

Literary approaches to the theory of thinness aesthetics

Abstract

In this research we will address the negative view of female beauty canons. In addition, we will study what Bourdieu call the ‘paradox of the doxa’ and Barthes’ notion of second-level meaning, which apparently contribute to sustaining the tyranny of female beauty.

In contrast, we will delve into Lipovetsky’s theory of the aesthetics of thinness, which considers thinness a symbol of self-control, success and self-management. In other words, thinness would translate the feminine desire for emancipation and equality. Thus, we will start from this theory to analyze some works by Najat El Hachmi, a hybrid and “atravesada” author, which will allow us to analyze the different conceptions of thinness in two cultures.

Keywords: female body, aesthetics of thinness, literature, Najat el Hachmi, Lipovetsky

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Introduction

The present work starts from the contemporary sociological theories of Translation Studies,¹ the concept of microphysics of power,² the concept of ideology,^{3,4} whose traces are palpable in the media, and the notion of symbolic violence,⁵ which is exercised through the media.

Likewise, given that the female body is an object of representation, the concept of representation (and therefore signification) must be analyzed: in fact, according to Barthes,⁶ the image is the only thing that exists, since reality cannot exist outside of representation.^{6,7} However, representations are never neutral, but objects on which power and ideology act. For this reason, feminism has also explored the concept of the body, both as an object of representation and as a historical and cultural construct.

The body as a semiotic system of representation and meaning

Writing is never neutral,⁸ and neither is it when writing about the body: it is about exercising the power of representation and imposing a certain vision of the world. As a consequence, the concept of the body has to do with the dominant power and ideology⁹ for this reason, it must be understood as a political and historical object on which the relations of power and resistance act, and which is sometimes placed in the background in front of the mind and Reason. For this reason, for the purpose of this research we consider “the body as a place of social pressures, of wills to power, of docility, of transformations” (my translation).¹⁰ However, the different visions, images and interpretations are nothing more than particular and fictitious representations,¹¹ despite the fact that representation is indispensable for reality to exist:⁶ “the importance given to body image nowadays and to fashion as a consequence makes us think that they are symptoms of causes external to them (sexism, patriarchy, racism, imperialism) and that they are loaded with significance. And it is that [...] without representations there is no reality” (my translation).¹⁰ As we said, writing about the (female) body is an exercise of power and representation that has been analyzed by a large number of philosophers—Luce Irigaray, Friedrich Nietzsche, Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, Roland Barthes, Umberto Eco, Hans Magnus Enzensberger, Gillo Dorfles, Pierre Bourdieu, Yuri Lotman and Jean Baudrillard—

although taking as a starting point no longer the female body, but a neutral body. For this reason, feminism took on the task of adapting some of their theories to the question of gender.

Thus, during the first wave, feminists vindicated civil rights, individual freedom and political voice, in addition to fighting for access to university studies. However, the outbreak of the First World War caused many to devote all their efforts to patriotism, to the detriment of the feminist movement. The second wave, located at the end of the Second World War and made up of several branches—liberal, socialist, radical or also called “the celebration of femininity”,¹² etc.—is characterized by the concepts of ‘oppression and liberation. During this wave, abortion, contraceptive methods and sexual freedom are claimed. Within this second wave, radical feminism is particularly relevant for Translation Studies, since it was at this precise moment when women became aware of the power of language and used it to (re)configure reality. This branch of feminism considered sex a created system of social organization and blamed patriarchy for the domination and power relations it exercised at the micro level.¹³ The third wave, formed by cultural feminism and that of difference, already corresponds to the 21st century. The first praised the virtues traditionally attributed to women, such as tenderness and affection. The second represented the progression of radical feminism, thanks to its ubiquitous conception of patriarchy, and cultural feminism, since it sought a new female culture. In view of all this, we can then conclude that the female body can be considered either an object of representation (Juliet Mitchell, Julia Kristeva, Nancy Chodorow, Marxist feminism, psychoanalytic feminism, etc.) or a historical and cultural construct (Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous, Gayatri Spivak, Jane Gallop, Judith Butler, Naomi Schor, etc.). In any case, far from being neutral, it is a semiotic system where economic, political, intellectual and sexual tensions occur.¹⁰

The female body, homogeneous and determined, can be considered a matter of power exercised through the media and advertising,⁹ among other ways. In addition, it can be considered a true semiotic system that serves to disseminate the canons of beauty to which women must submit in order to achieve success: “Ironically, we are aware that the beauties who are proposed to us as a paradigm of beauty are the result of multiple cosmetic-surgical manipulations; but, even so, the appearance market sensitizes women so that they feel guilty and humiliated for not reaching the proposed models” (my translation).¹⁴

In addition, the woman's body has been conceived based on the recognition and discourse professed by the Other: "Men look at women. Women contemplate themselves being looked at. This fact determines not only the relationship between men and women, but also the relationship of the woman with herself" (my translation).¹⁴ In view of this, the female body appears as something imperfect and mutable that must be (re)configured and (de)constructed. By virtue of all this, and despite the fact that women have evolved more in half a century than in all previous millennia,¹⁵ Western society seems contradictory: on the one hand, women have the feeling that they have achieved legal and reproductive rights, and that they own their bodies; on the other hand, unreal beauty is shown as the only way to achieve love, happiness and social success.^{10,14,16} In fact, "[d]uring the last decades, parallel to the normalization of the presence of women in the workplace and in power structures, the costs of cosmetic consumption in the female environment have multiplied, plastic surgery is advancing by leaps and bounds and the widespread obsession for weight control in the West is manifested in a multitude of offers related to gyms, diets and slimming pharmacopoeias. We are, therefore, facing a phenomenon that has a direct relationship with industrial and commercial policies (my translation).¹⁴

Wolf¹⁶ agrees with Ventura in stating that while women have challenged the power structure, eating disorders and cosmetic surgery have increased exponentially. Wolf speaks in this same vein when she states that "[t]he more legal and material hindrances women have broken through, the more strictly and heavily and cruelly images of female beauty have come to weigh upon them".¹⁶ Valcárcel also shares this point of view when she states that "we must study the modulations in which female pleasure is demanded because they are intrinsically connected to the freedoms allowed for the female sex" (my translation).¹⁷ According to Wolf, this situation does not happen by chance and considers the myth of beauty a masculine "political weapon" against feminist progress: "as women released themselves from the feminine mystique of domesticity, it waned and the beauty myth took over its lost ground, expanding to carry on its work of social control".¹⁴ In line with this, Ventura notes the following: "But while men share with us the fear of aging and face the demand to be calibrated by their physical appearance, something inside them tells them that economic power, professional achievements, talent, physical strength, celebrity, hierarchy, or, simply, sympathy and the capacity for seduction (aside from their anatomy), protect them from the insignificance or decadence of their bodies" (my translation).¹⁴

Since power diminishes women's ability to seduce, contrary to what happens in the case of men, women resort to aesthetics as a weapon to enhance seduction: in fact, women's physical qualities are more attractive and seductive than mental ones.¹⁵ For Lipovetsky, the bisexual and asymmetrical logic on which the universe of seduction is based is more comfortable for women.¹⁵

In this sense, it seems necessary to dwell on the question of the beautiful sex—or second sex—, since women have not always been considered as such.¹⁵ In the Upper Paleolithic and Neolithic, female depictions emphasized the breasts, hips, and womb as clear symbols of fertility. In Greek and Roman Antiquity, the body of married women belonged to the husband—as long as they were not slaves, in which case they were property of the master—and only women from the upper classes, prostitutes and free courtesans who earned money for their work, cultivated their appearance and used cosmetics, although this was not due to the culture of the fairer sex per se, but was related, rather, to the desire to look beautiful.¹⁵ It is also true that Greek artists praised feminine charms, but they never considered women the epitome of beauty, hence the predominance of the male

nude in art, to the detriment of the feminine.¹⁵ In addition, the Judeo-Christian tradition demonized female beauty: "The subjection of women to aesthetic norms imposed by male power and the hostility and suspicion of men towards the female body (and the ghost of its sexuality) are in the background of the history of appearances, from East to West and from Classical Antiquity to the Middle Ages" (my translation).¹⁴

Thus, we can conclude that women began to embody the epitome of beauty in the Renaissance, that is, during the 15th and 16th centuries,^{14,15} and that today's society is therefore the direct heir of the conception of this feminine aesthetic supremacy: "Thus, there is an evolution from the stigmatization of sinful beauty in the Judeo-Christian tradition typical of the middle Ages to the belief in the aesthetic and moral superiority of the 'Venuses' and the 'Dianas' of Renaissance art. Here the dualities of angel/monster, generated by the male perception, will be consolidated, and throughout history, they will materialize at the extreme poles of idealization and denigration of the female image" (my translation).¹⁴

However, Wolf¹⁶ considers the myth of beauty to be a much more recent invention: in fact, she places it after 1830, after the development of chain production and the consolidation of the cult of domesticity. For this author, the beauty myth achieves its goal because it succeeds in making women value their beauty in comparison to others and therefore consider themselves enemies of each other: "The core of the myth is its divisiveness [...] It is painful for women to talk about beauty because under the myth, one woman's body is used to hurt another. Their bodies become instruments to punish other women [...] This constant comparison, in which one woman's worth fluctuates in the presence of another, divides and conquers".¹⁶

For her part, Ventura, who defends that "the pursuit of beauty continues to gravitate over the biography of women" (my translation),¹⁴ blames the economic market and advertising for this situation and admits that it can be due to the sense of freedom that women enjoy: they receive atomized proposals adapted to a wide variety of personalities and, therefore, have the possibility to choose between them all.¹⁴ In short, our time has witnessed the democratization of beauty as aesthetic products have become everyday consumer goods: a luxury within everyone's reach.¹⁵

In any case, what seems particularly striking in the case of the tyranny of female beauty is the so-called paradox of doxa: that is, women have not yet rebelled against the established order and male symbolic violence.¹⁸ It could be due to the fact that the androcentric power structure seems neutral and, therefore, does not need to be expressed in discourses that legitimize it. Male symbolic domination turns women into symbolic objects and places them in a permanent state of bodily insecurity or, in other words, symbolic dependence.⁵ Bourdieu¹⁸ further argues that the femininity expected of women is nothing more than a form of complacency to male expectations. For this reason, the relationship of dependence that the woman establishes with respect to others becomes, on a large number of occasions, a constitutive element of her being: "Incessantly under the gaze of others, women are condemned to constantly experience the distance between the real body, to which they are chained, and the ideal body to which they incessantly try to approach. When they feel the need for the gaze of others to constitute themselves, they are constantly oriented in their practice to the anticipated evaluation of the price that their bodily appearance, their way of moving the body and of presenting it [...]" (my translation).⁵

Likewise, second-level meaning,¹⁹ one of the most efficient instruments of manipulation, also seems adequate to explain the

current situation: the media and advertising show women, and perhaps instill in them, that it is *logical, normal and natural* to be thin. But who determines what is *logical, normal and natural*? In short, what seems obvious is that the woman's identity apparently rests on her beauty, which reveals her to be vulnerable and subject to the approval of the Same. So much so that Valcárcel maintains that "the conditions of feminine beauty reveal the conditions of real freedom in which women exist" (my translation).²⁰

For the purpose of this work, we will explore the theory of the aesthetics of thinness proposed by Lipovetsky¹⁵ and apply it to the works *Jo també sóc catalana*,²¹ *L'últim patriarca*²² and *La filla estrangera*.²³

Thinness as a way of emancipation in the work of Najat el Hachmi

In a certain way, Lipovetsky¹⁵ shares some of the considerations we reviewed in the previous section. This author defends, for example, that the aesthetics of thinness, whose imperatives are increasingly strict, occupies a preponderant place and has become a mass market with an infinite number of ramifications. Likewise, he admits that the peak of female individualism coincides with the intensification of social pressures regarding bodily dictates: "On the one hand, the female body has easily emancipated itself from its old servitudes, whether sexual, procreative, or related to attire; on the other hand, we see it subjected to aesthetic pressures that are more regular, more imperative, more anxiety-inducing than in the past" (my translation).¹⁵ For Lipovetsky, in addition, "conserving shape, fighting wrinkles, ensuring a healthy diet, tanning, staying thin, relaxing, individualistic happiness is inseparable from an extraordinary effort to energize, maintain, and optimally manage oneself".²⁴

In this sense, Lipovetsky¹⁵ emphasizes that the feminist interpretation of the aesthetics of thinness, understood as a reproduction of the traditional subordination of women, "is at least insufficient, considering that nowadays those norms are also imposed on the stronger sex" (my translation). In fact, this author points out that although women are much more tyrannized than men in our age of lipophobic culture, they too care about losing weight, controlling weight and diet, exercising, etc.¹⁵ In addition to all this, this author also understands that the exaltation of a young look and the imperative of youth that is currently imposed "contributes in its own way to the granting of equal conditions between the sexes" (my translation).²⁵

Thus, in contrast to the authors we referred to in the previous section, such as Vidal,¹⁰ Ventura,¹⁴ Wolf,¹⁶ Valcárcel,¹⁷ etc., Lipovetsky¹⁵ considers the contemporary aesthetics of thinness a symbol of self-control, success and self-management. Apparently, this statement is due to the fact that women now use contraceptives and are involved in working life, which has led to a change in attitude towards physical appearance: in other words, they deny that their bodies are identified solely and exclusively with fecundity and motherhood and therefore with voluptuousness, their most obvious physical characteristic, as it used to be: "In the societies that preceded us, female corpulence was valued because it was associated with fecundity, the supreme destiny of the traditional female condition. The rise of contraceptive methods and the new professional commitment of women radically transformed not only women's living conditions but also, in the same vein, their relationship with the physical aspect. The expansion of individualist values, the legitimacy of women's paid work, birth control took away from motherhood its former position in social and individual life" (my translation).¹⁵

Ultimately, according to Lipovetsky, the aesthetics of thinness would translate the feminine desire for emancipation and, therefore, should be understood as a perspective of equality and not of oppression.¹⁵ Despite this conception of thinness defended by Lipovetsky, Ventura¹⁴ points out that the body obsession of a large number of women is neither synonymous with freedom nor a pleasure, but has ended up becoming a nightmare as external assessments are increasingly coercive. Wolf¹⁶ elaborates on this issue by stating that the real problem is not whether women lose weight or not, but rather the fact that they have no choice but to comply with imposed beauty canons.

Beauty, according to this author, is a political instrument that separates men from women, and the latter from each other,¹⁵ but, at the same time, he emphasizes that individualistic happiness is inseparable from maintenance of oneself.²⁴ In short, the aesthetics of thinness would translate the feminine desire for emancipation and, therefore, should be understood as a perspective of equality and not of oppression: "At the root of the female allergy to adipose volumes lies the new desire to neutralize the too emphatic marks of femininity [...] Every woman who wants to be thin manifests through her body the will to appropriate the qualities of will, of autonomy, of efficacy, of power over herself traditionally attributed to men [...] it must be considered more as a sign of the equalization of conditions than as a vector of oppression of women" (my translation).¹⁵

Despite this, it is at least paradoxical that contemporary culture promotes thinness and, at the same time, considers food a means of socialization. In any case, Lipovetsky rejects the myth of beauty and considers that female aspiration to aesthetic canons is marked by free examination, critical questioning and collective debate: "It is not about a mystique of beauty products but about voluntarist consumption, an optimism of the will that never completely eliminates distance and perplexity" (my translation).¹⁵

Also, for Lipovetsky²⁵ beauty treatments and make-up build a new figure of the feminine, since "the claim of feminine charm does not exclude that of work and responsibility" (my translation): "Women have won the right to vote, the right to sex, free procreation and all professional activities, but, at the same time, they retain the ancestral privilege of coquetry and seduction. This patchwork is what defines the 'woman with capital letters', constituted by the juxtaposition of ancient antinomian principles [...] getting ready, 'getting pretty', no longer has anything to do with alienation" (my translation).²⁵

In addition to the above, we must mention here that this author emphasizes that, as the most obvious symbols of difference diminish, "there are others that counteract the democratic tendency to approach the extremes: the lipstick frenzy after the Great War, of nail polish in the 1930s and eye makeup from the 1960s onwards. It is as if equality could not overcome a certain threshold, as if the democratic ideal would stumble upon the imperative of the aesthetic differentiation of the sexes. We all recognize ourselves of an identical essence and claim the same rights and, nevertheless, we do not want to look like the other sex" (my translation).²⁵

Furthermore, like Wolf, Lipovetsky²⁵ also points out that the value of female beauty depends, first, on comparison with other women and, second, on a thorough analysis of physical appearance based on recognized standards.

As we announced before, the object of study of the present investigation are the works *Jo també sóc catalana*,²¹ *L'últim patriarca*²² and *La filla estrangera*,²³ by the writer "atravesada"²⁶

writer El Hachmi. El Hachmi was born on July 2, 1979 in Nador when her father had already emigrated to Catalonia. At the age of eight she moved with the rest of the family to Vic (Catalonia) and a few years later she began studying Arabic Philology at the University of Barcelona. She started writing at just twelve years old and has continued ever since. Among her many works, we should highlight: *Jo també sóc catalana*,²¹ *L'últim patriarca*,²² *La caçadora de cossos*,²⁷ *La filla estrangera*,²³ *Mare de llet i mel*,²⁸ *Sempre han parlat per nosaltres*,²⁹ and *Dilluns ens estimaran*.³⁰

Her work, which bears the stamp of diasporic literature, takes as a guiding thread her life experience, and her writing, at the intersection of four cultures (Moroccan, Amazigh, Catalan and Spanish).³¹ For this research, we have taken as the object of study the works *Jo també sóc catalana*,²¹ *L'últim patriarca*²² and *La filla estrangera*,²³ since in all three works the female body and the different conceptions and standards of beauty depending on the culture in which it is framed play a fundamental role. As we will see below in various excerpts we have extracted, the narrator aspires to achieve a thinness that she associates with Western women.

In the autobiographical essay *Jo també sóc catalana*,²¹ dedicated to those who have felt between two worlds, El Hachmi reflects on the migratory process, languages, integration, female liberation and food, among other issues. As a result of migration, the author explains that she has experienced a process of identity change, the turning point of which was discovering that her internal speech was in Catalan. In this work, food understood as cultural translation is particularly relevant and, in fact, has consequences on the author's body. By way of illustration, after returning from Morocco, the narrator's aunts do not understand that she has not gained weight, since she lives in a rich country. They expected her to be like her cousin, who "era baixeta i quasi feia el mateix d'alt que d'ample" [was short and almost as tall as she was wide] (my translation),²¹ since this is their ideal of beauty. On the contrary, the narrator is in favor of the aesthetics of thinness, as we will also see below through the analysis of *L'últim patriarca*²² and *La filla estrangera*.²³ "[i] si us expliqués totes les meves baralles amb la bàscula i els carbohidrats, no per engreixar-me, no, ben bé al contrari, pensariu que m'he trastocat" [if I told you all my fights with the scale and carbs, not to get fat, no, quite the opposite, you'd think I've lost my mind?] (my translation).²¹

As we said, the aesthetics of thinness is also present in the novel *L'últim patriarca*.²² Thus, the protagonist explains that, when she told her mother that she had to go jogging to lose weight, the latter did not understand anything.²² It may be that this desire to lose weight is because the narrator links youth with thinness and considers the former to imply the latter.²² In relation to this theory, the protagonist also points out that at home they bought some food just for her and her mother, such as diet ice creams.²²

As in the two works we have reviewed so far, in the novel *La filla estrangera*²³ the so-called aesthetics of thinness is also one of its cornerstones. As an example, we should mention the fragment in which the narrator is cooking potatoes for her little cousins in Morocco and realizes that she never eats them fried because of their high caloric content: "faig present la taula amb la diferència calòrica entre unes patates bullides i unes de fregides, centenars i centenars de calories provinents del greix fastigós en què les hem de fregir" [I think of the table with the caloric difference between boiled and fried potatoes, hundreds and hundreds of calories from the disgusting fat in which we have to fry them] (my translation).²³ As we see then, the narrator tries not to eat certain foods, such as bread—one of the most basic foods in her culture of origin—and potatoes, given that they could have a negative impact on her weight: "O sigui que amb aquest sopar

simple i estúpid se m'acumulen dos problemes: l'oli que absorbeixen les patates i el pa amb què les haig d'agafar. Si hi ha pa d'ordi, el de pagès d'aquí de tota la vida i no aquestes baguettes blanques de ciutat, o els panets de *buyo*, encara. Però l'oli... és massa, no m'ho puc permetre. Des de que vam arribar que només fem que menjar i seure. Ens conviden a les cases, ens fan seure i ens serveixen un plat darrere l'altre. Tot amb pa. Jo de seguida m'atipo, miro d'agafar més la verdura lleugera, miro d'esquivar les patates i el greix, però les dones insisteixen" [So with this simple and stupid dinner, I accumulate two problems: the oil absorbed by the potatoes and the bread I have to use to pick them up. If there were barley bread, the typical country bread, not these white city baguettes, or the rustic rolls, even. But the oil... it's too much, I can't afford it. Since we arrived, all we do is eat and sit. They invite us into their homes, make us sit down, and serve us one dish after another. All with bread. I quickly fill up, try to take more of the light vegetables, try to avoid the potatoes and the grease, but the women insist] (my translation).²³

Likewise, the narrator asks her cousin for kitchen paper to absorb the oil released by the fries and reduce calories, which seems absurd to the latter: "[p]erò què fas?, m'ha cridat la cosina, que t'has tornat boja o què? És l'oli, cosina, així el paper absorbeix l'oli i les patates són més bones. Però en què vols que suquin el pa, els nens?" [But what are you doing?] shouted my cousin, "Have you gone mad or what? It's the oil, cousin, the paper absorbs the oil and the potatoes are better. But what do you want the kids to dip their bread in?" (my translation).²³

Following this same line about the different translations of female thinness depending on the culture we take as our starting point, the Moroccan women tell the narrator that she is too thin and should put on more weight, and she recalls her efforts to maintain her figure: "[j] o ric per dins recordant les meves caminades pels camps de la ciutat dels purins, els salts i els abdominals, la dieta permanent. Me les miro a totes, grasses, plenes de sacsons que s'intueixen sota les teles" [I laugh inwardly remembering my walks through the fields of the slurry city, the jumps and sit-ups, the permanent diet. I look at them all, fat, full spare tires that can be sensed under the fabrics] (my translation).²³ There is a moment when the protagonist's cousin asks her if maybe they are not given food abroad and the narrator thinks that the thinness she has achieved based on sacrifices is one of her greatest achievements. So much so that in Morocco, she worries about not having a scale on hand to control her weight, although she admits that she wouldn't be able to go out for a run or do sit-ups either because they would think she was crazy: "Sé que m'ha mirat les costelles, que se'm marquen, però no li puc dir que aquesta és una de les meves grans proeses, aconseguir que entre la pell i l'os no hi hagi ni un mil·límetre de greix. No li dic que des que van arribar em neguiteja no tenir cap bàscula a mà per saber si m'engreixo o m'aprimo o em mantinc i poder fer una cosa o altra per controlar el pes. Aquí tampoc no podria fer gaire res. Si sortís a córrer pels camps em prendrien per boja. Si em veiessin fent abdominals es pensarien que m'he trastocat" [I know she's looked at my ribs, which are noticeable, but I can't tell her that this is one of my greatest feats, getting not a millimeter of fat between the skin and the bone. I don't tell her that since we arrived I've been worried about not having a scale at hand to know if I'm gaining weight or losing weight or maintaining it and being able to do one thing or another to control my weight. I couldn't do much here either. If I went out running in the fields they would think I was crazy. If they saw me doing sit-ups, they'd think I've lost my mind] (my translation).²³

The above excerpt reveals the lipophobic culture and body cult that Lipovetsky^{32,33} discusses, as the narrator admits that she considers her thinness to be one of her greatest achievements. In this same sense, the

canons of ideal beauty, truly antagonistic, harbored by the protagonist and her mother are also significant. For her part, the narrator considers that she still has a lot of work to do, such as learning to control herself when she eats in order to reach the desired weight that “permeti tenir uns malucs més propis de les noies d’aquí [d’Espanya] que no pas aquestes anques amples i fèrtils que tenen les dones marroquines i que no els serveixen per altra cosa que per tenir fills i més fills” [allows her to have hips that are more typical of the girls here [from Spain] than these broad and fertile hips that Moroccan women have and that serve them for nothing other than to have children and more children] (my translation).²³ On the contrary, her mother believes that she should “menjar més, i menjar de debò” [eat more, and eat properly] (my translation),²³ which translates into “estofats, guisats, carn, patates, pa” [stews, casseroles, meat, potatoes, bread] (my translation).²³ So, as we see, the ideal bodies of both are diametrically opposed: “Ella em voldria plena, grassa, amb la cara rodona com la lluna (per mi, pa de pagès). [...] [U]na cara rodona com la lluna amb uns ulls negres enormes i unes celles llargues i espesses, una cara ben blanca i plena. Jo, en canvi, només faig que fixar-me en noies filfèriques, com moltes de les que anaven amb mi a l’institut, que porten uns pantalons estrets que els marquen unes natges rodones i petites com de nena. Em fixo en les seves clavícules i em semblen gairebé poètiques” [She would like me full, fat, with a face as round as the moon (for me, peasant bread). [...] [A] round face like the moon with huge black eyes and long thick eyebrows, a very white and full face. I, on the other hand, only notice skinny girls, like many of those who went to high school with me, who wear tight pants that show off their round and small buttocks like a girl’s. I look at their collarbones and they seem almost poetic to me] (my translation).²³

In this last fragment it is clear that the protagonist aspires to the aesthetics of thinness as a means of emancipation and equality, as she refuses for her potential voluptuousness to be ultimately associated with fertility. Likewise, perhaps we can even consider the culture of thinness here as a way to blend in and go unnoticed among the (Western) women around her, which, ultimately, could be understood as a perspective of integration into another culture. All in all, these fragments show a cultural clash in the intersemiotic translation of the body between the two cultures between which the narrator lives.

Conclusion

In contemporary Western societies, the female body and nutrition are hot-button issues: the media continuously and tirelessly project and perpetuate images that align with the beauty standards imposed by the prevailing power and ideology. For this reason, we could assert that the body, in the broadest sense of the word, is the greatest concern that besets women today.

Obviously, art reflects reality, as evidenced by the narrative work of El Hachmi. In fact, the work of this author becomes even more interesting when the reader realizes that she is not only concerned with food in relation to female identity and the body, but also with the consequences of different external meanings and cultural echoes. Thus, the three works analyzed—*Jo també sóc catalana*,²¹ *L’últim patriarca*²² and *La filla estrangera*.²³—merge femininity, sensitivity, feelings and bodily rhythms of two different cultures, making them particularly relevant works for understanding the different translations of the aesthetics of thinness according to different cultures.

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