

Anatomical Poems about the Breast (“Le Beau Tetin”) and Anatomical Proportions

Kun Hwang, MD, PhD

The pursuit of the beautiful breast has existed for centuries. As a marker of femininity, a sexual symbol, and a sustainer of new life, the female breast has occupied an iconic position in Western art—including both literary and visual representations.¹

In an anonymous medieval (12th or 13th century) French fictional story, “*Aucassin et Nicolette*,” there is a description of beautiful breasts. This “sung story” recounts the tale of Aucassin, son of a count, who loved Nicolette, a Saracen maiden who had been sold to a viscount. The relevant verses are as follows: “Her breasts so firm that they bore up the folds of her bodice as they had been two apples,” and “Woman may not love man as man loves woman, for a woman’s love lies in the glance of her eye, and the bud of her breast, and her foot’s tip-toe...”²

Between the medieval and Renaissance periods in France, poetic and artistic portrayals of the female breast express not only esthetic values and cultural anxieties concerning sexuality, but also political power, social class, and even religious ideology. In 1535, Clemente Marot (1496–1544) wrote two contrasting poems about the female breast, “Of the Fair Breast (*Blason du Beau Tetin*)” and “Of the Ugly Breast (*Contreblason du Tetin*)” (Table 1).³ In the first poem, he praised the beauties of the female breast; however, in the contrasting poem, he derided the appearance of a deformed breast.

It is now common for women to seek out reconstructive or cosmetic procedures to achieve their ideal breast. Despite the difficulty of perceiving beauty through defined margins, studies have sought to establish parameters that define the ideal breast, such as specific proportions, while others suggest that attitudes fluctuate based on culture and life experiences.⁴ Some studies have investigated physical markers of esthetically pleasing breasts, and researchers have devised potential parameters to define the ideal breast, such as specific proportions or shape.

In a study measuring the breast imagery depicted in western painting, the distance from the nipple to the

sternal notch and to the midclavicular point was the same, at 0.46 of the distance from the sternal notch to the umbilicus. The shape of the projection of the breast was almost an isosceles triangle, and the altitude of the triangle was at a proportion of 0.45 of the bottom length and 0.16 of the distance from the sternal notch to the umbilicus. The distance between the lateral ends of the breasts was 2.14 times the facial width, and the distance between nipples was 1.36 times the facial width (Fig. 1).⁵

Mallucci suggested “critical ideals” of breast beauty: (1) an upper pole to lower pole ratio of 45% to 55% (ie, a slightly fuller lower pole than the upper pole), referred to as the “45:55 breast,” (2) a skyward-pointing nipple (20 degree mean angle), (3) a straight/mildly concave upper pole slope, and (4) tight lower pole convexity (Fig. 2).⁶

The centuries-long pursuit of the beautiful breast is now being realized by plastic surgeons. We hope that both a “poetic mind” and “anatomical proportions” will help surgeons achieve satisfactory results—the “fair breast.”

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The author is grateful to Hye Won Hu, MA, Department of Oral Biology, Yonsei University College of Dentistry, for her illustration (Fig. 2).

DISCLOSURE

The author has no financial interests to declare in relation to the content of this article. This study was supported by a grant from National Research Foundation of Korea (NRF-2020R111A2054761).

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Received for publication April 15, 2021; accepted April 28, 2021.

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Plast Reconstr Surg Glob Open 2021;9:e3652; doi: 10.1097/GOX.0000000000003652; Published online 24 June 2021.

Table 1. Two Contrasting Poems for Female Breast, Written by Clemente Marot (Blason du Tetin)

Of the Fair Breast	Of the Ugly Breast
<p>Breast, whiter than an egg, and quite As smooth as satin, fresh and white; Breast that would shame the rose; plump breast, Of all things known, the loveliest; Firm breast; indeed, not breast at all; Rather, a small, round ivory ball, An in the middle, a cherry placed, Or berry, and with such beauty graced That, though I neither touch nor see It bare, I vow such must it be. Breast red-tipped; Breast taut, and that never Waggles about, whithersoever, Coming or going, running, leaping; Left Breast—coy, sweet—your distance keeping, Properly, from your mat, discreet. Breast that reflects, from top to teat, The body whole of your possessor! Ah! Were I but her breast-caresser!</p>	<p>Breast, nothing more than scraggy skin; Breast with no solid flesh therein; Sagging and loose, like swaying flag, Or-dare I say—a saddlebag! Black gross-tipped teat, long, ugly (very!), Funnel-like, that an ordinary Touch will set wagging in the breeze. And should, perchance, one choose to seize Your flaccid form, well may he crow: “I lend a hand to knead sour dough!” Breast dry as dust, breast drooping free; Breast withered, limp, whence loathsomely Not milk but muck comes oozing, spewing: Vile Breast, the very devil’s doing. Breast foul as tripe; Breast I would not Be much bemused to learn was got From some old she-gout, lying dead; Breast wrought in Hell, that might have fed Lucifer’s child; long swagging sack Fit to be slung athwart the back, Over the shoulder, like a cape Of yesteryear, round neck and nape.</p>
<p>Many’s the man that, when he sees you, Tingles with lust to hold and squeeze you; But he must rein his appetite, Never draw near lest soon he might Burn with a fire quite otherwise!</p>	<p>Many’s the hand that when one sees you, Quakes with disgust, forthwith, to squeeze you Well gloved, perforce! – and flail the face Of her who hides you in disgrace. Pendulous Breast, gaunt, misbegotten,</p>
<p>O Breast of perfect shape and size, Alluring Breast, who, night and day, Cry: “Find me a husband, quick, I pray!”</p>	<p>Ah, what a smell, abhorrent, rotten, Wafts from the sweat that you secrete: Civets and scents galore, replete With stench, I warrant, that might choke A hundred thousand gentlefolk. Breast that makes nature blush with shame To call you Breast; you who defame The very name of Breast; the first Among the foulest and the worst;</p>
<p>Breast swelling full and comely; Breast Quick to add inches to her chest; Ah! Right the man who says that he Is blest who fills you generously With milk, to turn you, <i>ma petite</i> From virgin’s Breast to Breast complete.</p>	<p>Breast with your nipple suppurating Slime-putrid, noxious, nauseating... By George! — the saint, that is — no more! Shit, pen, be still! Be silent, or If you keep writing so, no doubt I’ll retch and puck my innards out.</p>
<p>Epigrammes, I LXXIX</p>	<p>Epigrammes, I LXXX</p>

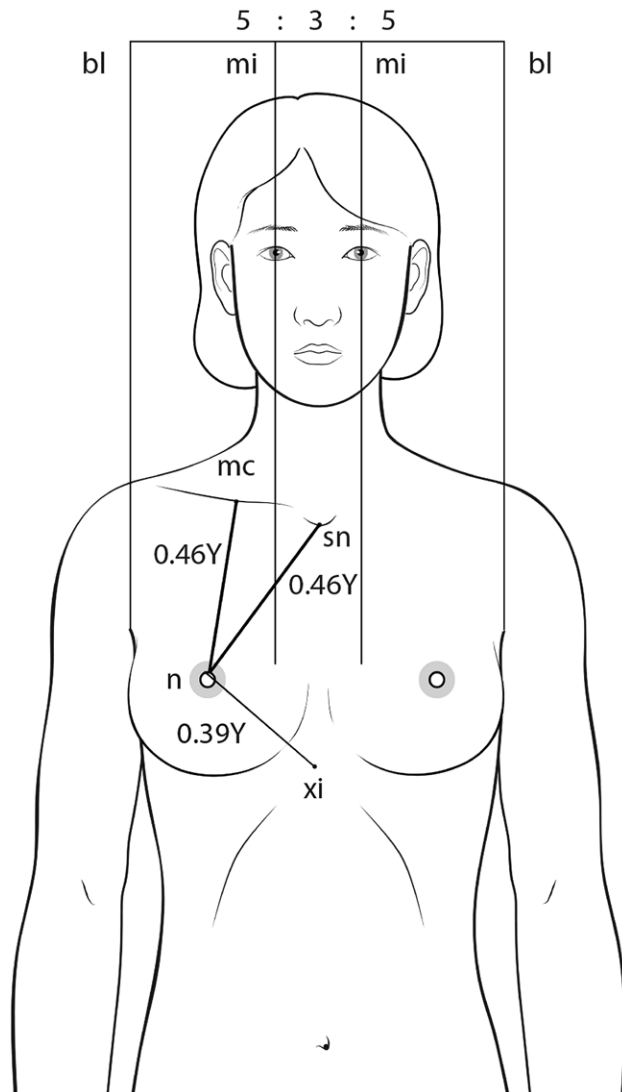


Fig. 1. Breast width and distance between the medial ends of the inframammary fold ratio and oblique proportional distances. Y, distance from the sternal notch to the umbilicus (sn-um); mi-mi, distance between the medial end of the inframammary fold; mc-n, distance from the midclavicle to the nipple; sn-n, distance from the sternal notch to the nipple; xi-n, distance from the xiphoid to the nipple. Reproduced with permission from *Arch Plast Surg.* 2015;42(2):226-231, available under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial-No Derivatives License 4.0 (CCBY-NC-ND), where it is permissible to download and share the work provided it is properly cited. The work cannot be changed in any way or used commercially without permission from the journal.

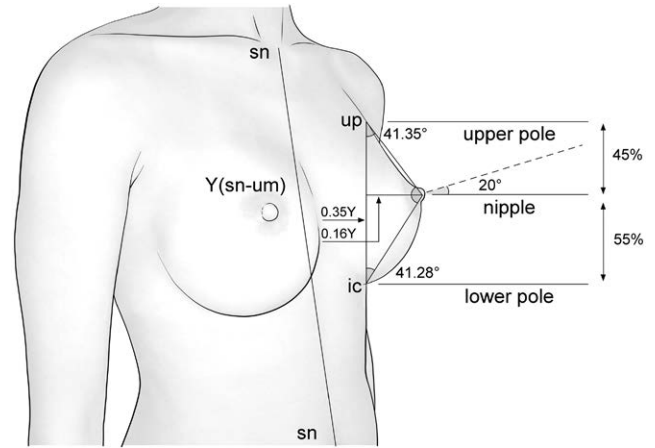


Fig. 2. “Critical ideals” of breast beauty suggested by Mallucci: (1) an upper pole to lower pole ratio of 45% to 55% (ie, a slightly fuller lower pole than the upper pole), referred to as the “45:55 breast,” (2) a skyward-pointing nipple (20 degree mean angle) (3) a straight/mildly concave upper pole slope, and (4) tight lower pole convexity (Artist’s re-drawing).