Withey, Alun. "Facial hair, health and the body, c. 1650–1750." *Concerning Beards: Facial Hair, Health and Practice in England, 1650–1900*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021. 19–32. *Bloomsbury Collections*. Web. 26 Apr. 2023. <<http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781350127876.ch-002>>.

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Facial hair, health and the body, c. 1650–1750

As a number of studies have recently shown, facial hair in the early modern period was freighted with a complex range of meanings. Unsurprisingly, the relationship between facial hair and constructions or representations of masculinity has been the dominant theme. As Mark Johnston's deconstructionist study of the semiotics of facial hair admirably demonstrates, beards carried many meanings including 'natural' strength, procreative power, mental acuity and the inner state of the body. At the same time, however, beard-wearing could also symbolize effete vanity, moral or physical weakness.¹ Faced with such contradictions, philosophers and medical authors attempted to 'fix' the role of the beard and did so by emphasizing its centrality to the male body and sexuality. In this reading the beard was both a proxy phallus and a synecdoche for the male body itself.² Will Fisher has also explored contemporary concerns with the nature, meanings and function of male facial hair, arguing that the beard was a marker of masculine identity, one that simultaneously constituted and reflected manliness. Here the beard is presented as 'a component of manhood [and] a means through which manhood was materialized'.³ Rather than a synecdoche for the male body, therefore, Fisher sees facial hair as an *enabler* of masculinity, one that was simultaneously a 'morphological reality' and a cultural artefact.⁴ In general terms, the beard was deemed a 'natural' ensign of a healthy male body and one that spoke of characteristics including sexual potency and martial strength.⁵

Fisher, Johnston and others have also explored the place of facial hair within the humoral framework and its relationship to catamenia and the expelling of excess bodily fluids.⁶ Beards were popularly linked to male bodily heat and specifically the

¹ Mark Albert Johnston, *Beard Fetish in Early Modern England: Sex, Gender, and Registers of Value* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 43–6. See also Edith Snook, 'Health and Hygiene', and Mark Albert Johnston, 'Gender and Sexuality', in Edith Snook (ed.), *A Cultural History of Hair in the Renaissance* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), 85–114, published after this chapter had been written and late into production of this book and is therefore not incorporated in the discussion in this chapter.

² Johnston, *Beard Fetish*, 49.

³ Will Fisher, *Materializing Gender in Early Modern English Literature and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 99.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Parts of the discussion on this and the following page are taken from Jennifer Evans and Alun Withey (eds), *Framing the Face: New Perspectives on the History of Facial Hair* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 2–3, reproduced with permission of Palgrave Macmillan.

⁶ Johnston, *Beard Fetish*, 43–6, 48–50; Fisher, *Materializing Gender*, 102–3, 108–9; also more briefly in Patricia Simons, *The Sex of Men in Premodern Europe: A Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 27–30; Jennifer Jordan, "'That Ere with Age, His Strength Is Utterly

production of semen. They were regarded variously as excrements, sooty residues or 'fumosities' and as a common (if also problematic in terms of gender binaries) adornment of the male body. Less attention has been paid, however, to the broader relationship between hair, the humours and ideas about the healthy body. Johnston, for example, briefly touches upon ideas about the role of beard colour in assessing humoral temperament and assessments of health based upon the quality of facial hair.⁷ Often, however, such discussions are refracted firmly through the lens of masculinity, obscuring the medical context. Perhaps more importantly, the nature of the relationship between beards and other types of facial hair has largely been overlooked. The question remains as to whether masculinity and 'medical' understandings of the beard were effectively coterminous, or whether there was conceptual space between them. As will be shown below, beards formed part of a skein of ideas about the nature and place of hair within humoral understandings of the body.

The nature and composition of hair, c. 1500–1750

As Edith Snook has recently argued, both the physical attributes of hair and its appearance, are culturally located. While historians have discussed topics relating to the appearance of hair – most notably debates about wigs – they have been more reticent in addressing the corporeality of hair.⁸ Ideas about the nature of hair were made and remade throughout the early modern period, affected by changing ideas about medicine, physiology and the body. Abundant, healthy and flowing hair was constructed through a variety of literary and medical discourses as a natural ensign of the body (and, specifically, the European body).⁹

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, knowledge of the origins, nature and construction of hair was firmly grounded within humoral medical theory. In broad terms hair, along with fingernails, was regarded as one of the common 'superfluities' or 'teguments' of the body. William Clever's 1590 *Flower of Phisicke* defined it as 'a material cause derived from the humours and inward partes of the body, as of the vaines'.¹⁰ For Clever, high temperatures within the body combined with a substance called 'hypostasis' in the 'bleather' (bladder), in turn, contributing to the formation of hair.¹¹ Such ideas were commonplace throughout the period. Over sixty years later, in 1654, the Wokingham physician and prolific medical author Robert Turner published a detailed study of the human body, in which he discussed the nature of hair, arguing them to be 'superfluities made of the grosse fume or smoake passing out of the viscous

Decay'd": Understanding the Male Body in Early Modern Manhood', in Kate Fisher and Sarah Toulalan (eds), *Bodies, Sex and Desire from the Renaissance to the Present* (London: Palgrave, 2011), 35–7.

⁷ Johnston, *Beard Fetish*, 44–5

⁸ Edith Snook, 'Beautiful Hair, Health and Privilege in Early Modern England', *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*, 15:4 (2015): 22–3.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 24–5.

¹⁰ William Clever, *The Flower of Phisicke Wherein Is Perfectly Comprehended a True Introduction and Method for Man's Assured Health* (London: Printed by Roger Ward, 1590), 86.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

matter, and thickned [*sic*] to the form of hair'.¹² Hair was thus presented as a viscous substance resulting from heat in the lower body and abdominal area, which rose, cooled and coagulated on reaching the surface of the skin.¹³

The fundamental principle governing humoral concepts of the creation of hair was heat. Hair was viewed as a by-product of the body's vital inner warmth. The flexibility of humoral theory allowed for the variations in the appearance, abundance and distribution of hair, which could be neatly explained as a result of individual humoral temperament, as well as temperature differences between the sexes.¹⁴ The hot and dry nature of men, as Samuel Haworth pointed out, made them naturally hairier than women, since their (men's) 'agitating virtue cause the blood more briskly to ferment, and circulate with more velocity'.¹⁵ Such explanations changed remarkably little up to the first half of the eighteenth century. Even in 1750, books such as *Aristotle's Problems* were still in print, which attributed hair growth to heat and vapour rising from the body. Here women's natural cold and moist state was explained by their having 'more matter of hair' which increased 'in the time of their monthly terms'. Since women had no beards, the 'matter of the beard' was diverted to hair on their heads.¹⁶ While the continued publication of the book cannot be taken as evidence that its contents were unquestioningly accepted, it at least confirms that such ideas were still in common currency.

A variety of health functions were ascribed to hair. Some viewed it as a means of protecting the brain, and the body more generally, from excess heat. Others saw it as a natural waste product of the body – commonly described in terms of a form of excrement, which carried away potentially harmful substances. In humoral theory, the health of the body could be regulated by the evacuation of waste materials through urination, defecation, vomit, sweat and so on. While practitioners could artificially induce this through various types of physic, the body also provided its own, natural sources of evacuation. According to Turner, for example, hair performed a vital function since 'by it the fumosity of the braine[s] are purged'.¹⁷ In a healthy body, the continued evacuation of the humours through hair growth prevented potentially dangerous accumulations within the body. While in women, the monthly 'terms' acted to expel excremental matter, the growth of a man's hair and beard was viewed as essentially part of the same process. But problems might arise if the system became blocked, allowing 'degenerate humours ... [to] retire backe' within the body. If this occurred, changes in the appearance of hair could presage a potentially dangerous

¹² Robert Turner, *Mikrokosmopgrapha. A Description of the Little World, or, Body of Man, Exactly Delineating All the Parts According to the Best Anatomists* (London: Printed for Edward Archer, 1654), 4.

¹³ Jordan, 'That Ere with Age', 31.

¹⁴ Anu Korhonen, 'Strange Things Out of Hair: Baldness and Masculinity in Early Modern England', *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 41:2 (2010): 380.

¹⁵ Samuel Haworth, *Anthropologia, or, A Philosophic Discourse Concerning Man, Being the Anatomy Both of His Soul and Body* (London: Printed for Stephen Foster, 1680), 193.

¹⁶ Anon., *Aristotle's Book of Problems, with Other Astronomers, Astrologers, Physicians and Philosophers, Wherein Is Contain'd Divers Questions and Answers Touching the State of Man* (London: Printed for S. N., 1749), 3.

¹⁷ Turner, *Mikrokosmopgrapha*, 5.

accumulation of humours. As William Clever noted, 'for when the body is disturbed, by any fuliginous or smokie vapours, then the outward forme of the bodie altereth and changeth therewith: besides which, the hairees doo eyther alter in their outward forme, and fall away, as leaues decay from the moysture of the tree'.¹⁸

Even beard hairs were sometimes attributed with health benefits. In his *Pro Sacerdotum bartis Apologia*, Joannes Valerianus took the usual humoral stance in arguing that long beards drew off superfluous humours. In addition, he claimed that facial hair protected the teeth from rotting and strengthened the gums, shielded the face from the sun and also helped prevent specific conditions such as quinsy.¹⁹ This is not to say that beards were universally acclaimed as a healthy appendage, however. John Bulwer's encomium to the beard listed various complaints about the supposed disadvantages of facial hair. These included obstruction of the mouth, leading to the incorrect chewing and digestion of food, as well as inhibiting respiration, the unsightly trapping of food and liquid in the beard and the prevention of clear diction caused by the 'gravity and weight' of facial hair preventing 'easie motion' of the upper lip.²⁰

Since it offered a view into the hidden inner workings of the body, hair could be a useful means of divining humoral temperament. Its colour, physical properties, appearance and health were all regarded as potential signals of bodily constitution and also the relevant signs and planets which acted upon the individual body. 'Dark flaxen haire' was a characteristic of Leo, while Sagittarians displayed light brown or chestnut-coloured hair. Black hair was indicative of Capricorn.²¹ Hot planets like Jupiter, Mars and the sun itself were likely to show in 'yellow complexion, and yellow haire, or reddish' their physical properties manifest upon the body.²²

This same concept applied to assessments of individual constitutions. A fleshy, compact body, a high facial colour and smiling countenance, could indicate a hot, sanguine constitution. The hair of a sanguine person was likely to be of a bright, even red, colour, 'the very colour of the Humour whereof it is generated'.²³ The hair of cold, moist and flabby phlegmatics, by contrast, was brown, straight and lank. Melancholic individuals, in line with their cold and dry constitutions, were slight of body, with 'hair that is black, hard, rough or crass'.²⁴ Cholemics, according to physician John Floyer in 1690, had yellow or black hair and a yellowish complexion of the face.²⁵ Some argued that the 'wit and natural disposition' of a person could be read through their bodily appearance. Juan Huarte's 1594 *Examination of Men's Wits* argued that thick, black, hard hair betokened imagination and understanding.

¹⁸ Clever, *Flower of Phisicke*, 86.

¹⁹ Quoted in Tom Robinson, 'Beards', *St James Magazine*, 4:40 (May 1881): 385–6.

²⁰ John Bulwer, *Anthropometamorphosis: Man Transform'd or the Artificial Changeling* (London: W. Hunt, 1653), 193–4.

²¹ Turner, *Mikrokosmopgrapha*, 150.

²² *Ibid.*, 153.

²³ Haworth, *Anthropologia*, 140.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 144–5.

²⁵ John Floyer, *The Preternatural State of Animal Humours Described by Their Qualities, Which Depend on the Different Degrees of Their Fermentation and the Cure of Each Particular Cacochymia Is Performed by Medicines of a Particular Specific Taste, Described...* (London: Printed by W. Downing, 1696), 111.

The state of the hair pointed to the amount and type of moisture in the brain, in turn suggesting mental acuity.²⁶ Others, however, included the beard as a less than desirable characteristic. Alexander Barclay's *Shepherd's Kalendar*, still in print in 1656, advised readers to 'beware ... specially of a man that hath no beard, for such be inclined to divers vices and evils, and one ought to eschue [*sic*] his company as his mortal enemy ... A man that hath black hair and a red beard, signifies to be lecherous, disloyall, a vanter, and one ought not to trust in him.'²⁷ Given the connection between beardlessness and effeminacy, the first example is fairly obvious. The disparity between the colour of the hair and beard in the latter example, however, implied one whose humoral balance was dangerously out of skew. As Robert Basset explained, 'Because the diversity of colour of haire proceeds from the diversity of humours: one and the selfe same man having divers humours predominant in him, is commonly, inconstant, dissembling, and mutable.'²⁸

If the colour, aesthetic and physical properties of hair might betray humoral state, they could also provide a glimpse into the body's inner health.²⁹ Changes to the appearance, strength and structure of hair, were therefore important signs through which the health of an individual could be judged. Those whose hair fell short of aesthetic ideals could find themselves under suspicion of loose living, not least given the raft of evidence citing falling hair as a symptom of venereal disease.³⁰ Various medical authors attested that 'excesse venerie' caused men's hair to 'decayeth, waxeth thin and vtterly looseth in the roots'.³¹

Within the broader maintenance of health, removing hair could be a means to restore balance, encouraging further growth and thereby releasing trapped substance within the head. For a 'phrensy' or delirium caused by an obstruction of the spirits, John Shirley recommended that the head be shaved and bathed with a chemical preparation, to encourage the release of 'poysonous vapours'.³² Nevertheless, baldness was undesirable since it bore negative connotations. As Anu Korhonen points out, heads covered by hair represented the 'natural' state in the early modern period. While male baldness was surely common, various social, cultural and medical factors combined to render it undesirable. Shaming rituals, for example, degraded bald men (and women) and head shaving was a highly visible and public punishment.³³ Baldness was interpreted as an indicator of life stage and age, but its onset could also signal a shift from haleness to decrepitude.

²⁶ Juan Huarte, *Examen de ingenios. = The Examination of Mens Vvits in Whicch [*sic*], by Discovering the Varietie of Natures, Is Shewed for What Profession Each One Is Apt, and How far He Shall Profit Therein* (London: Printed by Adam Islip, 1594), 83–4.

²⁷ Alexander Barclay, *The Shepheards Kalendar: Newly Augmented and Corrected* (London: Printed by Robert Ibbitson, 1656), 87.

²⁸ Robert Basset, *Curiosities: or the Cabinet of Nature Containing Phylosophical, Naturall, and Morall Questions Fully Answered and Resolved* (London: Printed by R. B. G., 1637), 46.

²⁹ Snook, 'Beautiful Hair', 26.

³⁰ For example, John Shirley, *A Short Compendium of Chirurgery Containing Its Grounds & Principles* (London: Printed by W. G., 1678), 115.

³¹ Quoted in Korhonen, 'Strange Things', 380.

³² Shirley, *Short Compendium*, 79.

³³ Korhonen, 'Strange Things', 374.

Beards and the male body

‘This is the last part of the face which one séeth outwardly, and also a goodly ornament of man; therefore men do desire to haue it grow, and stayed from falling out.’³⁴

As with hair on the head and body, facial hair was an outward manifestation of internal heat. Unlike other forms of hair, however, the beard was presented as the specific product of heat resulting from the production of sperm. It was heat that caused male genitals to protrude from the body. As another external protrusion, the beard was therefore closely linked to masculine sexuality and reproductive organs.³⁵ Beard hair was presented as the direct result of heat arising from the male genitals and ‘reins’ and, more specifically, as a ‘sooty’ residue of the production of sperm within the male body. Just like head hair, it was a ‘fumosity’, but also a type of ‘seminal excrement’ resulting from the heat and moisture generated from the male body’s production of sperm.³⁶ In this way the beard was directly linked to male sexuality and generative potential, and the strength and quality of beard pointed to a man’s reproductive abilities.³⁷

Early modern authors were at pains to establish a ‘normative corporeal ideal’.³⁸ In constructing the beard as the natural indicator of manliness, they both established and perpetuated ideals of gender and status.³⁹ Within the humoral framework, men’s bodies were naturally hot and dry, resulting in increased vapours within the male body, which explained why men were naturally hairier than women.⁴⁰ Since, as the Spanish physician Juan Huarte put it, it was impossible for women, who were by nature cold and moist, to achieve the requisite heat, they were therefore biologically incapable of growing beards. ‘If this not be so,’ he argued, ‘let the philosopher or physition tell me for what cause all women are beardlesse.’⁴¹ For men the inability to grow a beard was considered a sign of effeminacy (in the early modern sense of displaying feminine attributes) and of an inability to reproduce. A lack of ‘seminal ferment’ made men ‘womanish’ with shrill voices, low heat and lack of beards.⁴² The beard therefore signalled physical prowess and bodily strength, which were further constructed as masculine ideals; a man without a beard was scarcely a man at all. The beardless man

³⁴ Christof Wirsung, *The General Practise of Physicke Conteyning All Inward and Outward Parts of the Body...* (London: Printed by George Bishop, 1605), 117.

³⁵ Simons, *Sex of Men*, 131.

³⁶ Willis, *Dr Willis’s Practice*, 85.

³⁷ Fisher, *Materializing Gender*, 108; Patricia Simons, *The Sex of Men in Premodern Europe: A Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 30.

³⁸ Fisher, *Materializing Gender*, 103.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 104–5.

⁴⁰ See, for example, Jordan, ‘That Ere with Age’, 31.

⁴¹ Huarte, *Examination of Men’s Wits*, 271.

⁴² Thomas Willis, *Dr Willis’s Practice of Physick Being the Whole Works of That Renowned and Famous Physician Wherein Most of the Diseases Belonging to the Body of Man Are Treated of, with Excellent Methods and Receipts for the Cure of the Same* (London: Printed for T. Dring et al., 1684), 13; see also Lazare Rivière, *The Practice of Physick in Seventeen Several Books Wherein Is Plainly Set Forth the Nature, Cause, Differences, and Several Sorts of Signs* (London: Printed by Peter Cole, 1655), 506; Alexander Ross, *Arcana Microcosmi, or, The Hid Secrets of Man’s Body Discovered in an Anatomical Duel between Aristotle and Galen Concerning the Parts Thereof* (London: Printed by Thomas Newcomb, 1652), 85.

was lampooned in popular culture, both as an immature 'beardless boy' and as an unsuitable match for marriage. Smooth-faced men were seen as weak, poor at sports and unlikely to sire children. Literary fathers enjoined their daughters not to marry beardless men.⁴³ A husband without a beard, according to one play, was 'as unseemly as a wife with whiskers', a literal subversion of gendered appearance.⁴⁴ The character Hippolito in John Day's 1608 Italian comedy *Humour Out of Breath* commented upon the suggestion that a shop sign should carry the image of a 'proper man without a beard'. 'How?,' he cries, 'a proper man without a beard? We shall scarce find that sign in all Venice: for the propernesse of a man lives altogether in the fashion of his beard.'⁴⁵ A number of pejorative terms also existed, with further highlighted the intrinsic link between the beard and expectations of the male body. 'Imperbicke' was a Latinate term used in 1623 to indicate one who was 'without a beard'.⁴⁶ 'Smock faced' was another derisory term used to indicate a lack of facial hair, implying therein physical and sexual immaturity.⁴⁷ How far these judgements were projected onto the shaven face is unclear though. It seems likely that the *ability* to grow a beard was the deciding factor, indicating that the man's body was functioning 'correctly'.

The first appearance of the beard in adolescence signalled the change into sexual maturity and the commencement of the generation of seed. It therefore marked a critical change in the body, signalling the transition from one gender category to another. Will Fisher suggests that boyhood, before the appearance of the beard, was considered to be a distinct, third gender.⁴⁸ This was not an immediate change however, since humoral alterations to the body occurred over periods of around seven years. Puberty began around the age of twelve but could last into the early twenties.⁴⁹ So important was this transition that remedy collections sometimes provided solutions where nature appeared to have stalled. The self-style 'expert operator' 'La Fontaine' suggested that either spirit of honey or oil of tartar were proper for those 'that have come to an age to have a beard yet want it, so nature do but cooperate ever so little'.⁵⁰ Cockeram's dictionary actually gave this first flush of stubble its own distinct term. To signify the 'Downe, or the bearde when it first appeares to grow', the word 'Lanuge'

⁴³ Fisher, *Materializing Gender*, 109.

⁴⁴ Peter Motteux, *Love's Jest, A Comedy* (London: Printed for Peter Buck, 1696), 74.

⁴⁵ John Day, *Humour Out of Breath: A Comedy Lately Acted Divers Times by the Children of the King's Revels* (London: Printed for John Helmes, 1608), 20.

⁴⁶ Henry Cockeram, *The English Dictionarie: or, An Interpreter of Hard English Words...* (London: Printed for Edmund Weaver, 1623), unpaginated. Also in Edward Phillips, *The New World of English Words, or, A General Dictionary Containing the Interpretations of Such Hard Words as Are Derived from Other Languages* (London: Printed for E. Tyler, 1658), unpaginated.

⁴⁷ For examples, see J. S., *England's Merry Jester, or Court, City and Country Jests New, and Suitable to the Humours of the Times* (London: Printed by J. Wilde, 1693), 23. In Motteux's *Love's a Jest*, 74, the term is used to indicate surprise at the youthful appearance of a young couple and the lack of difference between the two, who are subsequently revealed as two women.

⁴⁸ Fisher, *Materializing Gender*, 87.

⁴⁹ Victoria Sparey, 'Performing Puberty: Fertile Complexions in Shakespeare's Plays', *Shakespeare Bulletin*, 33:3 (2015): 448–9. For the application of this in stage performances including young men, see Eleanor Rycroft, *Facial Hair and the Performance of Early Modern Masculinity* (London: Routledge, 2020), 51–2.

⁵⁰ Edward Fountaine, *A Brief Collection of Many Rare Secrets Many of Which Are Approved and Physical and the Rest Most Pleasant and Recreative* (London: Publisher unknown, 1650), 4.

was applied.⁵¹ John Crawford's 1724 *Cursus Medicinae* was explicit in linking the first appearance of the beard with the onset of adolescence. For Crawford the beard, along with changes in voice and temper, was a crucial sign of the commencement of 'generation-seed'.⁵² Before the age of sixteen, the 'particles of which [beards] are form'd' were seen as contributing to bodily growth, before being diverted once sperm began to be produced.⁵³ Others took the simultaneous appearance of 'the seed and the beard' as 'convincing proof that there is some correspondence between them' and that they consisted of the same matter.⁵⁴ In this reading, facial hair essentially represented the male equivalent of menstruation. The underlying principle that the matter of which hair was consisted differed in its manifestation upon male and female bodies was common. But Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa's *Glory of Women*, still in print in the seventeenth century, argued that 'by the ordinance of nature, women through secret places every moneth expell their superfluities; but men's are continually expelled through the face, the most comely part of the body'.⁵⁵ Given the stigma attached to menstrual fluid and its connections both to private domestic spaces and the most private parts of a woman's body, this was perhaps a surprising concept, not least in its appearance in the 'most comely' and public part of a man's body. Pierre Dionis made a similar argument in 1716, suggesting that women's menstrual cycles carried away beard matter and that he had observed some women with beards upon suppression of their 'terms'.⁵⁶ Unlike women's monthly cycles, however, the evacuation of beard 'matter' occurred on a gradual, daily basis.

Like the hair, the physical appearance of the beard was also regarded as a potential indicator of inner health and temperament. A thin or scanty beard could auger male bodily weakness and effeminacy, since it suggested a lack of body heat and weak distribution of humoral matter. Physicians considered the loss of hair, eyebrows or beard as a potential symptom of general bodily decline, such as 'defect of the nutritive facility' or weakness of the skin.⁵⁷ Specific conditions such as 'pestilent fever' or skin complaints could cause hair and beard loss. Others like 'Morphew' or 'Pellaria', caused by corrupted humours, led to mortification of the hair and beard and were considered an important potential sign of pox.⁵⁸ Indeed, there was a strong connection between loss of beard hair and venereal disease, again reinforcing the link between facial hair and the male reproductive system. According to the *Sick Man's Jewel* (1674) the sudden

⁵¹ Cockeram, *English Dictionary*, unpaginated.

⁵² John Crawford, *Cursus Medicinae: or a Complete Theory of Physic, in Five Parts...* (London: Printed for W. Taylor, 1724), 236.

⁵³ Pierre Dionis, *The Anatomy of Human Bodies Improv'd ... Translated from the Third Edition, Corrected and Enlarged by the Author* (London: Printed for R. Bronwicke et al., 1716), 345.

⁵⁴ Dennis De Coetlogon, *An Universal History of Arts and Sciences...* (London: Printed and sold by John Hart, 1745), 85.

⁵⁵ Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa, *The Glory of Women: or, A Treatise Declaring the Excellency and Preheminence of Women above Men* (London: Publisher unknown, 1652), 9–10.

⁵⁶ Dionis, *Anatomy*, 345.

⁵⁷ For example, Theophile Bonet, *A Guide to the Practical Physician* (London: Printed for Thomas Flesher, 1686), 8.

⁵⁸ Leonardo Fioravanti, *An Exact Collection of the Choicest and More Rare Experiments and Secrets in Physick and Chirurgery* (London: Printed for William Shears, 1659), 9, 181.

loss of beard hair was one of the first symptoms of the 'French Pox'.⁵⁹ Also, just as with the hair, the beard was considered another reliable indicator of humoral temperament and was affected not just by the predominant humour, but also by astrological influences. Thus, a man born in the 'hour of Venus' would have a round beard. A long beard, however, could identify one born under the influence of Mercury.⁶⁰ Saturn (and the sign of Capricorn) was distinguishable by a thin crop, whereas Jupiter begot a thick brown beard.⁶¹

The beard, then, was an ensign of manhood – one that spoke of the generative power of the individual man, together with multiple reference points to his health, strength and temperament. Nevertheless, the interpretation of the health function and symbolisms of facial hair was far from straightforward, due to the multiple and often conflicting meanings supported by humoral theory and also the lack of a coherent body of writing about beards. The lack of consensus around various factors relating to facial hair makes it unsafe to assume that a single, general approach existed. The situation was exacerbated by the lack of a homogenous medical 'profession', which meant that early modern writings about beards encompassed the opinions of a diverse group of authors, including clergymen and lawyers, as well as physicians.⁶² As such, beyond the basic consensus around the idea of beards resulting from inner heat, conceptions of facial hair were riven with contradictions and paradoxes.

The colour and quality of the beard as indicators of humoral temperament, for example, were acknowledged to be unreliable by early modern authors such as Thomas Hill, whose treatise on physiognomy allowed for discrepancies between ideals of male and female appearance.⁶³ Excessive facial hair could be a sign of ultramascularity, demonstrating the torrid internal heat of a man. But, at the same time a thick beard obscured the face, features and expression, implying deceit or an untrustworthy character. A thick 'bush beard' also carried the risk of characterizing a body left fallow.⁶⁴ Likewise, just as easily as a thick beard could evince wisdom, this could easily tip over into accusations of pretence, or being 'just for show'.⁶⁵ In the mid-seventeenth century, matters were further complicated by the theories of chemical physicians, which, although relatively short lived, offered alternative explanations for the origins of beard hair. The 'Paracelsian' physician Johannes Baptiste Van Helmont, while acknowledging that the beard was 'bred by the stones', nonetheless held that it was light, emanating from the testicles rather than heat, which was the principal driver of beard growth. Attempting to explain why the beard should appear on the chin,

⁵⁹ A. B., *The Sick-mans Rare Jewel Wherein Is Discovered a Speedy Way How Every Man May Recover Lost Health, and Prolong Life...* (London: Printed by T. R., 1674), 107.

⁶⁰ Anon., *The Compleat Book of Knowledge* (London: Printed by W. Onely, 1698), 61.

⁶¹ Joseph Blagrove, *Blagroves Astrological Practice of Physick Discovering the True Way to Cure All Kinds of Diseases and Infirmities* (London: Printed by S. G., 1671), 76–7.

⁶² Alexandra Shepherd, *Meanings of Manhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 50.

⁶³ Quoted in Johnson, *Beard Fetish*, 44.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 45, 72–3.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 45.

instead of the forehead, he admitted that this was a 'most hidden root of philosophy' and largely beyond the wit of man to uncover.⁶⁶

The degree to which the beard was even limited to male faces was a matter for debate. Some medical authors like Nicholas Culpepper and Daniel Sennert were adamant that only men grew beards, while a smooth face was the natural ornament of the female.⁶⁷ Levinus Lemnius argued that the hairs of the beard 'consist the grace and ornament of a man' and 'contained a manlike force'.⁶⁸ But the obvious fact that some women did have hirsute faces (and that some men could not grow beards) could not be ignored. The satirist Thomas D'Urfey devoted several stanzas of verse to the question of whether women 'may be hairy/in spite of arguments contrary'. Citing several examples of prominent women in history with facial hair, including the Queen of Sheba who reputedly 'had a small beard of sandy red', his titular character Collin claimed that even 'My mother and my sister both/possessing beards of handsome growth'.⁶⁹ A number of supporting footnotes added that Asian women were known to have beards and also that several old women in Lancashire, suspected of witchcraft, also had beards of considerable length.⁷⁰

If there was at least broad agreement on the role of spermatic heat in generating beard hair, the nature of the relationship between head and body hair and beard hair remained unclear. According to one conduct manual, men with different coloured hair and beard were 'accounted dangerous persons' since this implied 'an inequality of their humours and complexions, [making] them naturally variable'.⁷¹ How widespread was this belief is difficult to assess from a single reference. The question of whether head and beard hair were even of the same matter was often overlooked or simply ignored, but some medical authors, however, did differentiate. Steven Blankaart's *Physical Dictionary* of 1702 named several different types of hair as well as identifying them with individual areas of the body. 'Capillus' was defined as 'the Hair of the Head', while 'Cilia and Supercilia' denoted the eyebrows. While beard hair was not specifically identified, Blankaart used the term 'Pili' to refer to 'short hairs in any part of the body', except for 'the Hair on the Privy Parts', which were termed 'Pubes'.⁷² Pierre Dionis made a similar argument in his *Anatomy of Man*, translated into English, stating that hairs were of two sorts. The first were those that accompanied the body when it first entered the world, including head hair, eyelashes and eyebrows. The second was that which grew later 'as those upon the Beard, Arm-pits and the "*Pubes*" (original italics).⁷³

⁶⁶ J. C., *Van Helmont's Works Containing His Most Excellent Philosophy, Physick, Chirurgery, Anatomy* (London: Printed by Lodowick Hoyd, 1664), 335.

⁶⁷ Fisher, *Materializing Gender*, 102.

⁶⁸ Levinus Lemnius, *The Secret Miracles of Nature in Four Books...* (London: Printed by John Streater, 1658), 257.

⁶⁹ Thomas D'Urfey, *Collins Walk through London and Westminster in Burlesque, written by T.D* (London: Printed for Richard Parker, 1690), 121–2.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Edward Philips, *The Beau's Academy...* (London: Printed for O. B., 1699), 184.

⁷² Steven Blankaart, *The Physical Dictionary. Wherein the Terms of Anatomy, the Names and Causes of Diseases, Chyrurgical Instruments, and Their Use Are Accurately Describ'd* (London: Printed for Sam. Crouch and John Sprint, 1702), 50, 70, 89, 254.

⁷³ Dionis, *Anatomy*, 315.

The difference in appearance and nature of beard hair from head hair was also based upon assumptions about the reaction of hair to being shaved. In *Aristotle's Problems*, shaving off hair was argued to take away humours and vapours, which process then encouraged more to draw to the area. In areas where cutting or shaving was repeated, the humours accumulated thickly to form hair. On the face, therefore, where shaving was regular, the hair was liable to 'wax hard'.⁷⁴

Another issue that bears further scrutiny is that of life stage. As discussed above, the production of hair in men and women was closely linked to age. The appearance of the beard, along with increased body and pubic hair, demonstrated the commencement of seed production in males. In women, the matter producing beard hair was instead diverted to the 'courses'. Facial hair was, in a sense, a border between the normal operations of male and female bodies, but one that could be crossed. The interruption or impediment of menstruation, for example, was cited as one causal factor of beards on women's faces, as their bodies were masculinized. One aspect that requires further investigation, however, is that of the link between facial hair and the normative constructions of 'manhood'. The strong links between the beard and the display of masculine generative power meant that beard-wearing was closely bound to specific stages of a man's life. Puberty, as noted above, was a stage that spanned around seven years. 'Manhood' was another specific, but longer, stage that could last anywhere between ten and thirty years. Some authors broke this down further into specific periods such as 'staid youth' or 'middle age', but the 'lustie state of life' generally lasted between adolescence and the perceived onset of old age, which could begin anywhere between 35 and 50.⁷⁵

The distinction between beardless boys and 'men' with beards was an important one.⁷⁶ Randle Holmes's *Academy of Armory* made the link explicit; whereas children were smooth, and youths had hair on their heads but not on their faces, the mark of a 'Man' was 'having a beard'.⁷⁷ Medical authors including Nicholas Culpeper, Helkiah Crooke and Daniel Sennert specifically identified the beard with 'man', 'men' or 'manhode'.⁷⁸ But it is also clear that 'Man-Age' was precarious and temporary and, to a large degree, represented those in the supposed peak of life and still productive in sexual terms. As Eleanor Rycroft suggests, manhood was bounded on the one side by youthful effeminacy and imperfection, and on the other by old age.⁷⁹ If a beard suggested masculine power, then its fullness, shape, colour or distinctiveness also surely carried symbolic weight, acting as visual proof that the male subject was either in the prime of his life or descending towards the grave.

Mark Johnston and Eleanor Rycroft have explored the discursive significance of grey and white beards in context of cultural representations of age. Grey or white hair was presented as a mark of age and one in which hair was materially altered by the ensuing changes to bodily constitution.⁸⁰ This occurred as the man's body changed in humoral

⁷⁴ Anon., *Aristotle's Problems*, 5.

⁷⁵ Shepherd, *Meanings of Manhood*, 54–5.

⁷⁶ Fisher, *Materializing Gender*, 87.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 88.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 102.

⁷⁹ Rycroft, *Facial Hair*, 138.

⁸⁰ Johnston, *Beard Fetish*, 75–9.

constitution from the hot and moist constitution of youth to the cold and dry state associated with old age.⁸¹ Since beards resulted from internal body heat, the whitening of beard hairs was a visible manifestation of this process.⁸² In theory, therefore, the beard should presumably have been expected to thin, or even disappear completely, with the onset of age. Not all early modern authors agreed however. Bartholin, argued that the hair of the old – presumably including the beard – was ‘thicker, stronger, harder and more plentiful’.⁸³ For Roger Bacon, grey hair and beard were ‘accidents of age’, caused by putrefying humours and the gradual drying out or putrefaction of the moisture within each hair.⁸⁴ He did not suggest that the beard itself would necessarily weaken or diminish. In fact, the Aristotelian view of the changing hue of hair was not internal dryness or changing humours, but external factors such as the covering of the hair by hats or other means, which allowed the wind to wick away the natural moisture within each hair.⁸⁵ Depictions of older men in Tudor and Stuart portraits also appear not to support the diminution of the beard in later life. Indeed, many portraits show older men with full beards, befitting their patriarchal status. While portraiture is problematic in assessing ‘real’ appearance, not least because of the strong potential for artistic embellishment, the numbers of portraits of older men displaying full facial hair in the early modern period is suggestive of the close connections between beard-wearing and age, but also perhaps of the deployment of the beard as a conscious means of displaying that the subject retained their male heat. This is clearly not to say that unbearded men had beards simply painted in. But, instead, the portrayal and potential manipulation of their beard may have been a conscious tool to emphasize the retention of masculine power, even in old age.

Finally, it is worth noting the issue of change over time and the gradual shifts in conceptions of facial hair that began to occur towards the end of the period. Rather than remaining static, conceptions of hair and beards were affected by changes and challenges to prevailing medical theory, including the growing influence of microscopy. The early eighteenth century witnessed the beginnings of change both to perceptions of the hair as an indicator of inner temperament, and to its physical properties. A discussion of hair by the physician George Cheyne shows evidence of the new Georgian vogue for ‘nerves’.⁸⁶ While hair was still an outward indicator of inner character, for Cheyne it now spoke of the nervous state of the individual, rather than simply their humoral constitution. ‘Those who have naturally *soft, thin, small and short hair*, are of a *loose, flabby and relaxed state of nerves*’ (original italics).⁸⁷ The early eighteenth century also saw a new focus upon the materiality of hair and its physical properties. For Cheyne, hair was made of the ‘fleshy fibres [of the body] only lengthen’d

⁸¹ Ibid., 76.

⁸² Rycroft, *Facial Hair*, 142.

⁸³ Thomas Bartholin, *Bartholinus Anatomy Made from the Precepts of His Father, and from the Observations of All Modern Anatomists* (London: Printed by John Streater, 1668), 129.

⁸⁴ Roger Bacon, *The Cure of Old Age and Preservation of Youth by Roger Bacon* (London: Printed for Thomas Flescher, 1683), 25.

⁸⁵ Bartholin, *Bartholinus Anatomy Made*, 129.

⁸⁶ For a discussion of ‘nerves’, see Roy Porter and Dorothy Porter, *In Sickness and in Health* (London: Fourth Estate, 1988), 68–72.

⁸⁷ George Cheyne, *An Essay of Health and Long Life* (London: Printed for George Strahan, 1724), 187.

outwards and harden'd'. He postulated that each individual hair consisted of bundles of individual filaments, covered by an elastic membrane. As such, each hair was 'solid, transparent and elastick'.⁸⁸ Analysing hair using a microscope, the London surgeon and anatomist Thomas Gibson, however, defined it as 'a body cold and dry, thread-like, hard and flexible, budding from the skin'.⁸⁹ Gibson observed hairs to be square, or sometimes triangular rather than round, and porous, likening them to plant stalks.⁹⁰ In answering the question 'What is an Hair?', James Handley's *Colloquia Chirurgica* found it to be 'a small body, Thread-like, Hard and Flexible', while Gabriel Leclerc described hairs as 'Hollow Filaments planted in the Glandules of the skin'.⁹¹

If the eighteenth century brought new questions about the nature of hair, it also witnessed debate about the exact relationship between hair and body. Gibson raised another question of importance; that of the extent to which hair had 'life' of its own. On this point he was clear. '[Hairs] are no part of the body, and therefore have no *Animal* life' (original italics).⁹² Instead, he argued, hair grew independently from the living body, as fungus grew on a dead tree, evidenced by the fact that hair continued to grow after death.⁹³ Nonetheless, he was still convinced that hairs consisted of a 'viscid excrement of the third concoction'.⁹⁴ The seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries also saw the beginnings of debates about the function and intended purpose of hair. As already noted, some regarded hair as the body's natural means of expelling the noxious humours that might otherwise pollute the brain. Leclerc regarded it both as an adornment and a natural covering to those parts 'which Modesty requires to be conceal'd', as well as defending the body from the 'injury of the weather'.⁹⁵ Preservation of modesty was also a theme in Agrippa's assessment of why women had longer hair than men.⁹⁶ The French physician and anatomist Pierre Dionis, however, was adamant that hair was neither protective nor venerable, arguing instead that continually removing it actually encouraged the freer flow and weakening of 'excrementious particles'.⁹⁷

Hair, including the beard, was therefore bound up in a complex web of meanings in the early modern period, encompassing health, gender, sexuality and concepts of the natural emblems of the body. While there was debate as to the exact meanings of the beard, medical conceptions of the origins and characteristics of facial hair remained largely consistent across the period. The beard was nominally a waste product – literally a seminal excrement – but this did not diminish its power as a masculine symbol. It was a 'natural' symbol of manliness and one that both constituted and reflected male

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Thomas Gibson, *The Anatomy of Humane Bodies Epitomized* (London: Printed by T. W., 1703), 365.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ James Handley, *Colloquia Chirurgica: or, the Art of Surgery Epitomiz'd, and Made Easy, According to Modern Practice* (London: Printed for A. Bettesworth and C. Hitch, 1733), 213; Charles Gabriel LeClerc, *The Compleat Surgeon: or the Whole Art of Surgery Explain'd in a Most Familiar Method...* (London: Printed for W. Freeman et al., 1701), 10.

⁹² Gibson, *Anatomy*, 365.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Leclerc, *The Compleat Surgeon*, 10; Christof Wirsung also argued that hair had no other purpose than to 'garnish the head, decketh and coloureth it'. See Wirsung, *General Practice*, 45.

⁹⁶ Agrippa, *The Glory of Women*, 9–10.

⁹⁷ Dionis, *Anatomy*, 315.

characteristics of strength, heat and reproductive capability. There was actually little debate in the period about the relative merits or demerits of shaving. While some physicians recommended shaving as part of treatment for certain conditions, there was little sense that shaving yet formed part of any regimented health or grooming routines. As many authors argued, facial hair was essentially the default state of a man's face. Although the introduction of the microscope had begun to change views about the physical construction and appearance of individual hairs by the end of the seventeenth century, such observations took time to impact upon theories about hair and beards. As we shall see, many aspects of the humoral conceptions of hair remained stubbornly entrenched until well into the eighteenth century. The mid-eighteenth century, however, did begin to see change in the context of the enlightenment interest in nature, the body and gender. It is to those ideas that the following chapter turns.