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Refining the face: Auto-pogonotomy and self-styling, 1750–1900

In 1901, R. Kron's *Little Londoner* promised to guide foreign visitors through the complexities of language and daily life in the city, offering advice on everything from social proprieties, including visiting and shopping, to food and meals. One chapter, in particular, dealt with the 'toilet' of the gentleman and offered a complete (albeit idiosyncratic) guide to getting up in the morning.¹

When I wake up (or awake) after a good night's rest, I involuntarily rub my eyes, and then get up (or rise) in order to dress. I first put on my pants (or drawers) then my socks (reaching up to the calves), or stockings (reaching up to the knee), my trousers (familiarly: bags, or breeches; in America, pants or pantaloons), and my slippers.

Then I go to the wash(ing) stand and have a thorough wash in cold water, which is far more refreshing and wholesome than (luke)warm (or tepid) water. In washing I use a sponge, and a cake (or tablet) of unscented soap. I have a rough and a smooth towel to dry myself with. Many people have a bathroom close to their bed-room, and have (or take) a tub, i.e. a bath (hot or cold) every morning.

Then I clean (or brush) my teeth with a tooth-brush and tooth-powder (or dentifrice), and gargle (or rinse my mouth). After every meal I also rinse my mouth to prevent my teeth from decaying. When I have done washing (myself), I clean my (finger-)nail; after this I comb and brush my hair (with a comb and a [hair-]brush). I detest pomade and perfumes (or scents), and never put any on my hair.

My beard grows very fast, and so I (have a) shave (or I get shaved) every morning. Being (or Getting) shaved by a barber is an unpleasant affair for me, so

¹ R. Kron, *The Little Londoner: A Concise Account of the Life and Ways of the English, with Special Reference to London* (Freiburg: J. Bielefelds Verlag, 1907), 45. All parentheses and spellings are original.

I prefer to do it myself. I have a complete set of shaving tackle, viz., a (safety) razor, (razor-)strop, brush and shaving soap.

After shaving I put on my (under-)vest and (day-)shirt.²

As the account suggests, by the turn of the twentieth century, shaving was part of a complex suite of daily grooming tasks involving different actions, skills, instruments and products. How far this experience was reflective of men across all levels of society is up for debate, but it does suggest that shaving, and self-shaving in particular, was by then probably the norm.

This process had begun faltering in the early modern period but took firmer hold during the later eighteenth century. By the 1770s men were taking a more active role in the management of their own facial appearance. Grooming practices in general were often central to gender performance and self-expression. As I have argued elsewhere, amidst a new focus upon the 'polite body' the micromanagement of bodily surfaces, even in public, took on renewed importance. Of all bodily surfaces, it was the face that was arguably most important in the conveyance of politeness. For women, the necessity to shape the eyebrows and depilate the face made tweezers an essential accoutrement.³ For men, though, it was shaving (and by extension razors) that became the acme of enlightened self-presentation. After 1750, for the first time, advertisements for all manner of new products began to target men 'who shave themselves.'⁴ By the first decades of the nineteenth century, the practice had grown more widespread, assisted by new didactic literature, instructing men in the intricacies of shaving, maintaining razors and preparing lather.

But the second half of the nineteenth century brought an abrupt *volte face* in ideals of male appearance. The onset of the 'beard movement' saw facial hair again established as a touchstone of masculinity and an emblem of the Victorian man. While Georgian and early Victorian men had been forced to master the intricacies of shaving, men after the mid-nineteenth century faced new challenges in the myriad choices about how to manage and care for their abundant facial hair, including cleanliness, length, style and colour. In both periods, however, the choices surrounding facial hair, and the execution of shaving or beard styling, increasingly fell on individual men, rather than practitioners.

This chapter argues that what occurred between 1750 and 1900 was nothing less than a remaking of the male face, a shift in performed masculinity that saw both the increasing assumption of personal responsibility for managing facial appearance and the creation of a whole new category of male grooming. Importantly, although it still retained strong elements of cleanliness and bodily regulation and order, this new type of *personal* grooming was no longer linked specifically to medicine, or to medical practitioners.

² Ibid., 45–6.

³ See Alun Withey, *Technology, Self-Fashioning and Politeness in Eighteenth-Century Britain: Refined Bodies* (London: Palgrave, 2016), 66–7, 73, 79–83.

⁴ Alun Withey, 'Shaving and Masculinity in Eighteenth-Century Britain', *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 36:2 (2013): 229–30.

The rise of self-shaving

While accessing the grooming routines of individual men is still extremely difficult, there are strong suggestions that by the end of the eighteenth century, self-shaving was becoming more commonplace, at least among men of middling or elite status, since they were the social demographic for whom polite ideals mattered most. It was they who were the main audience for advertisements and the consumers of new-fashioned boutique steel razors, often priced and sold as luxury items. The journals of men such as the Irish statesman, author and philosopher Edmund Burke and physiognomist Johan Casper Lavater both reveal that they regularly shaved themselves.⁵ In a testimonial to the efficacy of 'British Shaving Paste' in 1796, the London stationer Benjamin Tiffin noted that the paste had helped him where his scorbutic face had meant that he could not 'shave myself without a great degree of pain'.⁶

But passing references elsewhere make it clear that men lower down the social scale and away from urban centres were also routinely shaving themselves. Over the course of his diaries between 1755–61, the Scottish country parson George Ridpath made more than twenty references to having shaved himself at home, but none to barbers or others.⁷ The diary of the Somerset parson William Holland reveals that he preferred to shave himself rather than visit a barber, albeit with mixed results. One Sunday morning in July 1802 he cut himself deeply while shaving and fretted that 'it bleeds so plentifully that I know not how to stop it'.⁸ Circumstantial evidence in court testimonies also reveals that self-shaving was beginning to be undertaken by plebeian men, hinting at the social depth to which the late Georgian fashion for shaving had sunk.⁹ In October 1782, officers entering the house of one George Franklin to arrest him, testified that they 'found him shaving himself'.¹⁰ When his shop was broken into in 1784, the wool-draper William Beresford noted that he was in his parlour, shaving himself.¹¹ It is also interesting, although by no means conclusive, to note that court testimonies before 1745 contain only one account of a man shaving himself. Between 1745 and 1812 there were thirteen separate references.¹² Even in the poorest

⁵ Charles McCormick, *Memoirs of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke, or an Impartial View of His Private Life* (London: Printed for Lee and Hurst, 1798), 281; Johan Casper Lavater, *Secret Journal of a Self-Observer* (London: Printed for T. Cadell, 1795), 108.

⁶ 'British Shaving Paste', *Oracle and Public Advertiser* (10 May 1796).

⁷ Sir James Balfour Paul (ed.), *The Diary of George Ridpath, 1755–1761* (Edinburgh: Printed for the Scottish History Society, 1922), 48, 60, 80, 273, 312, 329, 355, 384, etc.

⁸ Jack Ayres (ed.), *Paupers and Pig Killers: The Diary of William Holland, A Somerset Parson, 1799–1818* (Stroud: Sutton, 2003), 69. Holland makes other references to shaving himself, for example, 146.

⁹ Biographies of criminals or crime narratives also contained passing references. See, for example, James McKaen, *Genuine Copy: The Life of James McKaen, Shoemaker in Glasgow* (Glasgow: Brath and Keen, 1797), 40; 'A Civilian', *Trials for Adultery or the History of Divorces* (London: Printed for S. Bladon, 1779), 17.

¹⁰ OB, Trial of Isaac Votear and Thomas Dean, 16 October 1782, <https://www.londonlives.org/browse.jsp?div=t17821016-43&terms=shaving#highlight> (accessed 28 March 2018).

¹¹ OB, Trial of William Hubbard, 25 February, 1784, <https://www.londonlives.org/browse.jsp?div=t17840225-25&terms=shaving#highlight> (accessed 28 March 2018).

¹² Based on keyword searches of Old Bailey Online database. For the sake of clarity, it should be noted that this is raw data and may not take into account potential variances in the volume of entries each year, which might skew the numbers.

households, incidental references suggest that ownership of razors and shaving tackle was increasing. Among the goods of the pauper John Playne of Staplehurst in Essex in 1775 were a 'shaveing basin', while John Whayle of Little Wakering, Essex, owned '2 raziers' along with a box and strap. The 1816 probate inventory of the pauper William Lane of Buckland Newton in Dorset contained a 'shaving dish and brush', and others attest to similar goods.¹³

One possible influence upon this shift towards self-shaving may be the changing nature of the relationship between men and barbers. The figure of the inept or rustic barber had long been a comic staple, and the discomfort of being scraped with a blunt razor was painfully familiar to many men, providing much fodder for satirists. By the mid-nineteenth century, Sean Trainor has argued that relations between barbers and patrons had even further deteriorated.¹⁴ But the ready availability and continuing popularity of barbers across all levels of society suggests that pejorative depictions did not deter men from visiting them. Perhaps more likely was an increasing sense that shaving was one of the requisite skills of the gentleman. It was something that men *should* know how to do and, more importantly, should ideally be able to do for themselves. Part of this related to self-reliance and the belief that a gentleman should be able to do whatever his servants were required to, both to set an example and to allow him to be a good judge of their work. 'Hortator', author of the *Simplicity of Health* (1829), argued that 'every man should know how to shave himself', because it removed the need to be reliant on others and helped avoid the 'bad habits often contracted from the necessity of constantly going to barber's shops'.¹⁵ What 'bad habits' he was alluding to are unclear, but being able to shave oneself was certainly a useful expedient. A book of advice to young surgeon-apothecaries in 1800 recommended that they be able to shave themselves and dress their own hair to be presentable if called away at short notice.¹⁶ To shave oneself was seen as healthier than risking infection or contamination at the barber's. Benjamin Franklin reckoned it 'among my felicities, that I can set my own razor and shave myself perfectly well'. One of the 'daily pleasures' of this activity for Franklin was the unease of suffering the 'dirty fingers or bad breath of a slovenly barber'.¹⁷ As 'Hortator' also argued in *Simplicity of Health Exemplified*, though, shaving

¹³ Dorset History Centre, MS DHC PE-BCN/OV/3/2) (1813–1819), Inventory of William Lane, Buckland Newton, Dorset, 1816; Kent History and Library Centre, MS P99/8/1) (1811–1834), Vestry Order Book, Inventory of Widow Everst, Cowden, Kent, 1820; Kent History and Library Centre, MS P347/18/10) (1742–1831), Inventory of John Playne, Staplehurst, Kent, 1828; Essex Record Office, MS D/P 194/18/4) (1827–1830), Inventory of John Whale of Little Wakering, Essex, 1828; Norwich Record Office, MS PD 499/79) (1734–1772), Inventory of John Harvey, Norwich, 1734. I am extremely grateful to Joe Harley of the University of Derby for sharing these references from his study of pauper inventories. See Joseph Harley (ed.), *Norfolk Pauper Inventories, c. 1690–1834* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

¹⁴ Sean Trainor, 'Losing Control: The Nineteenth-Century Beard Movement in Europe and North America' (unrefereed article), http://vestoj.com/losing-control/?lipi=urn%3Ali%3Apage%3Ad_flagship3_profile_view_base%3BD6Sr7nftR0emuDQKcMniAQ%3D%3D (accessed 2 February 2018).

¹⁵ Hortator, *Simplicity of Health Exemplified* (London: Effingham Wilson, 1829), 29.

¹⁶ James Lucas, *A Candid Enquiry into the Education, Qualifications, and Offices of a Surgeon-Apothecary* (London: Printed and sold by S. Hazard, 1800), 158.

¹⁷ Jared Sparks, *The Works of Benjamin Franklin* (Philadelphia, PA: Sparks and Peterson, 1840), 280.

could also be a healthy activity in itself as part of a broader regime of the healthy body since 'uneasiness of any kind, whether bodily or mental, is inimical to health'.¹⁸

The practice was further encouraged in the growing instructional literature on the art of shaving. While earlier in the century men had looked to family, friends and peers for advice, new books set out the processes and equipment needed for a clean shave. The first formal shaving manual to appear was *La Pogonotomie, ou L'Art D'Apprendre A Se Raser Soi-Meme* (*Pogonotomy: or the Art of Learning to Shave Oneself*), published in 1770 by the French cutler Jean-Jacques Perret.¹⁹ Although not initially translated into English, the treatise instructed men in all shaving-related matters, including the best angle at which to hold the razor to achieve clean cutting, how to avoid skin irritation and how to correctly set, sharpen and strop razors. Perret's treatise is also credited with the first description of a safety razor. In Britain, razor-makers, as experts in the metallurgical construction and use of their products, also began to publish didactic texts on shaving. In 1786, the prominent London razor-maker and cutler John Savigny published his *Treatise on the Use and Management of the Razor*, part shaving manual and part technological treatise on the intricacies of steel. For Savigny, an expert metallurgist, razors were precision instruments, and he advised men to take into account factors such as the weight, balance and shape in their decisions to purchase.²⁰ As to the manner of shaving, he stressed the importance of washing and drying the face with warm water before applying a lather, either from shaving powder or, preferably, from soap, to soften the beard, allowing the razor to glide and cut more easily. A whole chapter was dedicated to 'applying the razor', discussing the importance of angling the blade (not too flat and not too elevated), shaving in one direction and not employing too much pressure, to ensure that the blade did not 'make its way thro' the Flesh'.²¹

Benjamin Kingsbury's *Treatise on Razors* (1797), written partly in response to Savigny, also sought to guide men through the delicate and potentially dangerous operation of shaving. For Kingsbury, accidental cuts had far more to do with the ineptitude of the individual than any deficiency of the razor, and many a good razor was 'injured by careless purchasers' before it had even touched their faces. Shaving was a process that required little pressure or force.²² Again, an entire chapter was dedicated to the minutiae of the shave. First, Kingsbury recommended that the beard hair to be shaved should be stretched tightly with the left hand, to make it stand proud for the razor's edge. The razor should then be 'applied to the skin in a flat position' with some pressure, determining the correct angle of 'attack' to remove hair at the root.²³ Once the beard had been removed, the razor should be washed and

¹⁸ Hortator, *Simplicity*, 28.

¹⁹ Jean-Jacques Perret, *La Pogonotomie, ou L'Art D'Apprendre A Se Raser Soi-Meme* (Paris: Par J. J. Perret, 1770).

²⁰ J. H. Savigny, *A Treatise on the Use and Management of the Razor with Practical Directions Relative to Its Appendages* (2nd edn) (London: Printed for the author, 1786), 1–5.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 29.

²² Benjamin Kingsbury, *A Treatise on Razors: In Which the Weight, Shape and Temper of a Razor, the Means of Keeping It in Order and the Manner of Using It, Are Particularly Considered...* (6th edn) (London: Printed by E. Blackader, 1810), 9.

²³ *Ibid.*, 44.

dried to prevent rust, and the face splashed with cold water to strengthen the skin.²⁴ By the late 1830s, newspaper articles were being devoted to the best ways for men to 'win over their troublesome friend – the beard – with greater facility', including the 'proper method of using a razor', how to sharpen and strop it and even the best angle of 'attack' for the razor to cut through beard hair.²⁵ It is difficult to gauge the audience and impact of such books, but occasional evidence shows that they were used and adapted. Ebenezer Rhodes's 1824 *Essay on the Manufacture, Choice and Management of a Razor* recommended dipping the razor into warm water before applying it to the face. A copy of the book held in the Wellcome Library in London contains the handwritten note 'not in boiling hot water', perhaps testament to a lesson learned by painful experience.²⁶

Didactic literature for servants provides continuing evidence of their important role in shaving, as part of expected knowledge about gentlemen's toilette. Nineteenth-century instruction manuals, however, often identified the valet's role more as preparing and maintaining razors and lather since it was suggested that many gentlemen still preferred to shave themselves.²⁷ Laying out a gentleman's shaving kit was one of the first primary tasks of the day. An article titled 'How to Begin the Day' advised men to 'shave unmistakeably before you descend from your room; chins, like oysters, should have their beards taken off before being permitted to go down'.²⁸ According to John Maitland, the first responsibility of the dutiful manservant was to rise early, prepare and set out his gentleman's shaving tackle, so that he might shave before going downstairs. This included setting the razor, placing it in readiness on a basin and 'should he shave with boiling water, [to] be sure to have it in readiness'.²⁹ Being able to maintain a razor and provide a clean shave was a key function of valets and one repeatedly stressed in advice literature to domestic servants. Samuel Adams's *Complete Servant* (1825) instructed valets in the art of stropping razors and also contained the method for a 'new mode of shaving'.³⁰ *The Family Manual* of 1850 contained a whole section on how to maintain razors, under the duties of the valet, including how to prepare lather and also a special preparation for 'those who, in their lips, or after shaving, are affected by frosty air'.³¹

Advice about shaving was even available in commercial literature, such as trade catalogues, along with the instructional guides included with products sold, offered further sources of practical instruction. The catalogue of the London razor-maker and cutler J. J. Mechi provided a whole section on how to shave, including how to sharpen, hold and use the razor correctly and, unsurprisingly, detailed instructions on how best

²⁴ Ibid., 46–7.

²⁵ Anon., 'On Shaving', *Mirror of Literature, Amusement and Instruction*, 34:976 (1839): 307–8.

²⁶ WL, MS T.611.1, copy of Ebenezer Rhodes, *Essay on the Manufacture, Choice and Management of a Razor* (Sheffield: G. Ridge, 1824), 23.

²⁷ See, for example, Samuel Adams, *The Complete Servant* (London: Knight and Lacey, 1825), 362; Isabella Beaton, *The Book of Household Management* (London: Ward, Locke and Tyler, 1869), 1016.

²⁸ 'How to Begin the Day', *HC*, 62:5 (January 1871): 5.

²⁹ John Maitland, *The Servant's Companion or Domestic Manual* (London: William Mason, 1850), 13.

³⁰ Adams, *The Complete Servant*, 362, 364.

³¹ Anon., *The Family Manual and Servants' Guide* (London: John Limbird, 1850), 204–7.

to prepare and Mechi's own soaps and 'magic strop paste'.³² In 1800, 'Rogers' much-approved new balls for coating razor strops' came complete with 'a valuable instructor for the most comfortable and easiest method of shaving ever known, and a complete guide for those who are learning to shave themselves or others'.³³ This combination of guide and product offered a cheap and accessible means to learn the basics of shaving, but their extent and importance as didactic tools is unclear.

It is also worth noting the growing role of the correspondence pages of periodicals and newspapers, as informal forums through which men could seek and share experiences and advice about shaving. In August 1806, 'H. K.' wrote to the *European Magazine* on the matter of shaving, recommending both a thicker-than-usual lather and also the adaptation of a commonly available shaving powder by adding a few drops of oil which, he argued, both preserved and enhanced the cutting edge of the razor.³⁴ Others offered more general tips on how to maintain razors. One, styling himself 'Economicus', argued that expending more than two shillings for a razor was a waste of money since articles at that price were often 'tolerably good'. Economicus also shared his favoured method for sharpening razors, using 'a mealy kind of stone' used by engravers, known as 'snake stone'.³⁵ In some senses this was merely an extension of the earlier informal, fraternal networks of family and friends through which men could learn about shaving, noted in the previous chapter. In this sense, by the early nineteenth century, advice about men's personal grooming had clearly begun to move from the domestic to the public space, expanding the knowledge economy about men's personal grooming beyond immediate family and kin.

Managing the beard

It was not just shaving that required the acquisition of new skills. The onset of the 'beard movement' around 1852 added a new challenge to the emerging concept of personal grooming: that of how to care for a rapidly billowing beard. Much ink was expended in extolling the virtues of a long, thick beard. It is easy to assume from the pleas of pogonophiles that it was simply left to grow 'natural', and that styling was unnecessary, if not unmanly. Little attention has yet been paid to the extent to which facial hair was managed in the nineteenth century. What products were available, to clean, style or beautify the beard? As was the case for the Victorian body in general, the cleanliness of beards was an important issue, and etiquette manuals offered men some advice on the principles and propriety of keeping beards and moustaches clean and tidy.

³² J. J. Mechi, *Prices and List of Articles Manufactured and Sold, Wholesale and Retail, and for Exportation, by Mechi, Cutler, Dressing Case Maker, and Inventor of the Celebrated Razor Strop and Paste* (London: Publisher unknown, 1805), 17–19.

³³ 'New Inventions and Improvements Sanctioned', *Morning Post and Gazetteer* (28 April 1800).

³⁴ H. K., 'Facts Relative to the Art of Shaving', *European Magazine* (August 1806): 111–12.

³⁵ Luke Herbert (ed.), *The Register of Arts and Journal of Patent Inventions* (London: G. Herbert, 1825), 369.

Cultivating a decent beard in the first place was problematic for some. In an age which venerated the beard as a totem of masculinity, the ability to grow one was ever more important. Having a weak, patchy beard or, worse still none at all, implied fundamental bodily weakness and even effeminacy. This was perhaps particularly keenly felt by young men. As Maria Victoria Alonso Cabezas has shown in her analysis of Spanish self-portraits, young artists were keen to have artists include facial hair, even if this amounted to pre-beard 'fuzz' or even a shadow on the face.³⁶ Facial hair was the 'must-wear attire in performative displays of masculinity'.³⁷ The late eighteenth century had seen a burgeoning market for products to remove facial hair, but the commercial market now expanded to include products for encouraging rampant growth. The context in which this occurred was the burgeoning market for hair products from the early decades of the nineteenth century. As Jonathan Shears notes, the demise of wigs made hair more visible, in turn encouraging the use of styling and beautifying products.³⁸ Hair dyes, oils and waters were part of self-fashioning and personal grooming, but were also seen as important in the maintenance of health, preventing dandruff, headaches and diseases of the scalp.³⁹ As well as head hair, facial hair was increasingly part of these developments.

It seems no coincidence that the inclusion of facial hair in advertising puffs for hair growth products coincided with the emerging trend for side whiskers among young, metropolitan elites around 1800. Early products such as 'Russia Oil' claimed to make hair 'grow thick and long, even in bald places, whiskers, eye-brows &c'.⁴⁰ In 1814, Atkinson's 'Curling Fluid' also promised to nourish the hair 'as it grows on the whiskers and mustachios, with the most beautiful luxuriance'.⁴¹ With typical Georgian ingenuity, other alternatives for those who could not grow their own included wigs with detachable whiskers, to allow men to pick and choose their 'look' according to circumstance.⁴² But while the trend for whiskers was possibly an urban phenomenon and limited away from London, the 1850s 'beard movement' was national – indeed international – creating greater pressures upon beardless men.⁴³

Makers of hair growth products quickly seized upon the opportunities of a new audience, afforded by the 'beard movement'. By 1855, products such as 'Crinutriar' promised 'luxurious hair and whiskers' for those left wanting.⁴⁴ Retailers played on

³⁶ Alonso Cabezas and Maria Victoria, 'Beardless Young Men: Facial Hair and the Construction of Masculinity in Nineteenth-Century Spanish Self Portraits', in Jennifer Evans and Alun Withey (eds), *New Perspectives on the History of Facial Hair: Framing the Face* (London: Palgrave, 2018), 98–102.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 91.

³⁸ Jonathan Shears, 'Self and Society: Hair Consciousness in the Age of Empire', in Sarah Heaton (ed.), *A Cultural History of Hair in the Age of Empire* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), 17.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 18–9.

⁴⁰ 'Sold by Harmer and Green', *Ipswich Journal* (22 March 1806).

⁴¹ 'Patronised by the Royal Family', *La Belle Assemblée* (1 February 1814).

⁴² The London wigmakers Ross and Co. stated that they had found a way to 'attach whiskers to [wigs] with that remarkable adhesion as cannot be discovered from Nature itself'; see 'Interesting Information', *Morning Chronicle* (9 July 1800).

⁴³ Similar points are made by Sallie McNamara, 'Production and Practice: Hair Harvest and Hairpieces, and Hairwork', in Heaton (ed.), *A Cultural History of Hair*, 71–3, which was published after this section was written.

⁴⁴ 'Fine Head of Hair, the Beard, Whiskers and Mustachios', *Era* (4 November 1860).

the fears of beardless boys and 'smock-faced' men, stressing the innate masculinity of beards and the risk to those unwilling or unable to display this most manly appendage. Men who 'wanted' luxurious hair and whiskers were entreated to reach into their pockets and rescue their pride. The makers of 'Crinutriar' claimed that 'Thousands ... who were once utterly destitute of Beard or Whiskers now have these *attributes of manhood*' (emphasis added).⁴⁵ The terminology and imagery of the 'destitute' beardless man was as telling as it was striking. Speed was also often a selling point, perhaps to give the lie of natural growth. 'Fox's Noted Formula' promised a heavy growth of beards or moustaches in six weeks, roughly the same time needed to grow them 'naturally' and sometimes substantially less.⁴⁶ The seemingly miraculous claims of such products even saw them enshrined in popular culture. The comic character 'Adolphus Niegle' in Basil Young's 1868 play *The Happy Family*, for example, was a youth with pretensions of manhood. With a habit of lounging in railway station refreshment rooms, wearing an eyeglass that perpetually fell out, Niegle 'withal cannot grow a beard, notwithstanding the fact that he has sent an endless number of stamps to those persons who profess to produce luxuriant whiskers in 24 hours'.⁴⁷

Women were particularly important manufacturers and sellers of beard and whisker growth products. In 1850, 'Miss Graham' promised to send her 'Nioukrene' on receipt of twenty-four stamps, and which had given at least one satisfied customer 'a plentiful crop of whiskers'.⁴⁸ 'Crinilene' was made by Emilie Dean and again available through application to her by post, while 'Crinutriar', noted above, was one of the products of the perfumer Rosalie Coupelle. Some women had taken over the business of production from their late husbands: one, Emilie Lloyd, was apparently celebrated for producing a better quality of 'Euxesis' than her late husband had been.⁴⁹ Female perfumers also had expertise in products for the stimulation of hair growth, and it is possible that they were seen to have authority and skill in that area. Not everyone was enthusiastic, however. One etiquette manual for men suggested it was far more preferable for gentlemen to grow their own whiskers than to seek the products of Madam Coupelle and others.⁵⁰

If growing and wearing a beard was loaded with social meaning, its colour was no less important. Beard colour, like hair, was something of a thorny issue, revealing tensions in ethnic or racial characteristics. Products to dye the hair, beard, whiskers and moustache were overwhelmingly concerned with returning hair to shades of brown or black – generally established as the 'natural shade of the hair'.⁵¹ W. H. Cockell's beard dye was 'Instantaneous', returning hair to a 'natural' colour and shine,

⁴⁵ 'Beautiful Hair, Whiskers &c', *Nottinghamshire Guardian* (17 February 1853). Accompanying testimonials spoke for the efficacy of such products, such as 'Serjeant Craven' of Longford, Ireland, who stated that 'Through using your Crinutriar, I now have an excellent moustache'.

⁴⁶ 'Luxuriant Whiskers and Moustaches', *Standard* (9 June 1869).

⁴⁷ 'Mr Basil Young', *Ipswich Journal* (10 October 1868).

⁴⁸ 'Do You Want Luxuriant Hair, Whiskers &c?', *Bell's Life in London* (4 August 1850).

⁴⁹ Thanks to Jessica Clark for alerting me to this reference.

⁵⁰ Anon., *The Habits of Good Society: A Handbook for Ladies and Gentlemen...* (New York: G.W. Carleton, 1872), 94.

⁵¹ 'An Infallible Hair Dye', *Hampshire Advertiser and Salisbury Guardian* (8 August 1846).

with the added benefit of perfume, and 'not a particle of poison'.⁵² Part of the reason was undoubtedly to mask the onset of age, giving the illusion of a youthful flush of facial hair. Prematurely grey beards were certainly undesirable for many younger men, since they obviously suggested advancing age, with all its deleterious connotations. But in singling out black and brown as 'natural' shades of beard hair, advertisers hinted at the negative ethnic and racial connotations that were borne by other shades. 'Red' (ginger) facial hair, for example, was constantly singled out as something to be disguised – an undesirable cultural other against the more 'British' shades. As early as 1807, perfumer John Chasson of Cornhill, London, advertised his 'Incomparable Fluid', for changing hair, whiskers and eyebrows from grey or 'red' to 'beautiful and natural shades of brown and black' (emphasis added).⁵³ Here, by definition, 'red' whiskers were not beautiful. Spencer's Chinese Liquid Hair Dye promised similarly in 1844, although with a further layer of complexity given the 'foreign' implications of its name. In this case it may have referred to the renowned black hair of Chinese people.⁵⁴

As Sarah Cheang has argued, the texture, length and colour of hair were central to nineteenth-century debates about race and identity.⁵⁵ Amidst concerns about racial classification and hierarchy, black or brown hair characterized the Caucasian type – highest in the racial hierarchy, above Mongolian, African and American corporeal types.⁵⁶ 'Red' or ginger whiskers bore negative associations with Jewish ethnicity and as such, as one 1800 article about beards argued, had no place in Britain. While they might 'please Hebrew beauties, we are not the descendants of Abraham, and prejudice has condemned this colour'.⁵⁷ Such connections lingered. One of the most infamous Jewish characters in nineteenth-century literature, after all, was Dickens's Fagin, whose 'villainous-looking and repulsive face was obscured by a quantity of matted red hair' and a straggly beard. Dickens was swift to point out that his depiction of Fagin was based on race, rather than religion; a caricature not intended as an attack on Jewish people. Nonetheless, in her study of Jewish stereotypes in English literature, Deborah Heller notes the red beard as a literary shorthand in depictions of Jewish characters, one transmuted from medieval depictions of Satan, thereby creating an association in the reader's mind between Jewishness and the devil.⁵⁸

⁵² 'Cockell's Instantaneous Dye for Beards and Whiskers,' *Standard* (7 June 1869). See also 'Parker's Original Grecian Compound,' *Examiner* (4 May 1844).

⁵³ 'A Most Important Discovery,' *Morning Post* (27 February 1807): 1.

⁵⁴ 'A Most Important Discovery,' *Morning Post* (20 March 1807). Other products included 'Day's Original Hair Water' to colour 'Red or Grey Hair, eye-brows, whiskers &c' – *Morning Post* (2 October 1807); 'Spencer's Chinese Liquid Hair Dye,' *Morning Chronicle* (6 November 1844).

⁵⁵ Sarah Cheang, 'Roots: Hair and Race,' in G. Biddle-Perry and Sarah Cheang (eds), *Hair Styling, Culture and Fashion* (London: Berg, 2008), 28–9.

⁵⁶ Alexander Rowland, *The Human Hair: Popularly and Physiologically Considered, with Special Reference to Its Preservation, Improvement and Adornment* (London: Piper Brothers, 1853), 19.

⁵⁷ Anon., 'On Beards,' *Oracle and Daily Advertiser* (13 November 1799).

⁵⁸ Deborah Heller, 'The Outcast as Villain and Victim: Jews in Dickens's *Oliver Twist* and *Our Mutual Friend*,' in Derek Cohen and Deborah Heller (eds), *Jewish Presences in English Literature* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990), 44. For earlier medieval associations between Jewish beards and satanic imagery, see Frank Felsenstein, *Anti-Semitic Stereotypes: A Paradigm of Otherness in English Popular Culture* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 28.

The aesthetic qualities, length and colour of beards, then, were all socially and culturally loaded in the second half of the nineteenth century. Wearing a beard evinced manly appearance and demonstrated conformity with prevailing arguments about the importance of facial hair as a 'natural' emblem of masculinity. Likewise, having a set of whiskers of the 'right' colour was also clearly important in order, presumably, in confirming ethnicity and, in particular, Britishness. To what extent though were beards groomed and refined by individual men, and what was commercially available to facilitate this process? It is to such questions that the chapter now turns.

The material culture of beard grooming

Sharon Twickler has explored the materiality of beard- and moustache-grooming instruments in nineteenth-century America and the social, cultural and medical meanings attached to them. The moustache comb, for example, stood for refinement and self-fashioning in America in the decades after 1850. Available in many forms, materials and prices, its pocket size also enabled men to refine their appearance even while in public or on the move.⁵⁹ Despite the focus on beard-wearing in the later nineteenth century, little attention has yet been paid to the extent to which men managed or groomed their beards, or the instruments or products used in the process. The issue of beard care actually raises questions about social expectations of beard- and moustache-grooming and their place within the construction of bearded masculinity in the late nineteenth century in Britain. Overt cosmetic use by men was generally frowned upon although, at the same time, expectations of cleanliness and neatness presumably required at least some attention to facial hair, to prevent it becoming matted or unkempt. And yet, much rhetoric in favour of beard-wearing actively promoted its 'natural' status. Explorers, returning from the wild, had grown their beards as a 'natural' barrier against wind, sun and dust.⁶⁰ The bigger the beard, the better the protection it supposedly offered. Nature's beard was ideally to be left to its own devices.

By the mid-nineteenth century, there were changes in the nature of advice literature for men, away from the conduct book form of the eighteenth century and towards broader etiquette manuals, offering advice on personal matters and appearance.⁶¹ There was also a marked difference in the advice given about personal grooming between the early and late decades of the century. Initially, etiquette manuals focused upon basic routines of hygiene, cleanliness and personal grooming, cautioning men against being slaves to fashion, or taking dress or appearance to extremes. But around 1850, the increased attention towards the physicality and corporeality of the male body again reframed the management of the male body. Amidst an increasingly visual culture in

⁵⁹ Sharon Twickler, 'Combing Masculine Identity in the Age of the Moustache, 1860–1900', in Evans and Withey (eds), *New Perspectives*, 149–53.

⁶⁰ Christopher Oldstone-Moore, 'The Beard Movement in Victorian Britain', *Victorian Studies*, 48:1 (2005): 17–18.

⁶¹ Claudia Nelson, *Family Ties in Victorian England* (London: Praeger, 2007), 28; Tosh, *Manliness and Masculinities*, 83.

later nineteenth-century Britain, men were acknowledged to possess a 'physical, visible self', manifested in the sexualization of clothing and also appearance.⁶² Managing the body was an important part of the articulation of the male self. As it had in the Georgian period, the exterior of a man's body revealed the character beneath.

Men were advised, for example, to maintain good general standards of bodily health and hygiene and to engage in cleansing routines for medical as well as social, reasons. In stressing the necessity for personal cleanliness, *The Gentleman's Manual of Modern Etiquette* (1849) argued that the 'importance of personal cleanliness on the score of health as well as decency [renders it] unnecessary to dilate'. The skin, teeth and nails were to be 'cleansed at regular and fixed intervals'.⁶³ Arthur Blenkinsopp's *Shilling's Worth of Advice on Manners, Behaviour and Dress* (1850) also noted the importance for 'Hair, face and teeth' to be 'well-washed and clean'.⁶⁴ There was also, however, some unease over attention towards appearance. *The English Gentleman* (1849) advised men to 'have nothing slovenly in your appearance. But when you have left your dressing room, give yourself no further trouble about it'.⁶⁵ Following a fashion was one thing, but taking it to an extreme was quite another, risking a 'finical and effeminate appearance', from which commenced vulgarity.⁶⁶

Initially beards did not merit specific attention in men's manuals, but their obvious popularity from the 1850s attracted new advice about cleaning and maintaining facial hair. As with other forms of personal grooming, beards were to be kept neat and tidy. Although fussiness or over-elaborate styling was to be avoided, it was down to individual preference as to which style of facial hair to wear. A straggly, matted or otherwise unkempt beard was slovenly, if not downright vulgar. Cleanliness was also of paramount importance. *Good Manners* suggested that 'The beard should be carefully and frequently washed, well-trimmed and well combed, and the hair and whiskers kept scrupulously clean, by the help of clean, stiff hair brushes, and soap and warm water'.⁶⁷ Edwin Creer argued that a regular wash with soap and water was necessary to remove particles of dirt, smoke and dust which naturally accumulated from the atmosphere and also for general hygiene.⁶⁸ There was clearly concern about the potential for beards to harbour contaminants. Responding to claims that beards collected dirt and germs, Artium Magister's *Apology for the Beard* (1862) argued that, if good hygiene was practised for the body as a whole, there was no reason to single out the beard. Ideally, it should be washed daily and brushed as often as hair on the

⁶² Brent Shannon, *The Cut of His Coat: Men, Dress and Consumer Culture in Britain, 1860–1914* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2006), 81.

⁶³ Anon., *The Gentleman's Manual of Modern Etiquette* (London: Paul Jerrard and Son, 1849), 46

⁶⁴ Arthur Blenkinsopp, *A Shilling's Worth of Advice on Manners, Behaviour and Dress* (London: Printed for the author, 1850), 15; see also 'A Lounger at the Clubs', *The Gentleman's Art of Dressing with Economy* (London: Frederick Warne, 1876), 96–7.

⁶⁵ Anon., *The English Gentleman: His Principles, His Feelings, His Manners, His Pursuits* (London: George Bell, 1849), 103.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 102.

⁶⁷ Anon., *Good Manners: A Manual of Etiquette in Good Society* (Philadelphia, PA: Porter and Coates, 1870), 65.

⁶⁸ Edwin Creer, *A Popular Treatise on the Human Hair* (London: Published for the author, 1865), 73.

head.⁶⁹ If men neglected the cleanliness of their beards, then it was their responsibility to shave them off accordingly.⁷⁰

Such factors point to the importance of the outward appearance and aesthetics of facial hair throughout the early years of the 'beard movement'. Merely having a beard was insufficient: how it looked spoke volumes about the man. According to the *Leicester New Monthly Magazine* in 1853, the 'good and true beard' was neither long, greasy nor dirty, but 'moderately thick, dark, curling, rather short, glistening, and fragrant with the perfume of some precious unguent'.⁷¹ Here, though, was ambiguity in the masculine discourse of beard-wearing. Just as with dress and comportment in general, affectations, such as curling moustache ends, were considered foppish. Beards supposedly represented natural 'ruggedness' and physicality but were equally encouraged to be soft and luxuriant. If they were stiff and wiry (caused by previous years of shaving) then 'recourse to art, to soften and improve [them]', was perfectly permissible.⁷² It is also interesting to note here that the 'good and true' beard should presumably smell pleasant, as well as being well kept.

In particular, beards were to be kept 'well-brushed and attended to'.⁷³ Some saw the 'positively delightful sensation' of combing and brushing the beard as a tactile, sensuous experience.⁷⁴ Artium Magister's 1862 *Apology for the Beard* suggested that it was 'quite the usual business of a man's person to trim the beard', as part of general maintenance of appearance.⁷⁵ Trimming it with scissors was seen as necessary to prevent a beard becoming 'unsightly' or 'too exuberant'.⁷⁶ Brushing beard hairs was necessary 'to arrange them when accidentally disordered'.⁷⁷ Various references note the apparent popularity of 'whisker brushes', specifically for removing the tangles from facial hair. These were seemingly a French innovation, adopted by English hairdressers after 1750, and later finding their way into domestic use. In 1843 the *Monmouthshire Merlin* suggested that the way to be regarded as a 'nice young man' was to 'starch up and brush your whiskers'.⁷⁸ By 1850 whisker brushes were advertised in *Bell's Weekly Messenger* as an ideal Christmas present for the bearded gentleman in your life, while a trade report in *The Hairdresser's Chronicle* in 1867 noted 'several novelties in whisker brushes' and their general usefulness in maintaining beards and hair.⁷⁹ Servants again sometimes played a part in the process. Isabella Beeton's *Book of Household Management* instructed valets to 'brush the hair, beard and moustache, where that

⁶⁹ Artium Magister, *An Apology for the Beard, Addressed to Men in General, to the Clergy in Particular* (London: Hivingtons, 1862), 63.

⁷⁰ Edwin Creer, *A Popular Treatise on the Human Hair* (London: Publisher unknown, 1865), 75.

⁷¹ Anon., 'De Tonsura', *Leicester New Monthly Magazine* (July 1853–June 1854): 126.

⁷² Creer, *Popular Treatise*, 75.

⁷³ Charles Gilman Currier, *The Art of Preserving Health* (New York: E. B. Treat, 1893), 62.

⁷⁴ 'The Philosophy of the Beard', *Suffolk Chronicle* (25 March 1854): 4.

⁷⁵ Artium Magister, *An Apology for the Beard, Addressed to Men in General, to the Clergy in Particular* (London: Rivingtons, 1862), 62–3.

⁷⁶ For example, 'Beards', *Broad Arrow* (16 October 1875): 494; 'An Impostor', *Leicester Chronicle* (25 June 1853); 'A Plea for the Beard', *Worcestershire Chronicle* (19 February 1851); 'Barton on the Heath', *Oxfordshire Weekly News* (21 February 1883): 5.

⁷⁷ A. R. Nares, *A Glossary, Volume 1* (London: Reeves and Turner, 1888), 66.

⁷⁸ 'Maxims', *Monmouthshire Merlin* (23 December 1843).

⁷⁹ 'Christmas Presents this Month', *Bell's Weekly Messenger* (8 December 1850); 'Trade Report', *HC*, 4:1 (February 1867): 7.

appendage is encouraged, arranging the whole simply and gracefully according to the age and style of countenance'.⁸⁰

The degree to which these prescriptive guides were followed by individual men, however, is hard to discern. Photographic images of some prominent Victorian men around the 1850s and 1860s, for example, appear to support a preference for 'natural', almost scruffy beards, sometimes accompanied by unkempt hair. Several portraits taken by Julia Margaret Cameron in the 1860s and 1870s make an interesting case in point. Clearly it is hard to say with certainty from a photographic image, how much attention had been paid to grooming a beard. Equally, some of Cameron's other portraits (including that of the poet Robert Browning) show men with short, neat beards. Nevertheless, several depict men with long, seemingly untrimmed or ungroomed beards. Examples include her portraits of Henry Taylor in 1864, Henry Thoby Prinsep in 1865 and Alfred Lord Tennyson the same year, each of whom display a similar 'natural' style. As an arch critic of beard styling, it is no surprise that portraits of Walt Whitman show a man content to adopt a 'warts and all' approach to his facial hair. It could be argued that writers and artists might not be representative of men more generally, perhaps predisposed to embrace the more romantic notions of the beard as a venerable symbol.

With the 1870s, though, came further signs of change and moves towards a more austere approach to beard styling and grooming in general. While cleanliness remained a constant, style and fashioning were discouraged. The *Gentlemen's Book of Etiquette* advised men to 'let your hair, beard and moustache be always perfectly smooth, well arranged and scrupulously clean' but also warned men to 'use but very little perfume [since] much of it is in bad taste'.⁸¹ The style of the beard should ideally be suited to the shape and form of a man's face, but 'any affectation in the cut of beard and whiskers is very objectionable, and augers unmitigated vanity in the wearer'.⁸² The length of the beard was a matter for some debate, although most agreed that over-long, elaborate or 'exaggerated' styles led to a ridiculous appearance and, therefore, advocated regular trimming.⁸³ There was little consensus into how regular this should be, however. Isabella Beeton suggested that hair in general should be trimmed at least every three weeks, and the beard and whiskers 'as often as required', suggesting that leaving the beard to grow 'natural' was not fashionable. After trimming, Beaton suggested, the hair, beard and moustache should be brushed 'where that appendage is encouraged'.⁸⁴ *The Habits of Good Society* (1872) also suggested that beards and moustaches 'should be well combed and in neat trim ... well-kept and not fantastically cut'.⁸⁵ At the same time some advice literature for men even began to advocate a return to the clean-shaven face. If a beard was to be worn, argued Samuel Beeton, it should be worn in

⁸⁰ Beeton, *Household Management*, 1016.

⁸¹ Cecil B. Hartley, *The Gentleman's Book of Etiquette and Manual of Politeness* (Boston: J. S. Locke, 1874), 120.

⁸² Anon., *Good Manners*, 65.

⁸³ Artium Magister, *An Apology for the Beard, Addressed to Men in General, to the Clergy in Particular* (London: Hivingtons, 1862), 63.

⁸⁴ Isabella Beaton, *The Book of Household Management* (London: S. O. Beeton, 1863), 978.

⁸⁵ Anon., *The Habits of Good Society: A Handbook* (New York: G. W. Carelton, 1872), 94–5.

Figure 7.1 Julia Margaret Cameron, portrait of Henry Taylor, 1864. Copyright of Victoria and Albert Museum.

moderation, since extremes were vulgar. A 'smooth-shaven beard' by contrast 'was a mark of cleanliness, and evidence of attention to the duties of the toilet'.⁸⁶ *The Habits of Good Society*, while generally in favour of facial hair, acknowledged that many men still were not. If shaving were to be done daily, it should be done well, preferably with

⁸⁶ Samuel Orchart Beeton, *All about Etiquette, or, the Manners of Polite Society for Ladies, Gentlemen and Families* (London: Ward, Lock, 1875), 36, 133–5.

a different razor every day and using hot water, soft soap and a good quality brush. A clean-shaven chin was considered far preferable to short stubble, which 'makes the face look so unlovely'. The author also noted the popularity of violet shaving powder among young men, which they considered injurious to the face and skin.⁸⁷

Overall, though, the impression left is that attending to facial hair was an important process. Men were encouraged to regularly maintain after their beards, by washing, brushing, trimming and softening them. In the eighteenth century, small instruments for personal grooming had risen to prominence as vectors to the articulation of the polite body. Items such as nail clippers and tweezers, sometimes included as part of toilette sets and even included on chains to be carried about the person, offered various options for attending to bodily surfaces and appearance.⁸⁸ Given Twickler's point about the popularity of moustache combs in America and their status as vectors, allowing men to convey gentlemanly neatness and elegance, it is interesting to note, however, that these items were seemingly not advertised in Britain, either on their own or within broader product lists. That they existed and were presumably used seems likely, but direct evidence for either is elusive. Beard and moustache combs also turned up in reference to other cultures. John Kitto's *Pictorial Bible* of 1856 noted the habit of Muslim men of carrying a comb, with which they combed their beards after prayers.⁸⁹ Patents were also lodged for various items, to deal with many potential issues arising from the growing, training and wearing of facial hair, from moustache cups to trainers, to allow men to grow their whiskers to a desired shape. It is possible that advertisers simply saw no need to single out such small, prosaic items for dedicated advertisements, accounting for their general invisibility in sources.

Conclusion

Between the late eighteenth century and the end of the nineteenth, as this chapter has showed, men were increasingly encouraged to take responsibility for their own facial appearance. Before 1850, responsibility for shaving – and later for maintaining the cleanliness, style and form of facial hair – became part of the essential grooming routines expected of individual men. After this, with the onset of the 'beard movement', washing, clipping, brushing and colouring facial hair instead became a focus for masculine self-fashioning, as beards contributed to the concept and articulation of harmonious self-presentation.

Such ideas were reinforced and disseminated through a growing body of literature, including etiquette manuals and advice books alongside newspapers and periodicals, providing public space for discussions about fashion and personal grooming, while also reinforcing the role of the individual man in mastering his appearance. As briefly discussed here, but explored in more detail in subsequent chapters, the domestic nature of men's personal grooming was also supported by a growing market for

⁸⁷ Anon, *Habits of Good Society*, 92–3.

⁸⁸ See the discussion of grooming instruments in Withey, *Technology*, 65–84.

⁸⁹ John Kitto, *The Pictorial Bible: Judges-Job* (London: W. and R. Chambers, 1855), 235.

male grooming and styling products, including whisker dyes, beard brushes and preparations to encourage the growth of facial hair.

The remaining question, however, is that of what happened to barbers during this period. If men were beginning to assume responsibility for shaving and/or managing facial hair, did this herald a shift in the longstanding relationship with and functions of barbers after the mid-eighteenth century? It is to such questions that the final chapter in this section now turns.