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The faces of politeness: Facial hair, masculinity and culture in the long eighteenth century

As Chapter 2 showed, early modern facial hair reflected humoral conceptions of the male body and, in particular, the reproductive system. Ideas about the generation of hair were firmly embedded within medical discourses and part of broader assumptions about the supposed 'natural' superiority of the male body. Assertions about the role of the beard as an emblem or public symbol of masculinity were equally bound with prevailing ideas about physicality and healthy male bodies. Such ideas remained deeply entrenched.

Nevertheless, the eighteenth century brought change. Where facial hair had been common through most of the 1600s, the new century saw a Europe-wide flight from the beard. The precise reasons for this change are unclear. Christopher Oldstone-Moore suggests that beard- and moustache-wearing began to decline from the 1680s, amidst redefinitions of masculinity coinciding with the proto-enlightenment climate of ideas.¹ This reconfiguring of masculinity into emerging aesthetic ideals of neatness and elegance was exemplified by new fashions in the court of Louis XIV. In 1701 the Sun King had a new portrait commissioned showing him with a clean-shaven face framed by a new-fashioned wig.² The French court certainly exerted a centripetal pull on the fashion consciousness of British elites, apparent in the adoption of wigs, but also in clothing styles and manners, to the extent that concerns were raised about the emasculating, 'Frenchified' affectations of English men during the eighteenth century.³

But new ideas about polite appearance and deportment also gave the beardless face deeper meaning. 'Politeness' as a system of form, language and behaviours, saw new aesthetic standards mapped onto the body and its surfaces. The new bodily ideal for men was neat and elegant, and the clean-shaven face swiftly became a *sine qua non*

¹ Christopher Oldstone-Moore, *Of Beards and Men: The Revealing History of Facial Hair* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016), 131–3.

² *Ibid.*, 133.

³ Michèle Cohen, *Fashioning Masculinity: National Identity and Language in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 1996), 9.

of male appearance.⁴ Where once beards had exemplified male power and strength, such ideas now shifted to the shaved face.⁵ As the beard was shunned by polite society, its position within discourses of masculinity and health also changed. Discussions about beards (and hair) were subsumed within emerging debates about physiognomy, corporeal aesthetics and also questions about race and ethnicity through which hair gradually lost its humoral associations. While connections with inner heat persisted in medical discourses, the specific link between beards and spermatic production was severed, reflecting shifting conceptions of masculinity and its embodied significance.

This chapter first maps the apparent disappearance of facial hair over the long eighteenth century, in the context of changing gendered expectations of male conduct and appearance. It argues that, as ideals of male facial appearance were remade, visible facial hair became linked with socially undesirable characteristics. Conversely, at the same time, the *act* of shaving was imbued with new meaning as a polite practice, becoming a central component in the gendered performance of masculinity. The second part of the chapter surveys medical conceptions of hair and facial hair in this period. While initially there was much continuity in definitions of the origins and functions of facial hair, the decline of beard-wearing brought shifts in the manner of its discussion. Rather than a distinct topic in medical texts, facial hair was instead enmeshed in broader debates about the nature and relationship of human bodies across spaces and cultures and about its potential as a marker of intellect and corporeal value. In tandem was the increasing physiognomic and physiological importance of faces as markers of health and character. Overall, this period saw what I term the 'externalization' of the beard, as it moved conceptually from the body's interior to its surface.

The 'polite face'

The decline of facial hair was rooted in broad changes in attitudes towards masculine appearance and behaviour and a redefinition of male manners over the long eighteenth century. As Karen Harvey has noted in her study of the male leg, the period after 1750 brought new focus on the outward appearance and physicality of men's bodies, imbuing them with new significance.⁶ Rather than simply being performative, masculinity could be embodied, with the shape, form and structure of the male body all carrying and conveying meaning.⁷ As I have argued elsewhere too, the whole body was enmeshed in discourses of politeness. Polite bodies were supposed to be straight and erect. If they did not conform, many products were available, to push, pull, twist and otherwise force them into a socially desirable shape.⁸ Hence, the body was a malleable

⁴ Alun Withey, *Technology, Self-Fashioning and Politeness in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 7–9.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁶ Karen Harvey, 'Men of Parts: Masculine Embodiment and the Male Leg in Eighteenth-Century England', *Journal of British Studies*, 54:4 (2015): 799.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 800–1.

⁸ Withey, *Technology*, ch. 1; David Turner and Alun Withey, 'Technologies of the Body: Polite Consumption and the Correction of Deformity in Eighteenth-Century England', *History*, 99:338

form, one that could be shaped by force of will and behaviour, as part of changing ideas about the relationship between mind and body. Like a machine, both body and mind needed constant attention to avoid seizing up. Addison's *Spectator*, for example, regarded training the body through shadowboxing, in tandem with training the mind through study and contemplation, as the 'double scheme of duties' necessary for the polite 'man-about-town'.⁹ As well as form and structure, the same applied to bodily surfaces, especially those visible to others and in public. As Harvey argues, changes to male fashion and clothing reflected the increased exposure of the male body and served to draw attention to specific attributes, such as the leg, which became a potent symbol of virility and sexuality.¹⁰ It could be argued that the face carried an equally powerful symbolic meaning.

As the seat of emotion and the most public of bodily surfaces, the face reflected the 'sentiments of the soul'. Facial appearance, features, expression and even tics all comprised a complex set of bodily meanings and were commonly observed and commented on in literature, as well as part of a broader social 'language' of expression. Faces dominated discussions of beauty, and its obverse – ugliness – in turn informing estimations of character. They were therefore a key marker of politeness.¹¹ Although a natural feature of the male face, however, facial hair was not a polite feature, perhaps due to the issue of concealment. Symmetry was a key element in expectations of the male body in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, both in terms of anthropometry and beauty.¹² But beards frustrated the symmetry of appearance and obscured the 'air and cast of the whole countenance', so important in assessing politeness.¹³ Not only was shaving an act of control, therefore, again reflecting the malleability of body and appearance, it was akin to removing a mask, enabling facial features to be seen and 'read'. Visibility was all, reinforced by the fact that faces were often the only unclothed or uncovered part of the body.¹⁴ There was also a powerful symbolism to the beardless face. An open countenance suggested an open mind, a key attribute of the enlightened gentleman; it also betokened honesty.¹⁵ Since the 'passions of the mind' determined facial features and expression, a 'man of sense' was easily identifiable by his noble

(2014): 775–96; see also Lynne Sorge-English, *Stays and Body Image in London: The Staymaking Trade, 1680–1810* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2014).

⁹ Quoted in Roy Porter, *Flesh in the Age of Reason* (London: Penguin, 2004), 119–21. See also Joanne Begiato, *Manliness in Britain: 1760–1900* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), 36–7.

¹⁰ Harvey, 'Men of Parts', 801.

¹¹ For a broader discussion of the various social and political contexts of the face in this period, see Kathryn Woods, 'The Polite Face: The Social Meanings Attached to Facial Appearance in Early Eighteenth-Century Didactic Journals', *Conference Proceedings of the International Workshop 'Archives of the Body. Medieval to Early Modern'*, Cambridge University, 8–9 September 2011, 43–66, https://epistemocritique.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/4-_Woods.pdf (accessed 9 July 2019). Also see the broader discussions of the importance of male beauty in Begiato, *Manliness*, ch. 1.

¹² Begiato, *Manliness*, 38.

¹³ Nicholas Andry, *Orthopaedia: or the Art of Preventing and Correcting Deformities in Children* (London: Printed for A. Miller, 1743), 18.

¹⁴ Robert A. Houston, 'The Face of Madness in Eighteenth- and Early Nineteenth-Century Scotland', *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 27:2 (2003): 51.

¹⁵ William Hogarth, *The Analysis of Beauty: Written with a View of Fixing the Fluctuating Ideas of Taste* (London: Printed by J. Reeves, 1753), 125; Withey, 'Shaving and Masculinity', 229.

visage.¹⁶ Much effort was expended in defining ideals of facial appearance after 1750, and the shaved face became a touchstone of manly appearance and behaviour, allowing the individual features of a man's face to be scrutinized.¹⁷

A number of other factors provided a favourable cultural climate for the removal of beards, not least of which was the cultural 'othering' of facial hair. If the eighteenth-century male body was expected to please, something about facial hair was clearly *displeasing*. As well as disturbing the harmonious mien of the gentlemanly face it implied neglect of basic routines of care in appearance. The polite gentleman was clean-shaven; by extension, then, facial hair was presumably 'impolite', belonging to unfavourable stereotypes such as the scruffy pleb, the rustic, the lunatic or the decrepit. Facial hair, then, could be a useful barometer in assessing character and even state of mind. Manly control over the body was the key. Echoing earlier, humoral ideas about the origins of facial hair, the author of one manual of politeness stressed that passions and affections should be carefully controlled for 'as they are the excrescencies of our souls, like our hair and beards, look horrid or [un]becoming, as we cut or let them grow over our reason'.¹⁸ Besides looking 'horrid', beards could, almost literally, obscure rationality. As Robert Houston has noted, long hair suggested eccentricity or even insanity, marking out men with unkempt beards as problematic 'others'.¹⁹ Accounts of hermits or 'wild men' frequently used beard length as a visual metaphor for the extent of their withdrawal from society or barbarity. Reports of the capture of a 'merman', by fishermen off Vigo, Spain, in 1739 made particular reference to its 'long beard and moustachoes'.²⁰ The extent of the 'otherness' of facial hair was also highlighted in its ready adoption by certain French military regiments, at a time of high tensions between Britain and France.²¹ In each case, then, facial hair became a marker of difference, representing rough, disordered or 'foreign' masculinities.²²

Second, the aesthetic properties of facial hair were incompatible with several new aspects of eighteenth-century manliness and bodily appearance, but most notably the wig. Stylistically, the wig and beard made for a jarring clash and again raised issues of concealment. Wearing a large wig *and* a thick beard would obscure virtually the entire head and face, leaving nothing open for scrutiny. Combining beards and wigs would also create an awkward tension between natural and unnatural, and between dead and living, hair. While it is hard to prove convincingly that wigs were an explicit catalyst for the decline of beards, their rise certainly coincided with shifting attitudes towards the appearance, sites and management of men's hair.

¹⁶ Ibid., 126.

¹⁷ Begiato, *Manliness*, 53.

¹⁸ Anon., *The Young Gentleman and Lady Instructed in Such Principles of Politeness, Prudence and Virtue...* (London: Printed for Edward Wicksteed, 1747), 360.

¹⁹ Houston, 'Face of Madness', 53.

²⁰ 'London, May 3rd', *Caledonian Mercury*, 8 May 1739. See also Peter Longueville, *The English Hermit, or the Unparallel'd and Surprising Adventures of One Phillip Quarll* (London: Publisher unknown, 1727), 13, 43; Anon., *A Full Account of Mr. John Harris, the English Hermit* (Banbury: Printed by T. Cheney, 1800).

²¹ Christopher Duffy, *The Military Experience in the Age of Reason* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987), 103; Withey, *Technology*, 46–7.

²² Angela Rosenthal, 'Raising Hair', *Eighteenth Century Studies*, 38:1 (2004): 1, 3.

The relationship between men's head hair and facial hair during this period was ambiguous. In terms of the performative gendered and sexual nature of men's hair as a form of display, the site of hair shifted away from the chin and cheeks and instead towards the head. This dovetails neatly with eighteenth-century concepts of the head as the site of authority, intelligence and learning, and also as a masculine feature of the body.²³ Wigs drew attention to the head, creating an elaborate illusion, forming a powerful semiotic encompassing social and professional identity. The face, by contrast, was ideally to be hairless suggesting youth and vigour. The 'cult of youth' of the 1780s made virtues of slender bodies and youthful personalities.²⁴ Shaving rendered the face more youthful at a stroke, revealing the soft skin underneath. Although facial hair had been abandoned long before the 'cult of youth', such associations nonetheless reinforced the need to shave. Smoothness was equally essential as a polite characteristic. For inspiration, Georgian men needed to look no further than the tactile, polished surfaces of Greek and Roman statues, which offered examples of athletic corporeal perfection, or to the heroic figures depicted in neoclassicist portraiture.²⁵ For Edmund Burke, commenting on the aesthetics of beauty, there was nothing in nature that was beautiful that was not also smooth.²⁶ If so, a bearded man could presumably never be beautiful.

As the beardless face was accepted as a key masculine characteristic, shaving became an essential grooming task for gentlemen.²⁷ The act of shaving evinced mid-century ideas about polite masculinity, encompassing control and self-mastery. As Philip Carter has noted, the performance of polite masculinity required a delicate balance between self-command and compassion. Men were encouraged to be temperate and measured in their social encounters, grave with other men, but sensitive to the delicacy of women.²⁸ Government of the senses and passions created a social bond with spectators, conveying character and breeding, but also reflected economic concerns. Careful management of finances, along with training the mind through intellectual pursuits, were seen as routes to commercial success. As the head of the household, men were expected to control finances, while acting as a family figurehead. Such ideas extended to the appearance of the body. For philosophers such as David Hume, the polite gentleman should be industrious and physically vigorous, to allow them to prosper in both commercial and private spheres.²⁹ Shaving dovetailed easily with such ideas. To shave (or even to be shaved) was to exert control over the body and appearance. It demonstrated care and attention to the self, as well as consideration for the social expectations of others. This was reinforced as self-shaving (auto-pogonotomy)

²³ Kathryn Woods, 'Dismembering Appearances: The Cultural Meaning of the Body and Its Parts in Eighteenth-Century Understanding', University of Edinburgh, Unpublished PhD thesis, 2014, 141–3.

²⁴ Porter, *Flesh*, 241–2.

²⁵ Withey, *Technology*, 46.

²⁶ Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (London: J. Dodsley, 1757), 213.

²⁷ Alun Withey, 'Shaving and Masculinity in Eighteenth-Century Britain', *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 36:2 (2013): 234–5.

²⁸ Philip Carter, *Men and the Emergence of Polite Society. Britain, 1660–1800* (London: Routledge, 2014), 74–5.

²⁹ Quoted in *ibid.*, 76.

gradually became more popular around the 1770s, helped on by the introduction of cast steel razors, making the process easier and more comfortable.³⁰ Self-shaving added a new dimension to bodily management by allowing a man to assume more responsibility for his *own* appearance, rather than delegating it to a practitioner. Even visiting a barber, however, was part of the same process of managing and fashioning a public face. Governance of the body and behaviour, therefore, was analogous with careful management of business.

The decline of facial hair from the late seventeenth century and throughout the eighteenth was therefore much more than simply fashion. Instead it was bound up with a number of sometimes competing discourses about expectations of manly appearance, as well as changing aesthetic ideals related to the enlightened climate of ideas. From these background factors, the chapter now turns to specific questions about the nature and status of facial hair in eighteenth-century Britain.

(Un)natural faces

Where once the beard had spoken of the generative power of men, the clean-shaven face now became the virtual synecdoche for virile masculinity. A smooth, face was the refined, manly and 'beautiful' obverse to the rough, unshaven brute. But in many ways, however, this new vogue for the shaved face complicated the question of what, in fact, *were* 'natural' male characteristics. As Michèle Cohen has argued, in endeavouring to create a 'pleasing' body, men defied nature by creating a soft, delicate and refined male 'other'.³¹ This created the paradox of a manliness that edged ever closer to femininity – a problematic issue amidst popular fears of effeminacy. The shaved face suggested male youthfulness, but equally removed a key mark of difference between male and female faces. The fact that so many of the processes involved in the articulation of politeness relied on the application of artificial means was also problematic. Polite literature cautioned against artifice, especially among young women. Cosmetics, in particular, were discouraged since they obscured the 'natural endowments and graces' of the 'real face'.³² Objections therefore surrounded covering up the face. But where cosmetics artificially obscured, razors equally artificially uncovered. To maintain a clean-shaven face required regular and careful attention and sometimes the use of cosmetic products including soap and lotions, rendering shaving as arguably no less an act of artifice. All this created a second paradox. On the one hand facial hair was still broadly construed as a 'natural' (in the sense of being biologically determined) component of the male body. In this reading, it was shaving that interfered with nature's work. On the other, however, the beard itself could be viewed as representing a mere prosthetic,

³⁰ See Withey, 'Shaving and Masculinity', 225–43.

³¹ Michèle Cohen, 'Manliness, Effeminacy and the French: Gender and the Construction of National Character in Eighteenth-Century England', in Tim Hitchcock and Michèle Cohen (eds), *English Masculinities: 1660–1800* (London: Routledge, 1999), 50.

³² Anon., *Young Gentleman and Lady*, 163.

obscuring the true, natural, face beneath. The beard was simultaneously, and therefore problematically, natural and unnatural.

Such issues were certainly not limited to beards. Wigs, hair and the head all shaped debates about gender roles, sexuality, age and fertility and informed broader criticisms of display and social performance. Wigs could exemplify moral weakness, vanity and even effeminacy, blurring boundaries between the sexes. As with beards, there were also ambiguities about social acceptability in the wearing or removing of hair. Shaving both heads and faces replaced a 'natural' look with one that was managed. Wig-wearers then replaced their own hair with an artificial contrivance of 'false' or dead hair. Bald heads had long been socially undesirable, bearing negative connotations including old age, decrepitude, loss of control and even emasculation.³³ Appearing in public without a wig, or betraying the balding pate beneath, were serious social faux pas.³⁴ A *shaved* head, however, at least showed willingness to don a fashionable wig and was therefore a vital step on the path to polite appearance. It was no coincidence that some eighteenth-century busts depicted elites or thinkers with shaved heads to demonstrate their erudition and mental acuity.³⁵ The key difference between head and face shaving lay in the matter of covering. Heads were shaved with the specific intention of being re-covered by the wig. The opposite applied to the face however, where the stubbly covering itself was regarded as unseemly. Unlike the head, therefore, shaving the face was an end in itself.

Given the multiple meanings and obvious problems with facial hair, therefore, its absence from contemporary discussions about gender and appearance seems remarkable. Early modern practitioners, authors and playwrights had devoted reams to the beard, establishing it as a signal component of the male body. But its disappearance attracted scarcely a murmur. It was perhaps easier to simply ignore rather than try and reconcile the obvious skein of contradictions. Only occasional dissenting voices spoke up against its decline and even here the pitfalls of Georgian irony cannot be discounted. In 1783, A. R. Grey's letter (perhaps tellingly to the *Weekly Entertainer*) appeared to suggest that growing a beard was his defence against the lack of respect afforded him due to his 'smock-faced' handsomeness. In imitation of classical heroes, he professed himself content to grow a beard and had 'dismissed my barber'.³⁶ Suspicions of insincerity are aroused by the given address of 'St. Barbe, Cornwall' – 'barbe' being a Latinate term for the beard. In 1798, another writer, styling himself 'Joseph', wrote a paean to the beard in an attempt to win over a doubtful female. Here the beard was depicted as a natural adornment of the '*British* race' (original italics) and one that conveyed strength and a 'rougher beauty' than the soft manliness currently in vogue. 'British' here implied Celtic and often specifically Welsh people which, given the often-pejorative portrayals of Welsh people in English satires, perhaps explains the reference

³³ For attitudes to baldness in the early modern period, see Anu Korhonen, 'Strange Things Out of Hair: Baldness and Masculinity in Early Modern England', *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 41:2 (2010): 371–91.

³⁴ Rosenthal, 'Raising Hair', 9–10.

³⁵ Malcolm Baker, "No Cap or Wig But a Thin Hair upon it": Hair and the Male Portrait Bust in England around 1750', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 38:1 (2004): 69–70.

³⁶ A. R. Grey, 'New Essay on Beards', *Weekly Entertainer* (19 March 1787): 269.

to rusticity and roughness.³⁷ But, 'If woman ever fear'd', argued Joseph, 'it was the man *without a beard*' (original italics).³⁸

Some were less ambiguous in their support for beards. In letters in 1779 the MP Thomas Lord Lyttelton bemoaned the present 'smock-faced days' caused by the abandonment of facial hair. The beard, he argued, was the emblem of experience and wisdom (the 'honours of the chin' and a 'flowing ornament') and one that achieved its full magnificence while the rest of the body declined in old age.³⁹ It is worth noting that, despite his protestations, contemporary portraits reveal that Lyttelton was beardless. Beards were also 'characteristick and essential marks of the Supreme Divinity', adorning artist representations of Christian and Pagan deities since time immemorial. It therefore made no sense to him that the beard should be an object of dissension. Such connections also suggest, however, that men of sense could still appreciate the semiotic and symbolic value of the beard without necessarily feeling the need to grow one themselves. As such, although the shaved face suited polite appearance, facial hair still carried meaning and value as a male attribute. For Lyttelton, the true demise of the beard owed everything to the caprices of the church and 'scythe of ecclesiastical discipline'.⁴⁰ Thus the 'persecuted beard' had been expelled from Europe but for the faces of 'fanatical Jews' or mendicant hermits.⁴¹

It is equally true though that relatively few spoke out against the beard. Peter Shaw's 1762 *Tablet or Picture of Real Life* claimed to shed light on all the 'virtues and vices, fopperies and fooleries [and] masks and mummeries' of the age. In a chapter about fashion and appearance, Shaw's advice was to 'shave thy beard and appear like a man, for the fashion of beards is no longer among mankind ... Thy beard is an open declaration that thou art unwilling to pass for a man'.⁴² He went further, asserting the beard to be an 'unmanly ornament' and threatening 'never to make peace with Thee, till thy beard is razed and leveled with thy chin'.⁴³ While many perhaps concurred with Shaw's view, the general sense from these sources is that facial hair was a bodily feature that was, although unnecessary, still a central component of the male body. *Choosing* not to display a beard or stubble was far preferable to being unable to grow one in the first place.

The re-emergence of the supposed science of physiognomy in the late eighteenth century added further layers of complexity. Here again, discussions of the beard were muted. During the early modern period, the practice of assessing character from facial features was popular in European intellectual circles and closely linked to astrology.⁴⁴

³⁷ See, for example, Peter Lord, 'A View from the Outside: Poor Taff, 1640–1740', *Words with Pictures: Welsh Images and Images of Wales in the Popular Press, 1640–1860* (Aberystwyth: Planet Books, 1995), 33–53.

³⁸ Joseph, 'The Message: Or an Apology for Beards', *Monthly Visitor and Pocket Companion*, 3 (1798): 78.

³⁹ Anon., *Letters of the Late Lord Lyttelton* (New York: Printed and sold by Wright, Goodenow and Stockwell, 1807), 272.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 274–5.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 275.

⁴² Peter Shaw, *The Tablet, or Picture of Real Life...* (London: Printed for T. Longman, 1762), 165.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 166.

⁴⁴ Kathryn Woods, 'Facing Identity in a "Faceless" Society: Physiognomy, Facial Appearance and Identity Perception in Eighteenth-Century London', *Cultural and Social History*, 14:2 (2017): 140.

In general, physiognomists focused upon 'unchanging' elements of the face, rather than expression or, presumably, prosthetic elements such as facial hair.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, early modern physiognomic texts make it clear that beards were legitimate indicators of character. Richard Saunders's *Physiognomie, and Chiromancie* (1653) ascribed several characteristics to the beard. A red beard, for example, suggested a 'placid forehead' and a courteous and friendly man, albeit one 'with some craft'. A man with a 'decent beard, handsom and full of haire' was 'of good nature and reasonable of things', while a thin, soft beard signified a man who was 'lustfull and effeminate'.⁴⁶ For Marck de Vulson, having a pale complexion, a plump and full chin and a 'beard that playes with the nose' was a sure sign of 'the luxurious' man.⁴⁷ It was, though, something of a niche interest and, although beliefs in the idea continued to circulate throughout the early eighteenth century, the links of physiognomy to astrology and the occult saw a general decline in interest.⁴⁸

The publication, in 1789, of Johan Caspar Lavater's landmark *Essays on Physiognomy*, however, revived interest.⁴⁹ While early modern physiognomy was based on individuals interpreting their own features to forecast future events in their life and health, eighteenth-century physiognomy had different aims, presenting itself as a science of reading identity through facial perception. As Kathryn Woods argues, this new focus was partly rooted in concerns about the depersonalizing effects of urban life and the decline of face-to-face relationships. The anonymity perpetuated by life in large towns, and the difficulties of identity perception in these new, metropolitan spaces, meant that physical appearance grew in importance as a means of divining the character of strangers.⁵⁰ As the most public of surfaces, heads and faces became sites of authority and signifiers of inner qualities from which character could be 'read'.⁵¹ New theories postulated links between facial characteristics and personality traits, including intelligence, morality and temper, and sought to recover the hidden 'language' of facial features and expression.⁵² Anything acting to conceal the true features and inhibit or distort the facial 'text', such as cosmetics or masquerades, therefore, was considered potentially deceptive and suspicious.⁵³ On this reading, facial hair should have been regarded negatively, since it hindered physiognomic assessment by obscuring the lower face and chin.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Richard Saunders, *Physiognomie, and Chiromancie, Metoposcopia: The Symmetrical Proportions and Signal Moles of the Body* (London: Printed for Nathaniel Brook, 1671), 190. See also J. S., *The True Fortune-Teller, or, Guide to Knowledge, Discovering the Whole Art of Chiromancy, Metoposcopy and Astrology* (London: Printed for E. Tracy, 1698), 64–5.

⁴⁷ Marck De Vulson, *The Court of Curiositie, Wherein, by the ALGEBRA and LOT the Most Intricate Questions Are Resolved* (trans. J. G. Gent) (London: Printed for William Crooke, 1669), 195.

⁴⁸ Woods, 'Facing Identity', 140–1.

⁴⁹ Johan Caspar Lavater, *Essays on Physiognomy, Designed to Promote the Knowledge and the Love of Mankind, by John Caspar Lavater, Volume 1* (London: Printed for John Murray, 1789).

⁵⁰ Woods, 'Facing Identity', 142–5.

⁵¹ Dror Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self: Identify and Culture in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 297–9; Penelope Corfield, 'Dress for Deference and Dissent: Hats and the Decline of Hat Honour', *Costume*, 23 (1989): 71; Woods, 'Facing Identity', 138.

⁵² Houston, 'Face of Madness', 50.

⁵³ Woods, 'Facing Identity', 144.

Perhaps surprisingly, therefore, references to beards were relatively scarce in physiognomic texts although they featured prominently in Lavater's *Essays*. In a later edition, echoing older ideas about the correlation between beard quality and bodily strength, Lavater argued that a short, thick and curly beard was an indicator of 'tranquil, firm strength'.⁵⁴ While language and behaviour could belie true nature, beards represented a corporeal truth that could not be concealed. Discussing portraits of famous villains, Lavater saw the men's fortune in their faces: 'even the[ir] beard bears a character of sternness and inflexibility'.⁵⁵ The fact that large proportions of men throughout the eighteenth century and well into the nineteenth were clean-shaven perhaps also rendered discussion superfluous.

Another group of sources, however, dictionaries and encyclopaedias, provide potentially useful insights into prevailing attitudes towards facial hair. Although obviously problematic in being prescriptive and difficult to fix in authorship or the origin of terms, they nonetheless provide consistent references to beards, allowing analysis of elite and vernacular terminologies and change over time. Dictionary authors varied widely in the amount of detail or terminology they included, but even this can be revealing of underlying attitudes towards the beard. The inclusion of specific entries at least suggests that beards were regarded as a distinct category of hair, separate from that on the head. Some provided only basic definitions. In 1735, Benjamin Defoe's entry for 'Beard' simply read 'the hair growing upon the chin'.⁵⁶ Francis Allen's *Compleat English Dictionary* of 1765 contained only two entries: 'Beard, S. the hair which grows on a person's cheek, lips and chin' and 'BEARDED, Adj. applied to persons, one who has a beard'.⁵⁷ Similarly brief entries appeared in James Buchanan's *Linguae Britannicae vera pronuntiatio* and John Ash's *New and Compleat Dictionary of the English Language* of 1775.⁵⁸ Some also gave alternative terminologies or descriptions. Nathaniel Bailey's 1730 *Dictionarium Britannicum* contained a number of entries. While 'Beard' was termed 'hair on the chin &c', Bailey included several other entries. The Latin 'Ba'rba' was defined as 'a beard, the hairy part of the chin and lips', while other Latinate terms were given, including 'Grani' for 'Mustachoes or Whiskers of a Beard' and 'Barbigerous' meaning 'bearded or wearing a beard'.⁵⁹ 'Barba' also appeared in John Barrow's 1749

⁵⁴ Johann Casper Lavater, *Essays on Physiognomy; for the Promotion of the Knowledge and the Love of Mankind; Written in the German Language by J. C. Lavater, Abridged from Mr. Holcroft's Translation* (London: Printed for G. G. J. & J. Robinson, 1800), 29.

⁵⁵ Lavater, *Essays on Physiognomy*, 183.

⁵⁶ Benjamin Defoe, *A Compleat English Dictionary: Containing the True Meaning of All the Words in the English Language* (Westminster: Printed for John Brindley, 1735), unpaginated. See also the entry for 'Beard' in Anne Fisher, *An Accurate New Spelling Dictionary, and Expositor of the English Language*. (London: Printed for the author, 1773).

⁵⁷ Francis Allen, *A Complete English Dictionary: Containing an Explanation of All the Words Made Use of in the Common Occurrences of Life...* (London: Printed for J. Wilson and J. Fell, 1765), unpaginated.

⁵⁸ James Buchanan, *Linguae Britannicae vera pronuntiatio: or, a New English Dictionary* (London: Printed for A. Miller in the Strand, 1757); John Ash, *The New and Complete Dictionary of the English Language, Vol. I* (London: Printed for Edward and Charles Dilly in the Poultry; and R. Baldwin in Pater-Noster Row, 1775), unpaginated.

⁵⁹ Nathaniel Bailey, *Dictionarium Britannicum: or a More Compleat Universal Etymological English Dictionary Than Any Extant* (London: Printed for T. Cox, 1730), unpaginated.

Dictionarium medicum universale, 'the beard, a part too well known to need description,' while 'Barb' was defined by Thomas Browne's *Union Dictionary* as 'anything that grows in the place of the beard'.⁶⁰

Other definitions, however, hint at the deeper meanings attached to facial hair, particularly in reference to life stage. Many dictionaries, for example, included specific terms for the first appearance of the beard in adolescence, reflecting older ideas about facial hair as a shift in body cycle. Nathaniel Bailey's dictionary included the term 'Impubescent', defined as the state of 'beginning to have a beard'.⁶¹ Barrow's dictionary defined the 'first appearance of the beard on the upper lip' as 'Probarbium'.⁶² The adjective 'beardless' appeared variously, denoting both the literal and figurative implications of a lack of facial hair. While Francis Allen defined beardless as simply being 'without a beard,' others like John Ash used it to imply one who was 'young or youthful'.⁶³ Some definitions also suggest the continuing close links between a lack of facial hair and generative capacity, or sexuality. Here, being beardless could be a sign of boyhood or bodily immaturity but might equally signal weakness or effeminacy. Thomas Dyche's dictionary defined 'beardless' as 'one that has no hair visible on the chin, as children, women and *effeminate men*' (emphasis added).⁶⁴ The implication that an inability to grow beards signalled effeminacy is repeated elsewhere. Dyche used the slang term 'smock-faced' for 'a man or boy with an effeminate or womanish look, smooth and without a beard &c'.⁶⁵ Interesting to note here is the separation of 'effeminate' and 'womanish,' suggesting sexual as well as physical ambiguity. John Barrow's medical dictionary listed the obscure term 'Spanopogones' to define 'persons whose beards are thin, or whose hairs fall off from their chins'.⁶⁶ Such definitions add a further layer of complexity to the already confused relationship between facial hair and the articulation of masculinity. To grow facial hair was uncouth and brutish; to shave it off, as we have seen, suggested control and the removal of a barrier to politeness. But, as lexicographers like Dyche and Ash also suggest, the *ability* to grow a beard was still a vital keystone of the male sex.⁶⁷

So far, we have explored the social and cultural meanings of facial hair and the factors contributing to its decline. But how far were changing social attitudes reflected

⁶⁰ Thomas Browne, *The Union Dictionary Containing All That Is Truly Useful in the Dictionaries of Johnson, Sheridan and Walker...* (London: Printed by J. W. Myers, 1800), unpaginated; John Barrow, *Dictionarium medicum universale: or, A New Medicinal Dictionary. Containing an Explanation of All the Terms Used in Physic, ... Botany, &c. ... The Whole Collected from the Original Authors, by J. Barrow, Teacher of Mathematics* (London: Printed for T. Longman and C. Hitch and A. Millar, 1749), unpaginated.

⁶¹ Bailey, *Dictionarium Britannicum*.

⁶² Barrow, *Dictionarium medicum universale*.

⁶³ Allen, *Compleat English Dictionary*; John Ash, *New and Complete Dictionary*; see also Browne, *Union Dictionary*.

⁶⁴ Thomas Dyche, *A New General English Dictionary; Peculiarly Calculated for the Use and Improvement of Such as Are Unacquainted with the Learned Languages...* (London: Printed for Catherine and Richard Ware, 1765), unpaginated.

⁶⁵ Dyche, *New General English Dictionary*.

⁶⁶ Barrow, *Dictionarium medicum universale*.

⁶⁷ See Karen Harvey, *Reading Sex in the Eighteenth Century: Bodies and Gender in English Erotic Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 95–7.

in medical literature relating to facial hair? As the eighteenth century progressed, was there a rupture between older ideas about the humoral body in light of changing medico-scientific debates about the body? It is to such questions that this chapter now turns.

Beards, hair and medicine in the eighteenth century

The eighteenth century saw renewed interest in the physiology of hair across public and professional, as well as medical, spheres. Discussions of the nature and formation of hair were part of a growing interest in the 'animal economy' and the place of the body in the natural world, driven partly by development and popularity of microscopy and in scientific instruments more generally. Optical instruments were the acme of enlightened enquiry, allowing dilettantes and philosophes alike to literally see the world in new ways.⁶⁸ Microscopes were perhaps the ultimate symbol of this and were, as Al Coppola suggests, 'a transformative sensory prosthesis of the new science'.⁶⁹ Microscopes opened a window into the micro-mechanisms of the body and its operations, and demand was particularly fuelled by a growing interest in 'animalcula' and blood flow.⁷⁰ As an abundant and freely available resource, hair was an obvious choice for the microscope slide. While groups of virtuosi observers established formal groups and societies, amateurs too used microscopes to explore the micro landscape of their own bodies. In the early eighteenth century, new microscopes were supplied with sample slides containing typical specimens, to illustrate how they might be used. Hair was a common inclusion.⁷¹ At first, microscopic observation appeared in many ways to reinforce, rather than replace, humoral conceptions of the origins and nature of hair.

Early studies focused upon the composition and physical properties of hair, as observed through a microscope. Some merely described hairs in basic terms such as 'short and thread like' or 'hard and flexible', and microscopic analysis initially appeared to confirm structures of fibres and filaments.⁷² In 1701, Charles LeClerc identified hairs as 'hollow filaments planted in the Glandules of the skin', implying that they were surface, external, or even parasitical entities.⁷³ Later descriptions were more detailed. The perfumer and hairdresser J. Mather noted that hairs were knotted and hollow, consisting of five or six bound fibres. Although appearing round and cylindrical, Mather observed that they could also be triangular or square.⁷⁴ Even much later the

⁶⁸ Withey, *Technology*, 94–5.

⁶⁹ Al Coppola, "'Without the Help of Glasses": The Anthropocentric Spectacle of Nehemiah Grew's Botany', *Eighteenth Century*, 54:2 (2013): 264.

⁷⁰ Withey, *Technology*, 94.

⁷¹ Jeremy Burgess, Michael Marten and Rosemary Taylor, *Under the Microscope: A Hidden World Revealed* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 186.

⁷² For example, Thomas Gibson, *The Anatomy of Humane Bodies Epitomized...* (London: Printed by T. W., 1703), 365; James Handley, *Colloquia Chirurgica: or the Art of Surgery Epitomiz'd and Made Easy...* (London: Printed for A. Bettesworth and C. Hitch, 1733), 191.

⁷³ LeClerc, *The Compleat Surgeon*, 10.9.

⁷⁴ J. Mather, *A Treatise on the Nature and Preservation of the Hair...* (London: Printed by A. Grant, 1795), 10.

debate about the shape of individual hairs was still raging. By 1832 they were argued to be ovular in shape and composed of a 'softish, glutinous or pulpy matter, contained in a semi-transparent bag'.⁷⁵ How hair should be classified was another matter for debate. In 1714, William Salmon's study of anatomy described hair as part of the 'vegetable system' and having a 'vegetable life'.⁷⁶

Such organic metaphors continued throughout the eighteenth century. William Moore's 1780 *Art of Hairdressing* described hair as an 'oeconomy' (a system that requires management), likening it to plants growing out of the earth.⁷⁷ Hairs were described variously as 'knotted like some form of grass ... [which] sent out branches from their joints', like 'the root of a tree'.⁷⁸ Just as the tops of vegetables grew back after being withered by cold weather, so the hair grew back stronger once cut.⁷⁹ The 'vegetable' analogy was further extended in discussions of how hair was nourished. Drawing life from the 'general stock of juice or moisture of the body' hair was portrayed as feeding 'as plants do out of the earth'.⁸⁰ Rather than being a living part of the body, therefore, it had its own distinct 'economy', which appeared to support observations of the continued growth of hair after death.⁸¹ The exact function and purpose of hair was also a topic of debate, although it was generally agreed that it served as a protective covering to shield the body from the harmful effects of environment and sunlight.

Where, though, were beards amidst this new climate of ideas? Early modern medical authors were confident in their assertions about the form and function of facial hair and its place within the embodiment and performance of masculinity. But the virtual disappearance of beards by 1700, and pejorative connections with roughness and inelegant manliness, complicated the significative power of facial hair as a symbol of virility and strength. Medical authors therefore faced a new problem of reconciling facial hair with changing views about the male body. Just as the beard was absent from advice literature and general discussions of gender and the social body, however, it appears similarly elusive in medical texts. As Emma Markiewicz notes, since facial hair was often considered a secondary category to that of head hair, it was therefore difficult to reconcile with medicine.⁸² Rather than attracting dedicated studies, facial hair was instead largely subsumed within new debates about the nature and origins of hair. One exception was the popular *Pogonologia* by the French politician, engineer and historian Jacques-Antoine Dulaure, translated into English and published in

⁷⁵ Anon., *The Toilette of Health, Beauty and Fashion* (London: Wittenoom and Cremer, 1832), 23.

⁷⁶ William Salmon, *Ars Anatomica: or the Anatomy of Human Bodies* (London: Printed by J. Dawkes, 1714), 3. This idea was still prevalent at the end of the century. See, for example, Mather, *A Treatise*, 10.

⁷⁷ William Moore, *The Art of Hair-Dressing, and Making It Grow Fast, Together with a Plain and Easy Means of Preserving It* (Bath: J. Salmon, 1780), 5–6.

⁷⁸ Cook, 'Natural History', 120; Rowland, *Familiar, Pleasing and Interesting Essay*, 5–6.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁸⁰ Mather, *A Treatise*, 10. See also David Ritchie, *A Treatise on the Hair* (London: Printed by the author, 1770), 4; Atkinson, *Essay on the Hair*, 4.

⁸¹ Moore, *Art of Hair Dressing*, 5.

⁸² Emma Markiewicz, 'Hair, Wigs and Wig Wearing in Eighteenth-Century England', Warwick University, unpublished PhD thesis, 2014, 54.

1786, which provided a detailed history of the beard, but without in-depth or specific discussion of the physical make up or biology of beard hairs.⁸³

Where beards were discussed they generally fell within one of two themes. First, especially in the early eighteenth century, was the continuing relationship between the beard and the production of sperm. Pierre Dionis's *Anatomy of Human Bodies Improv'd* (1716) reinforced the 'great correspondence between the seed and the beard', since they appeared at the same time. Those with 'the greatest stock of seed' had the 'roughest' beards.⁸⁴ In other words, the stronger the beard, the greater the assumed quantity of semen being produced and the more potent the reproductive power of the man. The place of the beard as a signifier of the shift to adolescence was discussed in passing in John Crawford's *Cursus Medicinae* of 1724, while other prominent physicians such as William Cullen continued to reinforce beard colour as an important indicator of temperament as late as 1789.⁸⁵ Second was the place of shaving within broader discussions of the maintenance of health. Discussing the importance of cleanliness and bodily care, the Polish physician Anthony Willich argued that removing the beard (and also the nails) was 'no insignificant matter in the care of health', since shaving promoted healthy perspiration.⁸⁶ Others discussed shaving as a useful means of evacuation, ridding the body of excess humours and cleaning blockages from pores.⁸⁷ For George Cheyne, regular shaving of face and head was highly beneficial in treating headaches and eye complaints.⁸⁸ Beards also appeared in medical texts, in discussions of conditions affecting their growth or appearance, including 'furfuratio', or dandruff on the head and beard, and 'sycosis', causing ulcers in 'those parts which are covered with Hair; the hard and round chiefly in the Beard'.⁸⁹

To further understand the place of the beard in eighteenth-century medical discourses, though, it is necessary to map broader changes in concepts of both hair and skin. As Emma Markiewicz notes, concepts of hair were closely bound up with changing ideas about the body and, in particular, the retreat from humoral theory

⁸³ Jacques-Antoine Dulaure, *Pogonologia, or a Philosophical and Historical Essay on Beards* (trans. Edward Drewe) (Exeter: Printed by R. Thorn, 1786).

⁸⁴ Pierre Dionis, *The Anatomy of Humane Bodies Improv'd, According to the Circulation of the Blood, and All the Modern Discoveries* (London: Printed for R. Bonwicke, Tim. Goodwin, J. Walthoe, M. Wotton, S. Manship, J. Nicholson, R. Wilkin, B. Tooke, R. Smith and T. Ward, 1716), 345. See also Dennis De Coetlogon, *An Universal History of Arts and Sciences* (London: Printed and sold by John Hart, 1745), 85.

⁸⁵ John Crawford, *Cursus medicinae; or a Complete Theory of Physic: in Five Parts* (London: Printed for W. Taylor, at the Ship and Black-Swan, in Pater-Noster-Row; and J. Osborn, at the Oxford-Arms, in Lombard-Street, 1724), 236, 304; William Cullen, *A Treatise of the Materia Medica* (2 vols) (Edinburgh: Printed for Charles Elliot, 1789), 63.

⁸⁶ Anthony Willich, *Lectures on Diet and Regimen...* (London: Printed for T. Longman, 1799), 198.

⁸⁷ Robert James, *A Medicinal Dictionary; Including Physic, Surgery, Anatomy, Chymistry, and Botany, in All Their Branches Relative to Medicine, Volume 2* (London: Printed for T. Osborne and sold by J. Roberts, 1734–5), 213.

⁸⁸ George Cheyne, *An Essay of Health and Long Life* (London: Printed for George Strahan, at the Golden Ball over-against the Royal Exchange in Cornhill; and J. Leake, Bookseller at Bath, 1724), 198–9.

⁸⁹ 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, and are to be sold by William Davis at the Black-Bull in Cornhill near the Royal Exchange, 1702), 143, 295.

as an explanatory model.⁹⁰ This was by no means a rapid change. Despite repeated invectives about popular errors and superstitions, humoral theory continued to underpin diagnosis and treatment well into the nineteenth century. But such ideas were subject to continual challenge and erosion from empirical observation, medical education and new theories of anatomy. As focus began to shift away from humoral physiology and towards the 'non-naturals' (including air, sleeping and waking, food and drink, diet, rest, exercise and emotions), attention switched to external factors in governing health.⁹¹ Early modern writers, remember, had placed the source of hair deep within the body, with beard hair resulting from the waste heat of sperm production. But, amidst increasing attention on the form and functions of the body and also a new socio-medical focus upon bodily surfaces, beards were increasingly viewed as originating in or below the skin, rather than the abdomen and loins.

Even so, there was still much continuity. Despite arguments that 'modern' science had superseded the knowledge of the 'ancients', the essential concept of hair remained broadly that of two centuries earlier. The notion of hair as a 'tegument of the body', likened to nails, or even bird feathers, was still in common currency.⁹² New discussions of the animal oeconomy tended to reinforce, rather than challenge, humoral views. The physician William Cullen noted the 'distinction of temperaments' established by 'the ancients' and placed hair within the context of simple solids. Cullen saw no reason to abandon humoral explanations at that stage since it 'appears to me to be founded in observation.'⁹³ David Ritchie began his book by appearing to suggest that 'modern physicians' had undermined humoral explanations of the hair. Much of the discussion that followed, however, was laden with humoral terminology and reference, from heat to excrement.⁹⁴

A 1776 article in the *Hibernian Magazine* suggested that hair was 'commonly reputed as a recrement' and one 'more simple than the other humours of the body'.⁹⁵ Quoting anatomical specialists such as Richard Gibson (published in 1703) and James Drake, Ritchie noted that hairs were 'commonly reputed to be excrements and esteemed to be nourished by such'.⁹⁶ There was, however, an important shift in the later eighteenth century, with the apparent abandonment of the notion of beard production as male catamenia. Seemingly no authors after 1750 still discussed the production of hair as a form of male menstruation, or explicitly linked it to the production of sperm. The implications of this seemingly minor change are actually profound in terms of gender conceptions, signalling a critical shift away from earlier models of the body. At least in medical terms, the beard was no longer specifically a sign or symptom of seminal

⁹⁰ Markiewicz, 'Hair, Wigs and Wig Wearing', 33–4.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁹² For examples, see Ritchie, *Treatise on the Hair*, 6–7; Andrew Fyfe, *A System of Anatomy and Physiology, with the Comparative Anatomy of Animals, Volume 1* (Edinburgh: J. Pillians and Sons, 1795), 477–9.

⁹³ William Cullen, *A Treatise of the Materia Medica, Volume 1* (Edinburgh: Printed for Charles Elliot, 1789), 63, 112.

⁹⁴ Ritchie, *Art of Hair Dressing*, 4, 6, 9.

⁹⁵ J. Cook, 'The Natural History of Hair', *Hibernian Magazine or Compendium of Useful Knowledge* (1776): 119–20.

⁹⁶ Ritchie, *Art of Hair Dressing*, 5.

ferment. Instead, it was causally linked to the blood and to a more general notion of bodily heat. It is worth noting too that Stewart's descriptions of hair concentrated upon the effects of heat upon its appearance, rather than as a factor affecting its generation or growth.⁹⁷

The broader concept of facial hair as a waste product or excrement, however, initially proved harder to shift. Alexander Stewart's 1795 study still identified hair as an excrement of the blood.⁹⁸ Classic humoral texts about the body, such as Culpeper's herbals and *English Physician*, were still in print in the nineteenth century, although their influence and reception by that stage is hard to assess. By 1800, though, this too had begun to change. While Erasmus Darwin described hair as being produced from the 'excretory' glands of the skin, he identified it as a product of the mucous glands.⁹⁹ Some authors actively sought to place distance between old and 'modern' ideas about hair. In 1791 Georges Buffon declared that while 'the ancients erroneously considered the hair as a type of excrement', such ideas had been replaced by the superior knowledge of 'the moderns'.¹⁰⁰ This was echoed by William Atkinson who broke with the 'ancients' view of hair as a 'sort of excrement, fed only with excrementitious matter', arguing instead that 'the moderns are agreed' that hair was a unique substance with its own individual nourishment.¹⁰¹ In 1818, Alexander Rowland was still quoting the thirteenth-century theologian and Catholic saint Albertus Magnus, referring to the production of hair when 'the brain is divested of gross humour, cholor or phlegm' which rose to the surface and solidified.¹⁰² Rowland suggested that his own observations led him to a broadly similar conclusion, but argued that hair began as a liquid substance in the 'cutis vera or inner skin' and was then 'exhaled by the heat of the body to the surface'.¹⁰³ Here was evidence of the second important shift in conceptions of facial hair. While Magnus held the traditional view of beard hair as a substance originating deep within the body, Rowland clearly saw it as emerging from within the surface of the skin. This process, which I term the 'externalization' of facial hair, took place in the context of broader changes in ideas about the permeability of skin. As Claudia Benthien and others have noted, early modern concepts of skin viewed it as a porous layer, one that allowed substances to both enter and exit the body.¹⁰⁴ In this sense, skin was 'excremental' allowing internal waste products, moisture, fluid and hair, to be expelled to maintain bodily balance.¹⁰⁵ It was, to use Barbara Duden's phrase, a 'surface on which the inside

⁹⁷ Alexander Stewart, *The Natural Production of Hair, or Its Growth and Decay...* (London: Printed by the author, 1795), 7, 11.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 11–12.

⁹⁹ Erasmus Darwin, *Zoonomia: or, the Laws of Organic Life* (London: Printed for J. Johnson, 1796), 44, 52.

¹⁰⁰ George Louis LeClerc Buffon, *The System of Natural History, Written by the Celebrated Buffon...* (Perth: Printed by R. Morrison, 1791), 41.

¹⁰¹ William Atkinson, *An Essay on the Hair, Describing Its Nature and Means of Nourishment* (London: Nichols and Sons, 1814), 4.

¹⁰² Alexander Rowland, *A Familiar, Pleasing and Interesting Essay on the Curious Structure, the Varied Colours and Practical Essay on the Human Hair* (London: Printed by W. Solomon, 1818), 4–5.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Claudia Benthien, *Skin: On the Cultural Border between Self and the World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 39.

¹⁰⁵ Steven Connor, *The Book of Skin* (London: Reaktion, 2004), 21–2.

[of the body] reveals itself'.¹⁰⁶ By the later eighteenth century, however, there were also shifts in the relationship between skin and the inner body, which saw skin recast as virtually a distinct organ. While still seen as a membrane and permeable, greater attention began to focus on its surface and layers.¹⁰⁷ It is into this changing context that shifting ideas about the origin of beard hair can be placed. Rather than originating deep within the body, beard hair was now conceptually part of the skin.

As the eighteenth century progressed, there was a noticeable change in the authorship of books about hair. While descriptions of hair were common in anatomical and physiological texts, it is noteworthy that virtually every dedicated study between 1770 and 1800 was written by barbers or hairdressers, rather than physicians. These included London hairdressers such as Peter Gilchrist, William Moore, David Ritchie and James Stewart, whose books were all published between 1770 and 1782.¹⁰⁸ In many ways this is unsurprising. Clearly occupational interest was a factor, and in the relatively new profession of hairdressing, some were keen to display knowledge as well as proficiency in their craft. Establishing themselves as published practitioners in the 'science' of haircutting, offered a potential elevation in status from mere trimming and wig-dressing. In 1770, Peter Gilchrist's *Treatise on the Hair* argued that the true nature and purpose of hair had been overlooked since the discovery of blood circulation, and he was keen to explore the nature of hair as well as its aesthetics.¹⁰⁹ David Ritchie emphasized the importance of the microscope in discovering the hidden structure and formation of hair.¹¹⁰ In part this perhaps reflected the growth of specialist knowledge and the claims of artisans, makers and practitioners to be the ultimate arbiters of their own product or service. But, on another level, it also highlights what might be regarded as the 'demedicalization' of facial hair – the point at which it began to move away from the ambit of medicine and practice and into a less-defined area of lay bodywork.

Perhaps one of the most important arenas for the discussion of facial hair in this period, however, was the emerging literature relating to race and hierarchies of human bodies. It is to such discussions that the final part of this chapter now turns.

Beards, race and corporeal value

Facial hair offered a useful lens through which to view British (and European) men's bodies, health, humoral temperament, manliness and character. But it also mapped on to broader debates about national and racial difference. Beards were central in discussions of the corporeal nature and aesthetics of race, amidst what was, in many ways, the 'great age of classification'.¹¹¹ Faced with the problem of trying to identify and

¹⁰⁶ Quoted in Benthien, *Skin*, 40.

¹⁰⁷ Connor, *Book of Skin*, 24.

¹⁰⁸ Peter Gilchrist, *A Treatise on the Hair* (London: Publisher unknown, 1770); Moore, *Art of Hair Dressing*; James Stewart, *Plococosmos, or the Whole Art of Hairdressing* (London: Printed for the author, 1782); Ritchie, *Art of Hair Dressing*.

¹⁰⁹ Gilchrist, *A Treatise*, 4.

¹¹⁰ Ritchie, *Treatise*, 2.

¹¹¹ Londa Schiebinger, *Nature's Body: Gender in the Making of Modern Science* (London: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 117.

categorize distinct types of human, naturalists sought criteria by which to measure them.¹¹² One was climate. Hippocratic climatic theory underpinned debates about the behaviour and capacity of non-European races. Temperate climates (the 'civilized middle' between the opposite extremes of temperature) were seen as producing temperate humans and those most likely to be moderate and intelligent.¹¹³ The more extreme the climate, the more 'barbaric' were its inhabitants. Although located in a northern zone, Britain was generally represented as a temperate region and, therefore, at or near the top of the theoretical hierarchy.¹¹⁴ The beard, was a central component in this 'geohumoralism', becoming one of the key indicators of racial 'value'.¹¹⁵ It could be used to identify racial groups and mark out the foreign 'other'.

The physical typology of northern Europeans was the standard against which all others were judged.¹¹⁶ Skin colour was an important barometer of the effects of hot or cold climates, as were bodily form, shape and features, including hair and beards.¹¹⁷ Francois Bernier's *New Division of the Earth* used lips, hair, skin and the presence of only 'slight beards', alongside colour, to claim that black Africans were a separate race.¹¹⁸ European hair was characterized as long and blond as a result of the moderate climate, contrasting with the short, curly hair of Africans, or the black, straight hair of Americans, both of whom inhabited hot climates.¹¹⁹ Beards, as Angela Rosenthal suggests, were perhaps even more meaningful than hair, as they linked both gender and ethnicity.¹²⁰ By 1700, the quality, length and colour of beards were important elements in discussions of non-European bodies, becoming central components in establishing ranks or 'sorts' of homo sapiens. Unsurprisingly, bearded European and north African men were generally deemed superior to those of beardless or thinly bearded races. Whether or not they chose to grow them was another matter. Black Africans, East Asians or Laplanders were all described as having scanty beards and discussed in pejorative terms.¹²¹ A century later, the novelist and poet Oliver Goldsmith argued that variation in the manner of wearing beards was an important distinction between races, noting that 'every nation seems to have entertained different prejudices at different times' towards facial hair.¹²² Geographical compendiums, such as Michael Adams's *New Royal Geographical Magazine* (1794) routinely recorded facial appearance, including facial hair, alongside other characteristics.¹²³

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Mary Floyd-Wilson, *English Ethnicity and Race in Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), ch. 1.

¹¹⁴ Roxann Wheeler, *The Complexion of Race: Categories of Difference in Eighteenth-Century British Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 111.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 96.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 2–3.

¹¹⁸ Quoted in *ibid.*, 96.

¹¹⁹ Rosenthal, 'Raising Hair', 2.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Schiebinger, *Nature's Body*, 122.

¹²² Oliver Goldsmith, *A History of the Earth and Animated Nature*, Vol. 2 (Dublin: Printed for James Williams, 1776), 96.

¹²³ Michael Adams, *The New Royal Geographical Magazine; or, a Modern, Complete, Authentic and Copious System of Universal Geography* (London: Published by Alexander Hoggatt, 1794), 11, 20,

The power of beards as measures of mental acuity and racial 'value' varied. Richard Bradley's *Philosophical Account of the Works of Nature* (1721) suggested that beards were a defining characteristic of white races, especially white Europeans, but acknowledged that differences in appearance were matters of degree, rather than accurate measures of intellectual capacity.¹²⁴ Underlying European suspicion of non-bearded races was the lingering connection between beardlessness and effeminacy. As noted above, the ability to grow a beard was still symbolically important for European men, even if fashion and other forces dictated its removal. There were suggestions, even in Lavater's work, of the lack of virility of some beardless nations. A passage quoted from M. De. Pauw's *Recherche Philosophique Sur Les Americains* noting the lack of beard among American tribes, argued that while it was not correct to infer that they were necessarily 'enfeebled in the organs of generation', it was true that they, along with the Chinese and Tartars, were 'far from being fruitful or much addicted to love'.¹²⁵

Even within discussions of beardless nations there was variation. Initially, Caribbean and American Indians were depicted positively, differing from Europeans only by degree.¹²⁶ They resembled Europeans in facial appearance, if not skin colour, and as such were perhaps seen as closer to them. By mid-century though, attitudes towards beardless races had hardened, with some naturalists arguing that their lack of beard follicles rendered them a different species of human.¹²⁷ This created an awkward paradox: in deliberately removing their beards to differentiate themselves from other nations and appear more 'civilized', Europeans were effectively mimicking the facial appearance of the (potentially effeminate or feminized) 'savage'. The smooth faces of Europeans even led to suspicions regarding their masculinity by men of other races. On first encountering British men in 1788, indigenous Australians were reportedly confused by their lack of beards, thinking them to be 'misshapen females'.¹²⁸ The shaved face therefore created ambiguities in the nature, symbolism and power of facial hair.

Why this occurred is more complex. The answer may lie in earlier precedents of shaving as a cultural reaction to 'otherness'. Exploring its place within sixteenth-century ethnological discourses, Elliot Horowitz suggests that the discovery of the New World altered European perceptions of beards. Since they had once borne unfavourable connections with Jews and Turks, Europeans had therefore shaved to demonstrate their superiority to this perceived 'other'.¹²⁹ According to Horowitz, the discovery of beardless white inhabitants in the New World shifted 'otherness' onto the clean-shaven face, leading to the widespread return of beards across Europe.¹³⁰ Others agree with the concept of facial hair as a cultural reaction. Douglas Biow's study of beards in medieval

30–1, 37, 47, 62, etc.; Thomas Bankes, *A Modern, Authentic and Complete System of Universal Geography*, 2 Vols (London: Printed for C. Cooke, 1790), 467–8, 479, 497, 511, 528, 561, etc.

¹²⁴ Schiebinger, *Nature's Body*, 122.

¹²⁵ Johan Caspar Lavater, *Essays on Physiognomy Designed to Promote the Knowledge and the Love of Mankind* (trans. Thomas Holcroft) (London: William Tegg, 1797), 351.

¹²⁶ Wheeler, *Complexion of Race*, 72–3; Wahrman, *Making of the Modern Self*, 97.

¹²⁷ Schiebinger, *Nature's Body*, 123.

¹²⁸ Quoted in Wheeler, *Complexion of Race*, 20.

¹²⁹ Elliott Horowitz, 'The New World and the Changing Face of Europe', *Sixteenth-Century Journal*, 28:4 (1997): 1185.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

Italy places 'otherness' within the contexts of urbanization and a crisis of masculinity among Italian elites. Whereas urban Italian men had shaved to emphasize their superiority to bearded rustics, Biow suggested that the invasion of Italy by France in the sixteenth century caused insecurity among Italian men. As a highly visible sign of manliness, the beard was here a response to the perceived weakness and vulnerability of the state, as well as the predominant style of the invaders.¹³¹ In both the medieval period and the eighteenth century, wearing facial hair, or not, was a conscious reaction to circumstance, rather than a neutral decision. It also involved a process of 'othering'.

As well as the beard itself, the methods used to remove it in non-European nations were culturally loaded and used as a further basis for assessments of barbarousness and even for judgements about sexuality and effeminacy. The beards of Chinese men, for example, connoted age and wisdom, although their custom of plucking beard hairs did not meet European expectations of civilization. This practice supposedly began at an early age and continued until the age of thirty, after which the beard was allowed to grow and, like long fingernails, was viewed as a sign of 'esteemed learning'.¹³² The issue of plucking beards was also discussed in relation to American Indians, where it was asserted that the habit gave the lie of beardlessness. Some argued that, if the young men had shaved rather than plucked their beard hairs, they would have beards as full and luxuriant as any European man.¹³³

If plucking the beard was questionable, though, shaving was a benchmark of civilization. Europeans were generally impressed with the ingenuity of other races whose men used implements to shave, largely because this mirrored their own practices. Non-Europeans who shaved were generally described in favourable terms than those who used other methods. James Cook's account of meeting Tongan islanders noted that they shaved their beards with shells. These 'singular instruments ... were found to be an excellent shift' although 'rather tedious' to use. The island chiefs reportedly made repeated visits to the ship for the novelty of being shaved by the barbers on board.¹³⁴ This sort of cultural exchange in the adoption of European habits was also viewed positively. Occasions when native peoples were introduced to the razor through contact with Europeans were also noted. Richard McCausland noted that while many American Indians plucked out their beard hairs, 'several of the Mohocks, Delawares, and others who live amongst white people (emphasis added), sometimes shave with razors'.¹³⁵ Oliver Goldsmith cautioned against the assumption that other races took no care of their appearance, arguing that 'we have a very wrong idea of savage finery'.¹³⁶ Elsewhere he slipped into judgement however. Discussing the

¹³¹ Douglas Biow, *On the Importance of Being an Individual in Renaissance Italy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 186–9.

¹³² Noble, *A Voyage*, 144.

¹³³ Schiebinger, *Nature's Body*, 124.

¹³⁴ Anon., *A Collection of Voyages Round the World Performed by Royal Authority* (London: Printed for A. Miller, 1790), 1399.

¹³⁵ Richard McCausland, 'Particulars Relative to the Nature and Customs of the Indians of North-America', *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society of London*, 76 (1786): 229.

¹³⁶ Goldsmith, *A History*, 96–7.

Mongolian race, Goldsmith noted that 'with but little beard that grows stragglingly upon the chin, the Calmucks were the 'ugliest of all' and 'lead an erratic life'.¹³⁷

But shaving could also be deliberately deployed to stress difference. In 1780, David Ritchie was convinced that European men shaved precisely because of the desire to differentiate themselves from other nations. The fact, Ritchie noted, that the beard was commonly shaved across Europe 'distinguishes them from all other countries of the world'; and he suggested that shaving gave 'a more significant physiognomy to their smooth chins'.¹³⁸ Buffon's natural history concurred. While the Turks cut off their hair and let their beards grow, Europeans 'shave their beards, and wear their hair'.¹³⁹ Here, both the beard *and* the act of shaving, could be cultural markers of difference.

Beards and hair, then, were central to concepts of manliness in Europe and in understandings of non-European bodies. The quantity, quality, colour and texture of beards and the methods of removing it all played into broader debates about racial hierarchies and value judgements of bodily 'others'.

Conclusion

The eighteenth century saw various important changes to concepts of facial hair. Amidst the pan-European decline of the beard, facial hair drew negative associations, including age, madness, low status and bodily dereliction. Beard-wearing had ceased to be a 'badge' of manliness by 1700, and elite and middling men took great pains in removing facial hair as part of the articulation of a polite, refined appearance. Nevertheless, shaving complicated concepts of the 'natural' body, artificially removing a natural component of the male body and replacing it with soft skin and an open countenance. Shaving was also established as a manly act and one that showed self-mastery although – amidst concerns about cosmetics and artifice and the ever-present spectre of effeminacy – the smooth, pampered face of the polite gentleman complicated expectations of manliness.

In medical texts beards largely ceased to warrant prolonged or detailed discussion, although shaving was propounded as a healthy activity and one that promoted equilibrium by providing a useful means of evacuation. But the broader debates about hair reveal the continuation of the strong link between beards and the male body. Until the mid-eighteenth century the connection between beard hair and the production of sperm remained firm, as did the significance of the first appearance of the beard in signalling the transition to manhood. As the century wore on, however, the specific link to spermatoc production was severed and, despite the retention of links between bodily heat and beard growth, understandings of the origin of hair – and beard hair – shifted from the interior to the exterior of the body.

The centrality of beards to concepts of 'foreign' bodies also reveals the extent to which facial hair could be a marker not only of manliness, but of hierarchies of the

¹³⁷ Ibid., 220.

¹³⁸ Ritchie, *A Treatise on the Hair*, 41–2.

¹³⁹ Buffon, *System*, 41.

body. In Britain, the binary between bearded and beardless was a potential line of demarcation between manliness and effeminacy, just as it was a mark of difference between men and women. Older ideas about beard colour and personality also clung on tenaciously, although were in decline by mid-century. In assessments of non-European men, however, everything from colour to length and curl were scrutinized for what they might reveal about intelligence and capacity. Perhaps most importantly, however, despite the fact that they were to be shaved off, beards still made the man. If it was socially undesirable to display it, the ability to grow a beard continued to be a vital component in the articulation of masculinity. In a beardless age, beards were still an essential symbol of manliness and the health, strength and sexual vigour of the male body.