue.

This view is part of the conviction of medieval scholars who referred to the field known as physiognomy, which propounded the view that external (bodily) appearance expresses the reality of a person’s spiritual interior, their character. The leading authorities here were Aristotle, who argued that characters depend on bodies (“*animae illae sequuntur corpora et dispositiones corporum*”),⁵ as well as Avicenna, Albert the Great and Thomas Aquinas, author of the phrase: “What your body is, your thoughts are” (“*Qualis es in corpore, talis es in mente*”). The words of Porphyry, who maintained that facial beauty marks good manners, and that external beauty connotes dignity, were also cited in this regard.⁶

debent et exhibent homines societatem qua velud quodam naturali vinculo sibi devincti pacificam et iocundam simul vitam ducant. [...] Per hanc solam ad beatam vitam pervenitur”.

⁵ See Pseudo-Aristoteles, *Physiognomica*, 1, 805a2.

⁶ See Paulus de Worczyn, *In Physiognomica*, qu. 1 (Kraków, Biblioteka Jagiellońska, cod. BJ 2073, f. 103v; ed. M. Kowalewska [forthcoming]): “Et probatur ratione, quia animae

Just like all nature derives its beauty from something that transcends it, like a book whose letters are creatures and whose meaning is a praise of divine wisdom, the human body — the harmony of all its parts — reflects the beauty of the soul. The body itself derives its beauty from the fact that it is united with the soul, it is beautiful because it carries within it something more than mere matter, visually this beauty materialises.⁷ For this reason, the formation of man's spiritual interior begins in the body. Mastery over the body is the first step on the way to God: mastery over external things, discipline of the body (gestures and posture) lead to mastery over the interior, to discipline of the mind and spirit (Poirel, 2021: 268–269; Van't Spijker, 2021: 241). In this way, the body is comparable to a book from which we read the virtues, since elegance in behaviour is indicative of a well and virtuously arranged human being. The body, being one with the soul, is the language of the soul and its eloquence is to be edifying; a man's goodness should be evident in his poised movements. And on the other hand, in order to maintain proper external manners, man must first achieve inner peace and serenity. The well-ordered functioning of all the limbs of the body results in the harmony of the whole human being (*concordia universitatis*), its moderation, order and beauty.⁸ Although the Victorine anthropology, inscribed in a twelfth-century Platonic perspective, recognised the soul alone as the essence of man, the conviction of the psycho-physical unity of man is expressed in these educational principles. Hugh, being a Christian thinker and, as Stefan Swieżawski states, “the most universal mind of the twelfth century”, could not follow a complete negation

illae sequuntur corpora et dispositiones corporum in tantum, quod ad discrutiatam faciem sequitur distortio morum. Et per oppositum pulchra facies est signum bonorum morum, unde Porphyrius: ‘species Priami digna est imperio’”.

⁷ Franklin T. Harkins writes about this: “For Hugh, not only does the inner state of the mind or heart determine the outer movement or disposition of the body, discipline on the outside stabilizes and strengthens the mind or spirit. Thus, the interaction between scriptural reading and Christian living establishes something of a self-perpetuating cycle according to which *scientia* gained through well-ordered *lectio* animates a correspondingly well-ordered bodily response in the form of virtuous living, which in turn prepares and nourishes the mind to be further instructed on wisdom” (cited in: Hawk-Reinhard, 2017: 125).

⁸ Hugh of Saint Victor, 2021: 238: “The human body is like a commonwealth, in which different functions are distributed to all its individual members. If one body part is taking over the function of another in an inordinate way, what happens but that the concord of the whole is disturbed? If one body part is impeding another by its movement, certainly it contradicts the arrangement that nature moderates [...]. That means, to give a few examples, to laugh without showing the teeth, to look without staring, to speak without extending your hands and pointing your fingers, without curling your lips, shaking your head, or raising your eyebrows; to walk without changing your gait, swinging your arms, or shaking your shoulder; to sit without spreading your legs, without putting your feet on top of each other, without extending or shaking your shins, without resting on one side and then the other, and to lie down without spreading out your limbs”.

of matter; he described the human body in a spirit of microcosmic affirmation, defining its relationship with the soul as a covenant and a relationship of friendship and love.⁹

AESTHETICS IN BEHAVIOUR

As was the custom of the age, upbringing and manners (*mores*) in a Victorine monastery constituted the art of living and discipline embodied on a daily basis. The latter is defined by Hugh as good and dignified (*bona et honesta*) behaviour, in which it is not enough just to avoid evil, but for it to be manifested above all in doing everything well, because, as he taught, it is not enough just to do good, but it must be done in a correct and exemplary manner. What is important is not only the rightness of intentions, but also the appropriateness and harmony of their manifestation. One should therefore also take care of the “aesthetics” of one’s behaviour, the “orderly movement” (*motus ordinatus*) of all the limbs of the body, and the right disposition (*dispositio decens*) in all actions and habits. Good action is linked with external beauty (*decor*), which is a reflection of the deeper beauty of the soul surpassing “the beauty and grandeur of all visible things”.¹⁰

Victorine ethics received the name humanist and aristocratic; as an ethic of benevolence and humanitarianism it was based on teaching by example. It cultivated ideals such as kindness (*benignitas*), sociability and courtesy (*humanitas*), generosity, charity (*caritas*), which were supported by habits: courtesy, hospitality and even the virtue of cheerfulness and good humour, which can be related to the Aristotelian virtue, in Greek called *eutrapelia*, or the art of humour for relaxation and fun.¹¹ Added to this catalogue are, compared to the sweetness of honey, elegance, refinement of manners and gracefulness of manner (*venustas morum*), the polishing and cultivation of which were compared to the creation of works of art (Jaeger, 2017: 97–99).

Considering the above, beauty equally in the social dimension of life has its role and power of influence: orderly behaviour and elegant manners (*elegantia morum*) indicate an orderly interior and a good character, because the state of

⁹ Hugo de Sancto Victore, 1997: 48: “Sicut enim de inconstantia mentis nascitur inordinata motio corporis, ita quoque, dum corpus per disciplinam stringitur, animus ad constantiam solidatur. Et paulatim intrinsecus mens ad quietem componitur, cum per discipline custodiam mali motus eius foras fluere non sinuntur. Integritas ergo virtutis est, quando per internam mentis custodiam ordinate reguntur membra corporis”. See Swieżawski, 1949–1950: 280.

¹⁰ Hugo de Sancto Victore, 1997: 98: “Disciplina est conversatio bona et honesta, cui parum est, malum non facere, sed studet etiam in his que bene agit per cuncta irreprehensibilis apparere. Item disciplina est membrorum omnium motus ordinatus et dispositio decens in omni habitu et actione”. See Poirel, 2013: 270; Coolman, 2020: 227.

¹¹ See Aristoteles, *Ethica Nicomachea*, IV, 8, 1128a–b.

the outer life corresponds to the state of the inner life. Therefore, in the process of shaping a person by example what counts is the energy and educational power of the teacher's personal appearance: elegance, beauty, appropriateness. The master and teacher is supposed to teach by word and by example to be a trustworthy role model for the students. The following is a testimony of a pupil who writes about Hugh as a teacher:

As soon as it became possible for me to do so, I chose him as my principal and special teacher and adhered with the utmost diligence to his teaching, as the teaching of a man whose reverent life embellishes knowledge and in whom the sanctity of the teacher illuminates the doctrine enriched with a sympathetic character (Piazzoni, 1982: 912).

In his treatise *De institutione novitiorum*, the most influential work on the practice of virtues, Hugh of St. Victor emphasised the importance he attached to harmony between outward behaviour and interpersonal relationships (Hugo de Sancto Victore, 1997: 7–114). The right measure in dress, gestures, words and manner of eating does not only reflect the inner dispositions of the novice, but in some way it nurtures and shapes them. The smallest gesture has aesthetic, ethical, political and spiritual repercussions: if it is balanced, it gives birth to beauty, it reveals and enhances self-mastery, strengthens the harmony between brothers and brings man closer to God (Schmitt, 1990).

Therefore, the Victorines emphasised the role of the outward, visible posture: a serene countenance, an orderly and poised body of each member of the community bore witness to the virtuousness of his soul and contributed to the harmony of the life of the whole community. All dimensions of the human being and existence were taken into account: cognitive, volitional, affective and even psychomotor ones.¹² Their harmony leads to a beautiful person, body and soul. The psychomotor dimension was about “re-forming” the body, restoring the original beauty of its form (Coolman, 2020: 210, 221). The culture of conduct in this respect included the discipline of walking, gesturing, speech, modelling one's entire appearance and creating an aura of elegant posture, beauty and dignity. In *De institutione novitiorum*, we find Hugh's comments on details

¹² Hugo de Sancto Victore, 1997: 58: “Gestus est motus et figuratio membrorum corporis ad omnem agendi et habendi modum. Hic sex modis reprehensibilis invenitur, scilicet si est aut mollis aut dissolutus, aut tardus aut citatus, aut prociac aut turbidus. Mollis significat lasciviam, dissolutus negligentiam, tardus pigritiam, citatus inconstantiam, prociac superbiam, turbidus iracundiam. Nam quod inordinati motus corporis corruptionem et dissolutionem indicent, mentis superius iam demonstratum est”. Hugh of Saint Victor, 2021: 232–233: “Gesture is the movement and figuration of the body's limbs with an aim. This can be found reprehensible in six ways, namely when it is too effeminate, dissolute, tardy, hurried, impudent or disorderly. Effeminate demeanor indicates lasciviousness, dissolute negligence, tardy laziness, hurried inconstancy, impudent haughtiness, and disorderly irascibility. It was shown above that disorderly movements of the body indicate a corrupt body and a dissolute mind”.

such as appropriate dress¹³ or table manners. He used humour in his instructions, describing amusing examples of inappropriate behaviour:

There are some who cannot listen without having their mouths open, and who open their mouths to the words of the speaker, as though the meaning has to flow into the heart by way of the mouth. Others, which is still worse, stick out their tongues like thirsty dogs when doing things or listening [...] Others, when speaking point out with their fingers, raise their eyebrows, roll their eyes, or stare as if in deep thought, by which they try to show off some great interior effort (Hugh of Saint Victor, 2021: 237).¹⁴

Master Hugh even draws attention to the moderation of facial expressions and describes how to ensure their appropriate expression and beautiful appearance. For it is a reflection of inner discipline and one should be extremely careful that it should harmonise with the latter, that it should not be rudely harsh or languidly relaxed: one should try to maintain a “firm gentleness” and a “gentle firmness” on the face:

The face is a mirror of discipline which one should guard all the more carefully, because if there is any sin in it, it cannot be hidden. We have to control our face and keep its expression in check, so that it is not carelessly irritated, nor effeminately soft, but instead it should always have a composed sweetness and a sweet composure (Hugh of Saint Victor, 2021: 237).¹⁵

¹³ Hugo de Sancto Victore, 1997: 50, 52: “Nam sunt quidam stulti qui stultis placere cupientes quodam artificio vestimenta sua circa se componunt. Alii vero maiori scurrilitate transvertunt ridiculose, alii autem, ut pompam de se faciant, explicant ea et quantum possunt latius distendunt. Alii temere corrugata in unum colligunt, alii contorquentes et complectentes involvunt. Alii, toto conamine stringentes et findentes ea, omnia corporis sui lineamenta in verecundissima quadam turpitudine aspicientibus numeranda exponunt. Alii iactando et ventilandando pannos suos levitatem mentis suae ex ipsa habitus sui mobilitate ostendunt”. Hugh of Saint Victor, 2021: 230: “There are some foolish men who desire to please fools, so with a certain artfulness they drape their clothes around themselves. Others, with an even greater buffoonery, turn them in a ridiculous way. Others, to make a show of themselves, unfold them and drape them around as expansively as they can. Others rashly hold them crumpled up into one, while others wrap them up crookedly and twirled around. Still others are intent on stringing them together and wrapping them together and they expose with a kind of exhibitionist immodesty all the contours of their body, to be measured by onlookers. Others show the flightiness of their mind by the levity of their behavior, in throwing their vestments around and draping them all over the place”.

¹⁴ Hugo de Sancto Victore, 1997: 68–70: “Sunt enim quidam qui nisi buccis patentibus auscultare nesciunt et, quasi per os sensus ad cor influere debeat, palatum ad verba loquentis aperiant. Alii, quod adhuc peius est, in agendo vel audiendo, quasi canes sitientes, linguam protendunt [...]. Alii loquentes digitum extendunt, supercilia erigunt, et oculos in orbem rotantes aut profunda quadam consideratione defigentes, cuiusdam intrinsecus magnificentiae conatus ostendunt”.

¹⁵ Hugo de Sancto Victore, 1997: 70: “Sunt praeterea mille larvae, mille subsannationes et corrugationes narium, mille valgia et contortiones labiorum, quae pulchritudinem faciei et

The liber ordinis Sancti Victoris Parisiensis, a writing of special character compared to other works of this genre,¹⁶ precisely defines the rules of the prevailing courtesy and even aristocratic manners. Attention is drawn to an atmosphere of good humour and human kindness. The rule points out that the idea is by no means about external etiquette, but about showing the character of the entire institution. The visitor is to be treated with great courtesy and kindness (*cum magna benignitate et humanitate*), with the greatest care and tenderness, so that he is reinforced by gestures of love so that, on the basis of external impressions, he is able to judge the things hidden inside, according to the principle of interdependence between the visible and the invisible (spiritual).¹⁷

As C. Stephen Jaeger points out, what we have here is a charismatic pedagogy containing an unusual social code: a worldly Ciceronianism (the classical origin of manners), inspired by religion combined with aristocratic courtesy, which occupies the middle position between the worldly ethics of the secular courts and the asceticism of the new monastic movements. The “ideal of human greatness”, developed within this framework and cultivated at the abbey, radiated widely outside its walls thanks to the fact that lay people, future courtiers and diplomats were also educated there and they carried it into the public life of the courts, presenting a model of the Christian politician and statesman (Jaeger, 2017: 100–101).

THE BEAUTY AND JOY OF LIFE

The original aesthetic of the Victorine reveals their subtle humanism. This is shown, for example, in the fact that they developed it in the direction of pan-aestheticism, according to which everything in the world can be beautiful and all senses, not only, as traditionally assumed, sight and hearing, but also smell, taste and touch, participate in experiencing it. Beauty appears not only in its utilitarian function. More important is the admiration of beauty itself and the

decorem disciplinae deformant. Est enim facies disciplinae speculum cui tanto maior custodia adhibenda est, quanto minus si quid in ea peccatum fuerit celari potest. Temperanda est igitur facies et modificanda in gestu suo, ita ut nec proterve exasperetur, nec molliter dissolvatur, sed semper habeat et rigidam dulcedinem et dulcem rigorem”.

¹⁶ Jaeger cites the opinion of the editor of the *Liber ordinis* who assesses it as “the most original work in the formation of a way of life, more courteous (in the literal sense of the word), more urban” (Jaeger, 2017: 93).

¹⁷ An important role, from the point of view of hospitality, is assigned to the function of the doorkeeper (*portarius curiae*) responsible for the first contact with arriving guests. He must be a man of proven character and impeccable manners — courteous and pleasant. This applies to both his speech and his manners so that he will be an example to all and he will embody the reputation of the whole house. If the community is treated as a body, he is the face of it.

participation of the whole person, with all the senses, in this enjoyment, as Hugh expresses in the following passage:

For here — in visible things — there is shape and form that delight the sight, there is the sweetness of smell that refreshes the sense of smell, there is the goodness of taste that awakens hunger, there is the smoothness of bodies that excites and attracts the touch. [...] and the pleasure of melody pleases the ear.¹⁸

Hugh's treatise *De tribus diebus* is an exceptional work in terms of aesthetic sensitivity — it can be seen as a textbook and a guide to an aesthetic way of “looking at the world”; he describes delight in the beauty of the world with such sensitivity and emotion that his words vividly touch the heart of the modern reader. It is hard not to agree with Poirel's opinion that we can easily find ourselves in this aesthetic, and even experience the childlike joy in the face of the countless wonders of nature. Hugh's sense of beauty seems broader than ours, so we can learn from him to read undiscovered manifestations of beauty that we do not usually see.¹⁹ He says this about the olfactory experience itself:

It is the same with smell. Incenses have their smells, ointments their aromas, roses their scent. Thickets have their smell, and meadows have theirs. Wastelands have their smells; wood, flower and fruits have theirs. All things that emit a sweet fragrance and breathe out sweet smells serve the olfactory sense and were created for its pleasure (Hugh of Saint Victor, 2010: 73).

Experiencing beauty brings a lot of emotional shades to man; although the world is governed by fixed rules, beauty can give the pleasure of surprise and unexpected delights. It does not only satiate our aesthetic emotions, but exceeds our expectations, expands our hearts and exceeds our hopes: there is the beauty of the gigantic, the beauty of miniature things, the beauty of the playful, the beauty of the paradoxical and even the beauty of the ugly. It expresses a kind of cosmic sympathy, empathy and a deep sense of belonging to the whole of creation, not so much on the level of rejoicing in the visible but in joyfully and trustingly consenting to it (Poirel, 2013: 253–254).

The theory of beauty was developed by Hugh's disciple Richard, who fitted it in to the systematisation of mysticism and the analysis of spiritual life described with dramatic flair, warmth and psychological acuity. More than in theoretical speculation he is interested in mystical contemplation while the beauty present in it extends its formative and educative role. Richard divides beautiful forms according to the material structure of their contents. These

¹⁸ My own translation of the passage from: Hugo de Sancto Victore, 2015: 949: “Est enim hic species et forma, quae delectat visum; est suavitas odoris, quae reficit olfactum; est dulcedo saporis, quae infundit gustum; est lenitas corporum, quae fovet et blande excipit tactum”.

¹⁹ This issue is analysed by Poirel, 2011: 363–382, on the basis of a treatise *De tribus diebus*.

are physical things (*res*) considered in their formal structure, works of art and nature (*opera*), in addition to devices, divine and human institutions (*mores*), where spirit is embodied in matter. Human things, actions and customs have their formal as well as their symbolic beauty (Poirel, 2013: 252).

In a work entitled *Benjamin major*, Richard presented a precisely developed hierarchy of contemplative experiences inspired by beauty (Richard of Saint-Victor, 2013). At the level of contemplation of sensual beauty itself, Richard distinguished seven degrees: 1. the humblest joy and admiration comes from the “intellectual” contemplation of matter itself, its weight or solidity (the beauty of marble is different from that of a tree) (Richard of Saint-Victor, 2013: 167);²⁰ 2. then comes the religious-aesthetic consideration of visible forms perceived as shapes and colours;²¹ 3. further, the mind penetrates deep into nature, admiring the “deeper” qualities of the other senses, which manifest themselves in sounds and smells;²² 4. at a higher level of the contemplation of beauty, we watch and admire the actions and works of nature that we enjoy as much as the actions of man, for example, the movement and rhythm of the life of a seed developing into a plant, into leaves, flowers and fruit;²³ 5. then we admire human activities and works, in particular works of art, and all other fields of human creation, even forms realised in agriculture;²⁴ 6. we further consider and admire the institutions, customs, moral laws, customs and secular

²⁰ Richard of Saint-Victor, 2013: 150: “Primum itaque contemplationis genus est in consideratione et admiratione rerum corporalium, in omnibus eis que per quinque sensus corporeos ingrediuntur ad animum. Et est quidem hoc omnium infimum, et debet esse incipientium. [...] Ad hoc itaque contemplationis genus pertinet omnis admiratio Creatoris quae surgit ex consideratione rerum corporalium”.

²¹ Richard of Saint-Victor, 2013: 160: “Materiam et formam uisu corporeo facile deprehendimus, nam lapidem a ligno, triangulum a quadrato sine errore discernimus. Illud autem quod ad naturam pertinet, partim expositum sensui, partim autem profundius latens repositum erat rationi. Natura siquidem consideratur in rerum qualitate intrinseca, quemadmodum et forma consistit in qualitate extrinseca”.

²² Richard of Saint-Victor, 2013: 160: “Qualitas autem rerum interior ex magna parte corporeo percipitur sensu, sicut saporis gustu, odores olfactu”.

²³ Richard of Saint-Victor, 2013: 162: “Operationem nature facile deprehendere possumus, ut in graminibus, arboribus, animalibus. In graminibus quomodo crescunt, maturescunt. In arboribus similiter quod frondent, florent, fructificant. In animalibus quomodo concipiunt et pariunt, quod alia nascuntur et alia moriuntur. Denique quotiens attendimus quomodo omnia orta occidunt et aucta senescunt, in naturalis operationis inspectione mentem nostram exercemus”.

²⁴ Richard of Saint-Victor, 2013: 162: “Opus artificiale, opus uidelicet industrie consideratur ut in celaturis, in picturis, in scriptura, in agricultura, et in ceteris operibus artificialibus, in quibus omnibus innumera inuenimus, pro quibus diuini muneris dignationem digne mirari et uenerari debeamus. Opus itaque naturale et opus artificiale, quia sibi inuicem cooperantur, quasi e latere sibi altrinsecus iunguntur, et sibi inuicem mutua contemplatione copulantur. Certum siquidem est quia ex naturali operatione opus industrie initium sumit, consistit et conualescit, et operatio naturalis ex industria proficit ut melior sit”.

holidays;²⁵ 7. At the top of the contemplation of the beauty of things, Richard places religious ceremonies, such as the liturgical service and the celebration of the sacraments in Church.²⁶ All formal qualities of beauty come together in solemn liturgies, namely the smell of incense, the melody of chants, the twinkling of gold and lights, the shapes and colours of churches, liturgical vestments; the stirrings of intelligence and emotion. In religious ceremonies beauty is no longer purely sensual and formal; it has a deeper sense, because what the senses perceive in a word, a gesture or a colour, raised by reason becomes a sign of a hidden power (Bruyne, 1946: 251–254).

Richard emphasises the solidarity of nature and art, as though their beauty was only complete through mutual interpenetration. The activity of nature ignites human activity, just like nature changes, developing and improving, through the intervention of art.²⁷ In the educational aspect, we find some threads here that can be treated as shaping man in reading and discovering the beauty of the world; the beauty which, in the Neoplatonic spirit, is (along with truth and goodness) one of the three paths of the spiritual climb towards perfection.

But we can say more than that: the Victorines' sensibility to the beauty of the world expresses their empathy and solidarity with nature, fitting in with modern ecological sensitivity. The holistic view and understanding of the world are the basis for responsible action and behaviour, and the righteous thinking is the tool of an ecologist caring for the protection of nature, the plant, animal and human world. These are the very ideas that we find in the educational programme promoted by the Victorine school.

²⁵ Richard of Saint-Victor, 2013: 164: "Post primam itaque considerationem que est in rebus, et secundam que est in operibus, sequitur tertia que constat in moribus, quam et ad arce nostre altitudinem pertinere iam diximus. Disciplina itaque morum partim ex institutione diuina, partim processit ex institutione humana. Disciplina itaque morum partim ex institutione diuina, partim processit ex institutione humana. [...] Ad instituta humana pertinent humane leges, consuetudines, urbanitates, plebiscita, iura ciuilia, et huiusmodi alia multa. Humana institutio propter uitam inferiorem, diuina institutio propter uitam superiorem. Illa ad obtinendam salutem et tranquillitatem uite temporalis, ista ad capessendam salutem et plenitudinem eterne beatudinis. In humana institutione scientia humana cubitum habere potest, quia quod inuenire potest, illud nec mirum comprehendere potest. In sacramentis diuinis duo esse non dubitamus, aliud est enim quod exterius in re uel in opere cernimus, atque aliud uirtus illa spiritalis que latet intrinsecus".

²⁶ Richard of Saint-Victor, 2013: 164: "Ad diuina instituta pertinent obsequia diuina, et quelibet Ecclesie sacramenta [...] In sacramentis diuinis duo esse non dubitamus, aliud est enim quod exterius in re uel in opere cernimus, atque aliud uirtus illa spiritalis que latet intrinsecus".

²⁷ Richardus de S. Victor, 1997: 162: "Opus itaque naturale et opus artificiale, quia sibi inuicem cooperantur, quasi e latere sibi altrinsecus iunguntur, et sibi inuicem mutua contemplatione copulantur. Certum siquidem est quia ex naturali operatione opus industrie initium sumit, consistit et conualescit, et operatio naturalis ex industria proficit ut melior sit".

CONCLUSION

The example of the pedagogical theory of Hugh of St. Victor, demonstrates the key features of medieval educational assumptions and practices that are worth considering when reflecting on the ethos of contemporary universities and schools. Hugh's approach to education demonstrates a more holistic way of learning than is practised in current educational models. His understanding of art and beauty, reading and memory, together with his concern for spiritual renewal as well as the discipline of the body, for the role of example and discipleship, and for the impact of community life on student learning — all this with the aim of promoting rationality, realism and virtue in the service of wisdom.²⁸

One aspect of this holistic approach in human upbringing is the motto *pulchrum esse* — “beautiful being”, which had a wide meaning in Victorine pedagogy; it was part of the various ways of understanding beauty present in medieval philosophical thought: in addition to corporeal, sensual beauty, two dimensions of beauty were assumed: the first being spiritual beauty seen almost exclusively as moral beauty (Greek *kalon* as *honestum*) and the second, supernal beauty, the most perfect, ideal beauty. All these dimensions of beauty found their way into Victorine aesthetic thought and were incorporated into their theory of education.

Pulchrum esse (beautiful being) marked the path of man's “re-newal” and showed him the ultimate goal of “*beatum esse*” — to be happy. The attainment of happiness in the present earthly life is a test of man's pursuit of wisdom, a foretaste of that happiness which is to be gained for eternity.

The greatness of the Victorine educational ideal lies in the fact that this programme coincided almost entirely with the state of knowledge available in the first half of the twelfth century. It was an attempt to strike a balance between the opening of intelligence to all areas of knowledge and the will to adapt it to the Christian vision of the human person and his or her relationship with God, nature and other human beings. And although the development of science and the accumulation of knowledge in the following centuries made this programme impossible to be fully realised and the slogan “learn everything” became unrealistic, the ideal continues to fascinate, perhaps because, as an antidote to our ultra-specialisation, it reminds us that knowledge, however complete it may be, will not be able to saturate man unless it structures itself into wisdom.

²⁸ See more in: Sullivan, 2021: 165–182.

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