

*The Renaissance Beard: Masculinity in Early Modern England**

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*This essay builds on Judith Butler's recent theoretical work in *Bodies that Matter* by suggesting that the sexual differences that "mattered" in early modern England are not exactly the same as those that "matter" today. In particular, it suggests that facial hair often conferred masculinity during the Renaissance: the beard made the man. The centrality of the beard is powerfully demonstrated by both portraits and theatrical practices. Indeed, virtually all men in portraits painted between the mid-sixteenth and the mid-seventeenth century have some sort of facial hair. Beards were also quite common on the Renaissance stage, and the essay goes on to analyze the use of false beards as theatrical props. These are not, however, the only "texts" from the period that equate being a man with having a beard. Similar formulations appear in a wide range of sources: medical treatises, physiognomy books, poetical works, and tracts on gender. In many of these texts, moreover, facial hair is not simply imagined as a means of constructing sexual differences between men and women; it is also a means of constructing distinctions between men and boys. Thus, it would appear that boys were considered to be a different gender from men during the Renaissance. This division had important ramifications for theater practice. It meant, for example, that boy actors would have been as much "in drag" when playing the parts of men as when playing the parts of women. Finally, we need to bear in mind that if facial hair thus served as an important means of materializing masculinity in early modern England, it was also crucially malleable and prosthetic. As a result, we can say that both masculinity and the beard had to be constantly made (to) matter*

Judith Butler's *Bodies that Matter* attempts to reconceptualize "the body" and gender in a way that will circumvent the current theoretical impasse between essentialists and constructivists. She argues that the body should not be understood as a natural entity that is bound up in an irreducible tension with cultural norms and ideals. Instead, as she puts it, the body ought to be understood as being that tension (66). Consequently, Butler maintains that our current model for understanding the formation of gender roles is inadequate. If we now tend to see masculinity and femininity as being constituted through a process in which preexisting "natural" sexual differences are

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shaped or modified by social norms and expectations, Butler contends, as the pun in her title implies, that it is really only through the process of making sexual differences matter (i.e., of making them socially significant) that those differences are made matter in the first place (i.e., brought into being, or made material). In what follows, I hope to provide an historical supplement to Butler's theoretical intervention. I want to suggest that the sexual differences that "mattered" in the early modern period are not necessarily the same as those that "matter" today.¹ In particular, I believe that in the Renaissance facial hair often conferred masculinity: the beard made the man.²

Previous histories of the Renaissance body have largely ignored facial hair. For example, although Thomas Laqueur's *Making Sex* continues to stand out as one of the most complex and detailed analyses of early modern ideas about the body and sex, he never even mentions facial hair. In fact, despite the purported subject of Laqueur's book, he focuses almost exclusively on medical thought and writing about the genitalia, and thus effectively reduces "sex" to "genital morphology." At one point, he even claims that "the physical appearance of the genital organs was and remains the usually reliable indicator [of sex]" (31). In choosing to single out the genitals as *the* indicator of sex, Laqueur fails to allow for the importance of other gendered parts, and as a result, fails to allow for the possibility of historical changes in the meaning of the term "sex." In other words, even though Laqueur brilliantly demonstrates some of the possible variations in the way in which genital morphology has been understood, he ends up assuming that "sex" itself (or rather what counts as sex) has remained historically constant.³

¹My point here about the historical difference between the Renaissance and the present might be illustrated by contrasting early modern depictions of men (which I discuss below) with modern ones. One such contemporary representation is the drawing of "man" sent into space on the Voyager probe. In this current vision of idealized masculinity, the figure of the male is significantly beardless. The absence of facial hair on the figure and others like it might be understood to signal the diminishing role of the beard in materializing gender in contemporary Western culture.

²There has been a lot of interesting work in the last couple of years on the cultural construction of masculinity — work which builds upon the early feminist analyses of gender. For general, theoretical, examinations, see *Constructing Masculinity*, edited by Maurice Berger, Brian Wallis, and Simon Watson, and for a study which concentrates on the Renaissance, see Mark Breitenberg's *Anxious Masculinity in Early Modern England*.

³I do not mean, however, to deny the fact that there were differing cultural investments in various morphological attributes and prosthetic parts. Instead, I want to suggest that there both the genitals and beard were quite central. At the same time, it is evident that having a penis did not in and of itself confer masculinity any more than having a beard did. Indeed, despite the fact that eunuchs and boys had penises, they were, as we shall see, quite literally not considered men.

As is probably clear by now, I do not believe that sex was synecdochally reduced to any one particular part in the Renaissance. So when I say that “the beard made the man,” I do not mean to imply that it did so in and of itself. Nor do I mean to imply that the presence or absence of facial hair was any more culturally significant than the morphology of the genitals. Rather, I would argue that sex was materialized through an array of features and prosthetic parts. A list of some of these parts would have to include the beard and the genitals, but would also have to include clothing, the hair, the tongue, and weapons such as swords or daggers (to name just a few).⁴

We can get a sense of the limitations of Laqueur’s genital focus by considering, briefly, his analysis of Montaigne’s anecdote about Marie-Germain. The story, as told by Montaigne and retold by Laqueur and Stephen Greenblatt,⁵ among others, goes like this: a fifteen-year-old French peasant girl named Marie was chasing after her swine in a wheat field one day. In mid-pursuit, she leapt over a ditch only to find that the sudden exertion had caused a set of male genitalia to pop out of her body. Marie was subsequently examined by a group of physicians and rebaptized as the male Germain.

For Laqueur, Montaigne’s narrative demonstrates both the Renaissance belief in isomorphism between male and female private parts and the possibility of transference between the sexes.⁶ Laqueur, however, omits a crucial element of Montaigne’s account. Montaigne carefully notes that even before her metamorphosis, Marie was “remarkable for having a little more hair about her chin than the other girls; they called her bearded Marie” (6). Moreover, Montaigne points out that after the transformation, Germain went on to develop “a big, very thick beard.” By omitting these elements of Montaigne’s narrative, Laqueur ends up simplifying its sexual significance and making it conform more readily to his thesis. But it is not entirely clear, for example, that Marie’s transformed genitalia are the sole reason that she is declared a man, or that the transformation is quite as radical as Laqueur makes it out to be. Indeed, Marie’s genital shift might be said to bring her private parts into alignment with the beard (and the humoral constitution

⁴We might even say that sex and sexual difference were produced through all of these assorted parts precisely because of the structural isomorphism between male and female bodies which Thomas Laqueur has demonstrated in *Making Sex*.

⁵See Greenblatt’s “Fiction and Friction.” He argues that the Renaissance “conception of gender” was “teleologically male” and that it “finds its supreme literary expression in the transvestite theater” (88). For incisive criticism of Greenblatt’s argument, see Julia Epstein’s “Either/Or — Neither/Both: Sexual Ambiguity and the Ideology of Gender.”

⁶See Parker’s important critique of Laqueur and Greenblatt in “Gender Ideology, Gender Change: The Case of Marie Germain.”

that it implies). At the very least, once we have acknowledged Marie's facial hair, the significance of the story becomes more complex.

Laqueur's failure to mention Marie's beard is symptomatic of his more general tendency to ignore non-genital markers of sexual difference. Moreover, this genitocentrism seems to be predicated upon a modern notion of sexual difference in which physiological features are hierarchized (classed as either primary or secondary characteristics) and in which genital morphology often comes to stand in for sex. At one point Laqueur, repeating this schema, dismisses the "secondary characteristics to which one would have reference in lieu of genital organs" (141). While we might agree that sexual difference is now constructed primarily as a difference of genital morphology and that "secondary" characteristics are subordinated to this "primary" difference, I do not think that we can assume that this hierarchy was in place during the Renaissance. Indeed, as I have already suggested, I believe that the beard was as important as the genitals and that it too "made the man."

Portraits provide one of the most striking indications of the cultural centrality of facial hair in the early modern period. Indeed, it is a curious and largely unappreciated art-historical fact that virtually all of the men depicted in portraits from the English Renaissance have beards. In England, starting in about 1540 and continuing for at least a century after that, males over the age of twenty-one are almost invariably represented with some sort of facial hair. Take, for example, the portraits included in a recent exhibition at the Tate Gallery in London — *Dynasties: Painting in Tudor and Jacobean England, 1530-1630*. This show assembled sixty early modern portraits of men, and of those sixty, fifty-five had some sort of facial hair (usually a full moustache and beard).⁷ In other words, over ninety percent of the men represented in the paintings in the exhibition had facial hair.

The preponderance of beards in these portraits is by no means atypical. In fact, it is corroborated by the images included in Roy Strong's encyclopedic *Tudor & Jacobean Portraits*. Strong has assembled approximately three-hundred-and-fifty portraits of men from the Tudor and Jacobean period in this two-volume work, and of those, there are over three-hundred-and-twenty in which the sitter is depicted with facial hair.⁸ Thus, for every portrait of a man without a beard, there are about ten portraits of men with beards. Again this is

⁷There are an additional thirteen portraits of males without facial hair ranging in age from two to twenty-one, but I have not included them in my numbers because it is not clear that they would have been capable of growing beards. The crucial point here is that there are only five portraits of men who are clearly shaven. Interestingly, three of these men are priests. See the lavishly illustrated catalog of the exhibition edited by Karen Hearn.

⁸These figures include only portraits painted between 1540 and 1630. It is my sense, however, that this phenomenon continued until at least 1640 and perhaps even 1660.

well over ninety percent. The ubiquity of beards in these paintings is suggested in an encapsulated form by the *Somerset House Conference Portrait* (fig. 1) where eleven different men are represented together in a single portrait and all of them have some sort of facial hair.

The beards in Renaissance paintings come in a wide variety of styles, known by distinctive names. Charles I, for example, is shown wearing a “stiletto,” the Earl of Essex a “square cut,” an unknown sitter a “swallowtail,” and Sir Thomas Wyatt a “sugarloaf” (see figs. 2-5). John Taylor, the water poet, catalogs some of the different styles in his satiric description of the beards popular at the court of James I:

Some like a spade, some like a fork, some square,
 Some round, some mow'd like stubble, some starke bare,
 Some sharpe, stiletto fashion, dagger-like,
 That may with whispering a man's eyes outpike:
 Some with hammer cut, or Romane T,
 Their beards extravagant reformed must be.⁹

Although Taylor's list may itself seem “extravagant,” it is by no means exhaustive. In fact, there were at least fifteen distinct and recognizable beard styles worn at the time: in addition to those already mentioned, there were the bodkin, the needle, the fantail, the pisa, and the marquisotte.¹⁰

Early modern portraits were not, however, the only place where beards frequently appeared; they were also quite common on the Renaissance stage. Indeed, beards are explicitly mentioned in all but four of Shakespeare's plays; and in *As You Like It* alone, there are over twenty references to them. Furthermore, even if facial hair is not explicitly mentioned in a play (as in *Richard III*, *Henry VIII*, *Titus Andronicus*, and *Pericles*), this does not mean that none of the characters in that play were bearded.

⁹William Harrison's *Description of England* provides a similar description: “some are shaven from the chin like those Turks, not a few cut short like the beard of Marquis Otto, some made round like a rubbing brush, other with a pique de vant (oh, fine fashion!) or now and then suffered to grow long, the barbers being grown so cunning in this behalf as the tailors. And therefore, if a man have a lean and straight face, a Marquis Otto's cut will make it broad and large; if it be platter-like, a long slender beard will make it seem much narrower; if he be weasel-becked, then much hair left on the cheeks will make the owner look big, like a bowlded [ruffled] hen, and so grim a goose” (146-47). My thanks to Valerie Traub for this reference.

¹⁰There is a lot of writing on hair and beards in the field of fashion history. Some of the best studies are Richard Corson's *Fashions in Hair: The First Five Thousand Years*, Bill Severn's *The Long and the Short of It: Five Thousand Years of Fun and Fury over Hair*, Reginald Reynolds' *Beards*, and Jacques Antoine Dulaure's *Pogonologia, or a Philosophical and Historical Essay on Beards*.



FIGURE 1. *The Somerset House Conference Portrait* (1604). Photo: National Portrait Gallery, London.



FIGURE 2. Detail. Charles I wearing a "stiletto" beard (ca. 1625-1625), attributed to Jacob Van Doort. Photo: The Royal Collection, Windsor Castle.



FIGURE 3. Detail. Robert Devereux, 2nd Earl of Essex, wearing a "square cut" beard (ca. 1596), by Isaac Oliver. Photo: National Portrait Gallery, London.



FIGURE 4. Detail. Unknown sitter wearing a “swallowtail” beard (1545), by John Bettes the Elder. Photo: Tate Gallery, London.



FIGURE 5. Detail. Sir Thomas Wyatt wearing a “sugarloaf” beard (ca. 1535), by Hans Holbein. Photo: The Royal Collection, Windsor Castle.

It is worth noting, however, that in addition to the “real” beards of actors, prosthetic beards were also used on the early modern stage. These false beards were probably most prevalent in the boys’ companies, but they may also have been used in the adult companies for specific roles: “the greybeard Gremio” (3.2.145) in *The Taming of the Shrew*, for example, or Abraham Slender in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* who is described as having “a little yellow colored beard, a cain-colored beard” (1.4.22-3).¹¹ In fact, the theatrical importance of false beards is dramatized (or rather satirized) in *The Book of Sir Thomas More* where the players slated to perform the play within the play are forced to postpone their production while one of them goes to borrow “a long beard” (34).

There is some evidence which suggests that prosthetic beards were used quite regularly in the Renaissance theaters (though it is difficult to determine exactly how often, or to what extent, these props were used on account of scant records). Most notably, documents from Oxford University indicate that in 1604, students hired *eighteen* beards in order to stage a single play — a production of the (now lost) play *Alba* for a visit by James I. The list of properties rented for the single performance includes:

- 1 blewe hayre and beard for neptune.
- 1 black smooth hayre and beard for à magitian.
- 1 white hayre and beard for nestor . . .
- 2 hermeits beards the on graye thother white . . .
- 3 beards one Red one blacke th’other flexen.
- 10. satyers heads and berds.¹²

It is worth acknowledging that this incident may not be representative of more general stage practices since it involves a production by students. Nevertheless, these records are significant because they are the only documents we have which indicate what props were used to produce a particular play (the other extant lists of stage properties are not linked to any particular play or production).¹³

¹¹Throughout this essay, I use *The Riverside Shakespeare* for references to Shakespeare’s plays.

¹²*Malone Society Collections*, 1:251-59. The production at Oxford is also discussed by Jean MacIntyre in *Costumes and Scripts in the Elizabethan Theaters*.

¹³Although the professional theater companies probably purchased their own prosthetic beards, we should at least note that there are several other documented instances of beards being hired for seasonal or occasional performances. For example, a weavers account book from Coventry in 1570 lists payments “for ye hyer of ij beardes to harry benet.” Similar entries appear a couple of times in the following years. In 1572, for instance, we find an almost identical note: “Item paid for ye hyer of ij beardes to hary benete.” These entries come from the Coventry volume of the *Records of Early English Drama*, 223-24.

The false beards for the performance at Oxford were obtained from Edward Kirkham and Thomas Kendall in London. The two men appear to have filled this particular invoice jointly, but either of them could probably have supplied all the necessary beards on his own.¹⁴ At the time, Kirkham was the Revels Yeoman and therefore had access to the costumes owned by the Revels Office. As Yeoman, Kirkham was probably entitled to rent out the costumes and properties in his care. There is evidence indicating that one of Kirkham's predecessors — John Arnold — engaged in just such a practice. According to a complaint filed by Thomas Giles in 1572, Arnold "havyng allone the costodye of the garmentes / dothe lend the same at hys plesure." Giles, a haberdasher, complained to the Queen because his own business was being undermined by Arnold's activities: as he puts it, he was "hynderyde of hys lyvyge herbye [because] . . . havyng aparell to lett . . . [he could not] so cheplye lett the same as hyr hyghnes maskes be lett."¹⁵

Furthermore, the Revels Office would almost certainly have had enough false beards on hand to fulfill the Oxford order since they were frequently purchased for the production of plays and masks at the court. In 1572–1573, for instance, twenty-nine prosthetic beards were purchased:

vij long white Beardes at xxd the peece — xiijs iiij/ Aberne Berdes ij & j
blackfyzicians bearde — xiiij viij / Berds White & Black vj — viijs/ Heares
for plamers ij — ijs viij Berdes for fyshers vj — ix . . . Redd Berdes vj — ix.¹⁶

Another twenty-two beards were bought for the following season:

vij Long Aberne beardes at xvjd the peece — ix iiiij/ vij other berdes ottett at
xiiij the peece for the haunces Mask at xvjd the peece — viijs ijd/ xij beardes
Black & Redd for the fforesters Mask at like rate — xvjs/ Heare for the wylde
Men at xvjd the lb iij lb — iiij/ One Long white Bearde — ijs viij.¹⁷

The variety of colors and shapes here is remarkable. Indeed, other records give some insight into how this variety might have been achieved: an inventory at Cambridge describes "iiij beardes of cone skinnes & white fur & fox."¹⁸ In any case, if the acquisitions by the Revels office in the 1570s were

¹⁴Boas suggests in the *Malone Society Collections* that the costumes came from the properties belonging to The Children of the Queens Revels. Both Kirkham and Kendall were associated with this company beginning in 1602. MacIntyre, however, believes that it may well have been from the Revels Office stock that the order was filled.

¹⁵*A Complaint of Thomas Gylles against the Yeoman of the Revels*, (c. December 1572), included as an appendix in *Documents relating to the Office of the Revels in the time of Queen Elizabeth*, 409.

¹⁶*Documents relating to the Office of the Revels in the time of Queen Elizabeth*, 177.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 199.

¹⁸*Records of Early English Drama, Cambridge*, 1:127.

in any way typical, Kirkham would have had a large collection of prosthetic beards to choose from.

Like Kirkham, Kendall could probably have supplied all of the beards needed for the production at Oxford. Kendall was a haberdasher, like Thomas Giles, and may well have trafficked in costumes and properties. Although there are no other records of Kendall renting or selling beards or wigs, we know that both he and Kirkham were associated with the child actors at Blackfriars from 1602 (MacIntyre, 73). Furthermore, haberdashers were certainly known to engage in theatrical rentals. Harry Bennet, whom I mentioned above, was a haberdasher in Coventry who rented (and also sold) false beards. Similarly, a haberdasher named John Ogle made all of the beards and wigs acquired by the Revels Office during the 1570s and 80s, including the 56 beards delivered in 1572-1574. Like Bennet, Ogle may have been in the business of hiring or lending his beards out to others. In fact, in *The Book of Sir Thomas More*, when the player goes to borrow the “long beard for young wit” (34), he goes “to Oagles” only to find that “Oagle was not with in, and his wife would not let [him] have the beard” (38).

While it is difficult to tell if the use of prosthetic beards in the Oxford performance is representative of English stage practice in general, when all of these documents about beards are seen in conjunction with one another — especially the lists of the objects themselves coupled with the records indicating that there were identifiable individuals who regularly supplied them — it becomes apparent that there was a lively market for, and traffic in, false beards. Moreover, I think that it is also likely, given this evidence, that false beards were used with some regularity on the stages in London, although the professional theater companies probably did not rent their beards but rather purchased or made them in the manner of the Revels Office.¹⁹

I begin with these observations about facial hair in English Renaissance painting and on the Renaissance stage, in part, because I want to make these beards visible. It is my sense that most modern viewers or readers simply fail to notice the facial hair in these paintings and the numerous references to

¹⁹While the records indicate that false beards were readily purchased or hired for dramatic performances, they also suggest that they may not have been confined to that milieu. In other words, prosthetic beards may have been part of the traffic in second hand clothes that has been mapped out by Peter Stallybrass, or the traffic in theatrical properties traced by Natasha Korda. There is some evidence to support this. *The Bourse of the Reformation*, a satire about the commodification of fashion during the seventeenth century included in the Percy Society miscellany, alludes to various articles of costume that were sold at the Old and New Exchange: “false beards for a disguise” (27:194) are included in the list of items for sale. Similarly, Corson mentions edicts that were passed in Rouen which forbade the wearing of prosthetic beards in public in 1508 and again in 1513.

them in the plays in much the same way as we previously failed to notice the genitals of Christ in some early modern religious painting (as Leo Steinberg has demonstrated). I want to make it clear, however, that in calling attention to these beards, I do not mean to suggest that all men simply wore beards in the Renaissance. Instead, I want to ask how these representations might have helped to fashion an historically specific vision of what it meant to be a man by fashioning an historically specific ideal of the male body.

Portraits and stage plays were not, however, the only early modern documents to equate being a man with having a beard. Indeed, there are many other texts from the period which do so. Thomas Hill's physiognomy book, for example, attempts to explain why "men are lone bearded, & not women" (148).²⁰ Similarly, the poet Hugh Crompton writes in *The Glory of Women* that "in each man's face appears / A beard extending upward to his ears . . . But every female beardless doth remaine, both old and young her face is still the same" (14). In both of these texts, men are imagined to be bearded and women beardless.

It is worth noting at this point that while it is certainly true that males are more likely to grow beards than females, this tendency is by no means as clear-cut as Hill and Crompton imply. In fact, if we look more closely, it becomes apparent that although these writers imagine the distribution of hair growth between the sexes to be bipolar (that is to say sharp and dichotomous), it is better described as being bimodal (that is to say that while the majority of males are more hairy than the majority of females, there are nevertheless some females who are more hirsute than some males, and some males who are less hirsute than some females). Insofar as early modern writers like Hill and Crompton reiterate the common fantasy that facial hair is bipolarly arranged (that "men are lone bearded" and "every female beardless doth remaine"), they can be said to participate in the ideological process whereby beards are made to materialize sexual difference.²¹

²⁰This emphasis on sexual difference is even more striking if we consider that most sections of the physiognomy books are about reading "character" or "constitution" through such things as complexion, the moles on the face, etc. One could certainly imagine a section on beards that would be more consistent with the rest of these books, one which might, for example, examine different colors and styles of beard growth as an index of character.

²¹It is worth noting that this procedure continues to this day. T. Perper's *Sex Signals: The Biology of Love* argues that "secondary" sexual characteristics such as hair growth are still imagined to conform to a strict bipolarity because they are seen as emblematic essences — emblematic of primary sexual characteristics which are now almost always imagined as "naturally" bipolar (184-86). Moreover, although we might expect that this ideology would actively work to *produce* a bipolar distribution of facial hair (and it does to some extent, insofar as women still often remove or dye their facial hair), the fact that these differences are not

The ideological component of early modern discussions of beards becomes even more apparent if we look at other statements made about them. For example, Thomas Hall's treatise *The Loathsomeness of Long Hair* contends that "a decent growth of the beard is a signe of manhood . . . given by God to distinguish the Male from the Female sex" (48). John Bulwer makes a similar point in his proto-anthropological work *Anthropometamorphosis*, stating that "the beard is the sign of man . . . by which he appears a man" (208). In both Hall and Bulwer, the beard is not simply imagined to be a morphological attribute found on one of the sexes as in Hill and Crompton, but rather it is imagined to be a "sign" of masculinity, and a means of "distinguishing" men from women. Finally, John Valerian takes this argument a step further in his tract on beards from 1533. He insists that "Nature hath made women with smothe facis, and men rough and full of heere" (10), and that therefore it "beseemeth menne to have longe beardes, for [it is] chiefly by that token . . . [that] the vigorous strength of manhode is decerned from the tenderness of women" (17-18). In Valerian's text, facial hair begins as a morphological attribute of males (as in Hill and Crompton), but becomes a "token" of "manhode" (as in Hall and Bulwer), and finally a sign of the "vigorous strength" of men (as opposed to the "tenderness of women"). The physiological attribute is thus fully transmuted into a sign through which gender itself is constructed.

In many of these early modern texts, the centrality of the beard is linked to the fact that it is visible in social situations. Valerian, for instance, foregrounds the visibility of facial hair when he says that the "beard is a token of manly nature" and claims that "the thyng selfe doethe shewe more playne, than any man can declare" (7). Similarly, Bulwer notes that "the Beard hath the chiefest place" in the face, and that it is "in the face . . . [that] the ineffable majesty of the whole man doth shine" (206). In these formulations, visibility is equated with ontogeny and contrasted with "mere" performativity, or that which "any man can *declare*." In the end, we need to recognize that even if that visibility is always partially phantasmatic, it is nevertheless crucial for understanding the early modern investment in facial hair, for it means that the beard could materialize sexual difference in a way which the genitals, for example, could not.

fully materialized in twentieth-century western culture may be taken as an index of the diminishing emphasis placed on facial hair. It is also crucial to note that despite the "natural" bimodal distribution of facial hair, the early modern ideology of gender may have actually ended up producing in practice a bipolar distribution: that is to say, the ideology of gender may have materialized bodies in such a way that men were effectively (though always tenuously) bearded and women beardless.

In fact, Valerian argues that Diogenes “wore his beard to the intent he myghte have in remembrance, that he was a man” (7). Here facial hair is figured not only as a social sign, but as an active agent; it keeps Diogenes’ masculinity “in remembrance,” presumably both to himself and to others. We might therefore say that in this passage the beard materializes memory, and thus functions much like clothes which, as Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass have argued, were often seen as performing such memorializations.

But if facial hair was thus ideologically central in the construction of masculinity, it was also crucially prosthetic. In other words, hair both is and is not a part of the body. The early modern writers who assert that beard growth makes the man are often obliged to deny this ambiguous materiality. Bulwer, for example, maintains that “the beard is an existent part of the body,” though he acknowledges that some “Superficiall Philosophers do much please themselves . . . saying, that . . . haire[s] [are] an excrement and not a part [of the body] . . . to which account the Beard must be reduced which is all haire.” In response, Bulwer not only claims that the beard is part of the body, but he also insists that it is “most necessary”: “its necessity is from its use and office it hath in the body” — namely, its “use” and “office” as “manly ornament” (206-07).

It is ultimately Bulwer’s investment in constructing sexual difference through the beard that leads him to this position. Indeed, this same investment may also help to explain his denunciation of shaving. Bulwer writes: “shaving the chin is justly to be accounted a note of Effeminacy,” and that it is “not without cause” that those “who expose themselves to be shaved . . . [are] called, in reproach, women” (198).²² Furthermore, Bulwer argues that men who shave “aim at nothing less than to become lesse man” (200). The important thing to note in these passages is the apparent malleability of masculinity. A man who shaves quite literally becomes “lesse man” or even a “woman.” This was no idle threat in a culture in which differences between the sexes were sometimes seen as a matter of degree, and sexual transformations were imagined as a distinct possibility.

If early modern commentators thus suggest that shaving might make a man “womanish,” they never acknowledge that it might do the same for a woman. In other words, they never acknowledge that the “smothe facis” of women might themselves be the result of depilation, and thus that shaving might actually help create the kinds of distinctions that they wish to make.

²²Like Bulwer, Valerian also condemns shaving. He writes that in “all nations . . . where so ever they se men with . . . smothe faces, they call them women in scorne” (7) and therefore, “who so ever, by any crafte or busynes, gothe aboute to make a man beardles . . . hath done agaynst the lawes of Nature” (10).

In fact, Hugh Crompton suggests just the opposite — that shaving may be the cause of facial hair in women. As we have seen, Crompton asserts:

in each man's face appears
 A beard extending upward to his ears . . .
 But every female beardless doth remaine,
 Both old and young her face is still the same.

But then he writes:

Hence it was graven the Law Tables in
 That women should not shave their tender skin
 Lest that a hairy bush should chance to bud,
 And spoyle the sanguine colors of their bloud.
 (14)

Thus, according to Crompton, rather than removing a hairy bush, women's shaving might actually induce it to "bud." We might therefore say that for Crompton, facial hair in women (though not presumably in men) is the product of shaving.²³ It is worth acknowledging that Crompton's logic here is quite tortured: why, we might ask, would a woman shave in the first place if "every female beardless doth remaine"? The contradictions in Crompton's text can ultimately be seen as a side-effect of his attempt to diffuse the cultural dissonance engendered by the figure of the bearded woman without ever explicitly acknowledging her existence.

Moreover, his tortured dismissal hints at the anxiety evoked by women's facial hair, and the threat it posed to the early modern norms of gender. Vale-rian, for example, clearly manifests this anxiety when he states that "it hathe bene euer a monstrous thyng, to se a woman with a beard, though it were very littel" (10). Similarly, Bulwer claims that "Woman is by Nature smoothe and delicate; and if she have many haire she is a monster, as Epictetus saith, and the Proverbe abominates her, [A bearded woman must be greeted with stones from a distance]" (215).²⁴ This proverb not only suggests the violence used to establish and maintain the normative ideals of gender, but it also symbolically reiterates the supposed transgression of the bearded female: the "stones" used to greet her could be seen as a figurative displacement of the masculine stones ("testicles") which she might be imagined to possess.

²³The malleability of the body is meant to be contrasted with, and no doubt offset by, the inflexible social law which is "graven" in the "Law Tables."

²⁴Tilley mentions a similar proverb: "Greet . . . a bearded woman three miles off" in his collection of sayings from the early modern period.

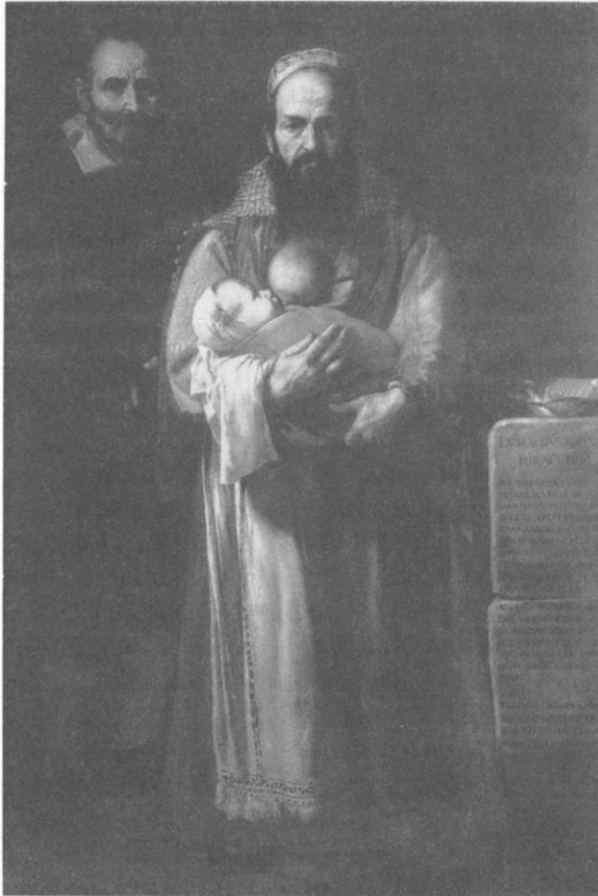


FIGURE 6. *Magdalena Ventura* (1631), by José de Ribera. Palacio Lerma, Toledo

It is quite interesting that neither Bulwer nor Valerian claim that women with facial hair are masculine or even unfeminine, instead, they claim that these women are “monsters.” This particular formulation indicates that sex/gender interpellation is such a crucial part of subjectification that in the case of abjected beings who do not appear “properly” gendered, it is not their gender but their very humanity that is called into question.

José de Ribera’s portrait of a bearded woman named Magdalena Ventura provides a somewhat different response (fig. 6). Although the sitter in Ribera’s painting is said to be a “Wonder of Nature,” there is little of the explicit rhetoric of monstrosity that we saw in the discussions of Bulwer and Valerian, and none of the correspondent animosity. In addition, whereas Bulwer and Valerian seem to question the femininity or even the humanity of the

bearded female, the painting actively works to define that (contradictory) humanity. The Latin text on the column at right of the composition explains that Magdalena is a “woman” and that she “has borne three sons by her husband, Felici de Amici, whom you see here.” This statement affirms Magdalena’s femininity by pointing out that she is both a wife and a mother, and thus that she has fulfilled the standard roles assigned to women within the early modern social structure. In fact, it not only emphasizes her role in biological reproduction, but more specifically her role in the production of heirs (she is said to have produced “three sons”), and hence social reproduction. In addition, there are a number of other details of the composition which work to establish Magdalena’s femininity: most obviously, her bared breast, her baby, her husband, and her clothes. In addition, the still life on the plinth contains a spindle and bobbin. These are “feminine” accessories associated with traditional forms of women’s work: namely sewing and weaving. Furthermore, it is worth noting that both of these implements are covered with hair — namely wool. Thus, we might say that the “feminine” wool of the still life may be meant to compensate for the woolly beard of the sitter.

But it is not as if Magdalena can be unproblematically assimilated into the early modern category of woman. In fact, the number and variety of compensatory elements included in the painting might ultimately be seen as a testament to the symbolic power of the beard — an indication of the massive cultural work which must be done in order to offset it.

The inscription on the plinth both visually and verbally encodes the “contradictions” which Magdalena seems to embody. The text reads as follows: at age thirty-seven Magdalena “began to become hairy and grew a beard [which is] so long and thick that it seems more like that of any bearded gentleman than [that] of a woman who had borne three children by her husband.” In the middle of the plinth, there is a large fissure which runs across the face of the rock and creates a break in the description between the words “thick” and “that.” This crevice effectively divides the text into two sections: first there is the description of Magdalena’s facial hair, and then her beard is compared to that of “any bearded gentleman.” The cleft in the middle of the text thus constructs a rhetorical chasm between the description of Magdalena’s “long” and “thick” beard on the top half of the column, and the normative ideals of masculinity and femininity on the bottom portion of the plinth: in the lower half, facial hair is imagined to be the property of “any . . . gentleman” and not of a “woman who had borne three children.” When seen from this perspective, the fissure could be construed as an apt embodiment of the problem of the facial hair: that is to say the problem of attaching it securely to either man or woman.

And yet, even the normative ideals represented on the bottom of the column are somewhat conflicted insofar as this portion of the text seems to offer the possibility that women too might have facial hair. Magdalena is said to have a beard that is “*more* like that of any bearded gentleman *than that of a woman.*” If we take this statement to its logical conclusion, it suggests that a woman could have a beard, but that *this particular beard* is more like that of a man. Envisioned in these terms, it is not the presence or absence of facial hair that distinguishes a man from a woman, but the relative amount. Furthermore, given this formulation, it is striking that Magdalena’s husband (himself a “bearded gentleman”) is not nearly as hirsute as his wife. If Magdalena’s beard is like that of “any bearded gentleman,” we might ask if Felicia’s beard is like the beard of “any bearded woman”?

I have tried to show some of the divergent responses elicited by the “bearded woman.” In the end, however, we need to recognize that the designation “bearded woman” (a designation which has subsequently become the *de facto* title of Ribera’s painting) is somewhat inadequate; it implies that a figure like Magdalena is “really” a woman, and thus denies the constitutive power of facial hair. Banquo’s comments about the witches in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* will clarify this point. Upon seeing the witches, Banquo exclaims: “You should be women, *and yet your beards forbid me to interpret that you are so*” (1.3.45-47). For Banquo, the presence of a beard “forbids” him from calling the witches “women.” The dilemma here is that Banquo is presented with “incompatible” or “discordant” parts. Confronted by contradictory markers of gender, he is not so much given over to uncertainty as he is to multiple and irreconcilable certainties. It thus seems clear that for Banquo, as for Ribera, the beard is not simply a secondary characteristic, but rather a constitutive element of gendered identity.

If masculinity was, as I’ve been suggesting, produced around a particular set of physiological features, it was equally produced around a certain set of social roles. In other words, to be a “man” meant not only having facial hair or a particular genital morphology, but also performing activities such as fighting in battle and begetting children. It is not, however, as if the corporeal forms and social roles attributed to men were simply two distinct ways in which the ideology of masculinity was grounded. Indeed, beard growth was consistently associated with the “masculine” social roles of soldier and father.

First of all, facial hair was often described in martial terms. Both Helkiah Crooke and John Bulwer, for example, label the beard an “ensigne”: Crooke calls it an “ensigne of majesty” (70) and Bulwer, as we have seen, calls it the “natural Ensigne of Manhood” (193). An “ensigne,” as the *OED* explains, is “a military or naval standard.” Thus, the beard is understood to announce a man’s “Manhood” or social position (his “majesty”) in the same

way as an “ensign” announces the military identity of a group of soldiers.²⁵ These formulations transpose the earlier descriptions of facial hair as a “signe of manhood” into a specifically military register.

A similar set of associations is produced in the *Haec Vir* pamphlet (1620) — a tract explicitly concerned with the production and regulation of sexual difference. The narrator claims that womanish men:

curl, frizzle and powder [their] hairs, bestowing more hours and time in dividing lock from lock, and hair from hair . . . than ever Caesar did in Marshalling his Army. [And what’s more, they have] so greedily engrossed [the Art of face painting] that were it not for that little fantastical sharp-pointed dagger that hangs at [their] chins, and the cross-hilt which guards [their] upper lip, hardly would there be any difference between the fair Mistress and the foolish Servant. (286)

According to the passage, “curling” “frizzling” and Powdering” the hair have replaced “properly” masculine activities like “Marshalling an Army.” Given this juxtaposition, it is hardly surprising to find that the beard is subsequently figured as a weapon (a “sharp-pointed dagger” with the mustache as a “cross-hilt”) since it is quite literally imagined to be the last line of “defense” against effeminization, the only thing that separates the “fair Mistress and the foolish Servant.”

But if the *Haec Vir* pamphlet suggests that facial hair continues to signal masculinity even when other traditional markers of masculinity such as clothes or the hair on the head have failed, it is also clear that, within the pamphlet, beards do not announce “Manhood” in a transparent or uniform manner. Indeed, in this text, the tenuousness of that production is insistently foregrounded; the beard appears to be under threat of imminent erasure (it is described as “fantastical” and “little”). We might therefore say that facial hair is not imagined to produce masculinity in a homogeneous way and that differing styles of facial hair seem to confer differing degrees of masculinity. When seen from this perspective, it is appropriate that the beard is likened to a “dagger” in this passage, for even though the dagger is a “masculine” weapon, it is hardly the most potent martial implement.

Just as beard growth was partially correlated with martial ability, it was also partially correlated with reproductive capacity. But the correlation between beard growth and reproductive capacity was not symbolic, instead, it was quite literal. In medical books from the Renaissance, the growth of facial hair is explicitly tied to the production of semen. This “explanation” for the appearance of facial hair in men is most exhaustively articulated in Marcus Ulmus’s *Physiologia Barbae Humanae* (1603), a three hundred page book de-

²⁵The beard, like a military flag, “announces” an identity but does not necessarily determine it.

voted solely to physiology and social significance of beards. The book argues “that Nature gave to mankind a Beard, that it might remaine as an Index in the Face, of the Masculine generative faculty” (208).²⁶ The physiognomer Thomas Hill explains beard growth in similar terms. He writes:

The bearde in man . . . beginnith to appeare in the nether jawe . . . through the heate and moysture, carried unto the same, drawn from the genitours: which draw to them especially, the sperme from those places. (145-46)

In this passage, Hill links the growth of facial hair to the “heat and moysture” arising from the production of semen in the testicles. The beard is thus figured as a kind of seminal excrement. This is fitting, for in the Renaissance, all hair was thought to be an “excremental” residue left by the “fumosities” as they passed out of the pores of the body:

the immediate matter of Haires . . . is a sortie, thicke and earthy vapour which . . . passeth through the Pores of the Skin. For the vapor being thicke, in his passage leaveth some part of itself . . . where it is impacted by a succeeding vapor arising whence the former did, [and] is protruded or thrust forward. (Crooke, 67)

This description of hair growth is based on the model of soot building up in a chimney and eventually being pushed out of the body by the uprising fumosities: “we see by the continual ascent of Soot, long strings of it are gathered as it were into a chaine” (Crooke, 67). If hair is thus thought to be a kind of excrement that is produced by the “fumosities” in general, the beard is described as a specifically seminal type of excrement, produced by the “sortie” excrement that is given off during the production of seed. As Hill explains: “Other Haires . . . [are bred] in Boyes when they begin to breed seed . . . come out in . . . the Chin and Cheekes” (145).

The language that Hill uses in his description of the beard clearly works to define it specifically as a marker of procreative potential. By calling the testicles the “genitours,” Hill foregrounds their role in generation. The association of the beard with “the Masculine generative faculty” was forged in a more socially accessible form in Shakespeare’s *Troilus and Cressida* through the common pun on hairs and heirs. In the play, Pandarus describes how Helen had spied a white hair on Troilus’s chin and said: “Here’s but two and fifty hairs on your chin — and one of them is white.” To which Troilus replies “That white hair is my father, and all the rest are his sons” (1.2.150-62). In Troilus’s response, he likens the hairs on his chin to his father Priam and his fifty sons. He thus associates his own production of facial hairs with his father’s production of heirs (i.e., his fifty sons), in order to em-

²⁶This is Bulwer’s description of Ulmus’s argument.

phasize his own procreative potential. As in the medical texts, Troilus creates a direct link between the growth of his facial hair and his virility.

By now it should be clear that during the early modern period, the growth of facial hair was insistently mapped onto social roles like soldier and father, and that those roles were in turn linked to having a beard. In fact, these sources demonstrate the extent to which the somatic and the social contours of “manhood” were imbricated in one another. At this point, however, I want to shift my focus somewhat and suggest that facial hair was not simply a means of constructing sexual differences between men and women; it was also a means of constructing distinctions between men and boys. “Boys,” I will argue, were quite literally a different gender from men during the early modern period. Although we currently tend to see the difference between men and boys as being a matter of degree (boys are diminutive versions of men) and the difference between men and women as being a matter of kind (women are entirely distinct from men), we need to remember that in the Renaissance, sexual differences were, as Thomas Laqueur has demonstrated in *Making Sex*, often conceptualized in terms of degree. Thus, the distinction between men and boys would have been analogous to that between men and women.²⁷

In recent studies of Renaissance culture, there has been a burgeoning interest in the gender and sexuality of boys, and especially boy actors. Stephen Orgel’s *Impersonations*, for example, examines “why . . . the English stage [took] boys for women.”²⁸ Similarly, Lisa Jardine has looked at the erotic interchangeability of boys and women arguing that it was not so much the sex of the “submissive” partner that mattered, but the expectation

²⁷If this is the case, then the early modern sex-gender system would have been organized around a tripartite set of distinctions between men, women, and boys, as opposed to the modern binary arrangement. It may well be, however, that there was a corresponding split in the production of femininity in the early modern period, in which case sexual distinctions would have been fourfold. This question requires further investigation. It seems clear, however, that boys, women, and castrate were all alike in the fact that they were not bearded “men.” This is not to say that there were no differences *between* boys, women, and castrate, or in other words, that boys and women, for example, were interchangeable or identical. As Jonathan Goldberg has trenchantly observed, collapsing these different categories runs the risk of turning all eroticism into heteroeroticism.

²⁸According to Orgel, “the analogy between boys and women . . . does not imply that boys are substitutes for women; it implies just the opposite: both are treated as a medium of exchange within the patriarchal structure, and both are (perhaps in consequence) constructed as objects of erotic attraction for adult men. Boys and women are not in competition in this system; they are antithetical not to each other, but to men” (103). Thus, within Orgel’s text, “boy” is primarily understood as an erotic category: as he puts it “[f]or Renaissance society the economic analogy between boys and women overlaid a more essential one: boys were, like women — but unlike men — acknowledged objects of sexual attraction for men” (70).

of that very submissiveness. Whereas most of this current research has tended to focus on the eroticization of boys, I want discuss their place within the sex/gender system. I will therefore be exploring how the gendered category “boy” was constituted, and especially how the gendered contrast between “boys” and “men” was produced.

Like the distinction between men and women, the distinction between men and boys was materialized through a wide array of attributes and parts. One of these was facial hair. Indeed, Randal Holme’s *Academy of Armory* uses beard growth alone to separate the men from the boys. Holme lists the different stages of masculine development according to hair growth: he begins with the “child” who he says is “smooth and [has] little hair.” Then, he defines a “youth” as having “hair on the head, but none on the face” and finally defines a “Man” as “having a beard” (391).²⁹ Shakespeare offers a similar schema in *As You Like It*: in the “seven ages of man speech” given by Jacques, he speaks of the transition from “schoolboy” with a “shining morning face” to the “soldier” who is “bearded like the pard” (2.7.145-50).

But beardlessness was, as I suggested above, by no means the only characteristic used to produce the opposition boys to men.³⁰ Francis Bacon, for instance, remarks in his preface to *The Great Instauration* (1620) that “the characteristic property of boys” is that they “cannot generate” (302-03). As we have seen, however, it is not as if procreative capacity and beard growth were two unrelated ways of materializing differences between men and boys. These two gendered “traits” were insistently mapped onto one another insofar as facial hair was conceptualized as a kind of seminal excrement.

These two characteristics are used interchangeably to establish a distinction between a man and a boy in a scene from William Cartwright’s *The Ordinary*. Simon Credulous reprimands Meanewell, telling him: “Leave off your flouting! You’re a beardless Boy; I am a Father of Children” (5.4.2362-63). Simon Credulous thus attempts to dissociate himself from the “boy” Meanewell (and to create a hierarchical power relation between

²⁹These definitions are part of Holme’s description of the different stages of a man’s life. To these groupings, he adds the transitional category of “Young Man” which he defines as “hair on the head and a little on the higher lip, a Muschatoc.” For my purposes, the most important thing to note is that Holme would not label someone a man (young or otherwise) unless they had some sort of facial hair. He then goes on to give a general idea of the corresponding ages for these divisions. He says that a “youth” would be between the ages of fourteen through twenty-one, a “young man” between twenty-two through thirty, and a “man” after thirty.

³⁰As with the distinctions between men and women, the gendered differences between men and boys constructed around facial hair are not definitive, nor was facial hair the only way in which this difference was produced: others important “signs” might include the voice, swords, testicles, skin, and armor.

them), by contrasting his own generativity with the beardlessness of Meanewell. In doing so, he forges an equivalence between the terms man/bearded/generative and the terms boy/beardless/nongenerative and constructs an over-arching opposition between them.

One discursive site where the distance between boys and men was consistently accentuated was in the discourse on marriage, and specifically, in discussions of who would make a proper husband. In Jonson's *Epicoene*, for example, Otter explains that "a boy or child under years is not fit for marriage because he cannot reddere debitum [literally 'pay the debt']" (5.3.171-72).³¹ In this passage, boys are marked as unsuitable husbands on account of their supposed non-generativity. In Massinger's *The Guardian* (1658), the beardless male is said to be similarly unfit for marriage: "to marry . . . [i]n a beardless chin / Tis ten times worse then wenching" (1.1.62-64). The implication of this statement is that marriage without a beard is even "worse" than heterosexual intercourse outside of marriage ("wenching"), presumably because such a marriage would not offer the possibility of reproduction and would thus have "degraded" the institution itself. Such a marriage might even be considered sodomitical.

If Jonson and Massinger, respectively, suggest that boys and beardless males would not be appropriate husbands, Shakespeare conflates these two groups in *Much Ado About Nothing*. Beatrice complains that she "could not endure a husband with a beard on his face" (2.1.29-30) and that she would "rather lie in the woollen." But when Leonato suggests that she might "light on a husband that hath no beard" (31-32), Beatrice dismisses the notion:

What should I do with him? dress him in my apparel and make him my waiting-gentle-woman? He that hath a beard is more than a youth; and he that is more than a youth is not for me, and he that is less than a man, I am not for him. (2.1.34-9)

The logic here is somewhat convoluted, but it is clear that Beatrice imagines a "youth" to be defined by his beardlessness in a way that recalls Randal Holme's schema in the *Academy of Armory*. She categorically states "he that hath a beard is more than a youth." Moreover, she subsequently implies that she considers a beardless male to be "less than a man." This formulation recalls that of Bulwer, who, as we have seen, insists that the man who shaves away his beard becomes "less man." Indeed, in Beatrice's description as in those of Bulwer and Valerian, the beardless youth is virtually transformed

³¹While it may be that the "debt" in this passage refers to women's pleasure and not to procreation, I think that it is more likely that the two meanings are bound up with one another. Indeed, procreation was itself bound up with women's pleasure in the early modern imaginary insofar as female orgasm was thought to be essential for conception.

into a woman. But Beatrice not only suggests that youths are beardless, she also asserts that they would not make appropriate husbands. In her words, the only “duties” a beardless youth could fulfill would be those of “waiting-gentle-woman.” In short, Beatrice does not think a beardless boy capable of fulfilling his “proper” husbandry “duties” — namely procreation.

But even though the beardless youth is distinguished from the bearded man and subsequently rejected as an appropriate husband, the scene also makes it clear that these categorizations are not entirely fixed since Leonato at least offers the possibility that Beatrice might “light on a husband without a beard.” Nevertheless, we might ultimately say that in the process of fashioning a portrait of the exemplary husband, these Renaissance sources work to construct an antithesis between men and boys through such gendered “signs” as beard growth and generativity.

Boys were not, however, the only early modern males who were not considered “men”; the same was true of eunuchs. In his physiognomy book, Bartholomeus Cocles maintains that after castration, a gelding can no longer be considered a man: “gelded parsones,” he writes, “are very much changed from the nature of menne, into the nature of women.”³² And one of the distinguishing features of the eunuch was his beardlessness. John Bulwer, for instance, claims that eunuchs “are smooth and produce not a Beard, the signe of virility . . . [and are] therein not men” (98).

For my purposes, the crucial thing to note here is the parallel between eunuchs and boys. Both of these groups of males are distinguished from men, and in both instances, the distinctions are materialized through facial hair. It is particularly interesting, however, that eunuchs are consistently figured as “smooth” in these texts, for it is not the case that all eunuchs are beardless. If a male is castrated after the onset of puberty, he will still grow facial hair. Thus, this appears to be yet another instance in which physiological “facts” were transformed — or at least idealized — in the service of producing a “coherent” model of masculinity.

Despite the insistent production of differences between men and “non-masculine” males (like boys and eunuchs), we need to recognize that it is not as if beard growth absolutely determined gendered identity. In both Phillip Sidney’s *Arcadia* and William Shakespeare’s *Coriolanus*, the protagonists are beardless, and yet they perform feats which are said to “demonstrate” that they are “men.” In *Arcadia*, Pyrocles has “no hair of his face to witness

³²The categorical distinction between men and castrate further complicates Laqueur’s contention that genital morphology was central within the early modern sex gender system. Since castrate still had functioning penises (it was the testicles that were removed), the genital morphology of men and eunuchs would not be entirely dissimilar (at least by modern standards in which the phallus is privileged over the testicles).

him a man” and yet he performs martial exploits “beyond the degree of a man” (30). Similarly, in *Coriolanus*, Cominius describes Coriolanus’s extraordinary feats of valor on the battle field:

. . . [Coriolanus] fought
Beyond the mark of others . . .

* * * * *

When with his Amazonian chin he drove
The bristled lips before him. He bestrid
An o’erpress’d Roman, and i’ th’ consul’s view
Slew three opposers . . .

. . . In that days feats,
When he might act the woman in the scene,
He proved the best man i’ the field . . .
. . . His pupil age Man-entered thus.

(2.2.88-99)

On the one hand, Cominius indicates that Coriolanus still seems to be a boy, and is, in fact, only sixteen: in addition he has an “Amazonian chin” and might “play the woman in the scene” (something which Pyrocles actually does in the *Arcadia*). But on the other hand, Coriolanus performs martial feats which quite literally confer masculinity: by fighting “beyond the mark” of the “bristled lips” and thus “prov[ing] the best man i’ the field” he “Man-enter[s].” This passage thus suggests that although differences between men and boys were materialized through facial hair, the beard (or lack thereof) did not absolutely determine gendered identity. Furthermore, it begins to pull apart the insistent conflation of masculinity, beard growth and martial capacity. Indeed, Coriolanus is said to be “Amazonian” and thus is associated with a tradition of non-masculine warriors.

These passages from Sidney and Shakespeare clearly indicate that facial hair did not unequivocally materialize differences between boys and men. Moreover, they demonstrate that the social and somatic groundings for masculinity were not always consistent. Nevertheless, both of these texts might also be said to reiterate the normative ideals that equated masculinity with having facial hair insofar as the beardlessness of each protagonist is put forward as being remarkable. In other words, we might say that these beardless “men” are imagined as the exceptions that prove the rule. In general, it would thus appear that the man defined through the beard was defined against beardless woman, boys and eunuchs. Indeed, Valerian links all these groups together when he writes “[i]t is openly known amongst all kyndes of men, that chyl dren, women, [and] gelded men . . . are ever sene withoute beardis” (7). The implication is that these groups are alike in not having beards and in not being men.

* * * * *

At this point I want to return to the early modern theater. If beards were, as we saw earlier, fairly common on the Renaissance stage, we might ask what dramatic function they served? How were those beards utilized? I believe that beards (and especially prosthetic beards) were used predominantly as a means of producing masculinity, in much the same way as dresses or wigs might have been used to produce femininity. The "production" of masculinity is perhaps most evident in performances by the boys' companies. Indeed, given the gendered distinctions between boys and men, we might say that when boy actors donned beards in order to play the parts of men, they would have been as much "in drag" as when they played the parts of women.

Contemporary scholars have been reluctant to recognize that boy actors used false beards to materialize masculinity on the stage. Reveley Gair, an expert on Paul's boys, claims that the actors at Paul's "did not . . . use false beards or moustaches" (143).³³ The evidence from the plays themselves, however, contradicts this claim. First of all, there are at least five extant plays performed by Paul's boys that explicitly call for prosthetic beards. Moreover, there are yet another nine plays which feature characters who are said to be bearded. While it is, of course, possible that these parts were filled by boys who had "real" facial hair, I believe that it is likely that false beards were used in at least some of these instances, especially given the specificity of the descriptions in the plays: in one play, a character is described as having a "red beard," while in another, a character is described as having a "black beard."³⁴

Gair is unwilling to acknowledge the regular use of prosthetic beards at Paul's because, as he sees it, prosthetic facial hair "on a fourteen year old [is] obviously comic" (143). As a result, admitting that the boys habitually employed false beards and moustaches would, for Gair, be tantamount to conceding that their performances were little more than caricature, and would thus compromise his larger argument: namely that the boy actors were serious thespians and not simply parodic "offshoots of the public professional stage" (142). I see no reason, however, to assume that the boys' use of false beards would have necessarily been comic. Indeed, the boys rou-

³³Although Gair qualifies this statement by limiting the dates from 1599 to 1602, he then states categorically, "at Paul's the only facial hair was real" (144). While it is certainly possible that some of the facial hair mentioned in the plays I cite below may have been real, there are a number of works which explicitly call for false beards. Although the plays that would have necessitated false beards fall outside the 1599-1602 date frame, I don't see why those props wouldn't have been used during that period as well.

³⁴Only thirty-six of the plays performed by Paul's boys have survived. So this means that beards are explicitly mentioned in almost half of the extant plays.

tinely wore dresses and wigs in order to play the parts of women, and no one — not even Gair — assumes that this was invariably farcical. When seen from this perspective, the gendered dynamics of Gair's analysis become evident: while he is willing to concede that femininity was produced prosthetically on the stage, he appears to be anxious about acknowledging that masculinity might have been produced in a similar fashion.³⁵

But how did the boys use these prosthetic beards? We can get some idea from one of the plays performed by Paul's boys — Middleton's *A Mad World, My Masters*. The plot of Middleton's play is in many ways typical of crossdressing narratives, but in this instance, it is boy/man transvestism that is presented as opposed to the more common boy/woman or woman/boy transvestism. In the play, a boy (Follywit) dresses himself as a man (Lord Owemuch) in order to sneak into the house of his grandfather (Sir Bounteous Progress) and repair their strained relations. Follywit's disguise consists of "a French ruff, a thin beard, and strong perfume" (1.1.78). As the two "men" talk, their dialogue inevitably foregrounds the distinctions between "Follywit" and "Owemuch." At one point, Sir Bounteous Progress comments to Owemuch (Follywit with a beard) on Follywit's immaturity, describing him as an "Imberbis juvenis" and notes that "his chin has no more prickles than a mid-wife" (2.1.135-36).

On the one hand, Bounteous indicates that he does not consider Follywit to be a proper man because he has "no more prickles" (with the obvious pun) than a "mid-wife" (meaning "half-woman"); on the other hand, his formulation simultaneously allows for the possibility that Follywit — and a "mid-wife," for that matter — might indeed have some "prickles." Thus, instead of constructing absolute or categorical distinctions between men, boys, and women, Middleton seems to imagine a gendered continuum. In fact, the males in the play are arrayed along just such a spectrum: Owemuch — the effeminate courtier notable not only for his "thin beard" but also for his "french ruff" and "strong perfume" — stands symbolically between the "mid-wife" Follywit and the masculine Sir Bounteous. We might say that in *A Mad World, My Masters* prosthetic facial hair is used to mark out sexual differences between boys and men, but that those differences are produced as quantitative rather than qualitative. For my purposes, however, the crucial

³⁵This striking discrepancy in Gair's work may well be symptomatic of a particularly modern anxiety about the artifactuality or detachability of maleness. Marjorie Garber has suggested the possibility of such an anxiety in *Vested Interests*: "traditionally, transvestism on the Western stage and in clubs and drag acts has turned on the artifactuality of women's bodies — balloon breasts, fluffy wigs, makeup. Is it possible that this overt acknowledgement of artifice — often a source of consternation to women and to feminists — masks another (I hesitate to say, a deeper) concern about the artifactuality and the detachability of maleness?" (125).

thing to note is the centrality of the beard both in Follywit's costume and in the subsequent dialogue. This is particularly significant given that the play explicitly dramatizes the production of manhood. Moreover, we need to recognize that the particular way in which this play (and others like it) chooses to show masculinity being produced would have had material effects (such as helping to reiterate/constitute the beard as an essential, if detachable, sign of the difference between men and boys).

If beards were thus sometimes used to materialize masculinity in the children's companies, the same is true for the adult companies. But the theatrical practices and organization of the adult companies differed somewhat from those of the boys' companies. The adult companies were, of course, composed of both adult and boy actors, and the roles assigned to each member of the company were predicated upon his status within this hierarchy (boy actors, for instance, played the parts of women).³⁶ This largely professional division was, however, given a further inflection insofar as it was correlated with the gendered division between men and boys. This gendered division is explicit in the scene from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* where the "rude mechanicals" are preparing to stage their production of "Pyramus and Thisby." When Flute is assigned the role of Thisby, he protests: "Nay faith let me not play a woman, I have a beard coming" (1.2.47-48). Flute thus implies that because he has a "beard coming" it would be inappropriate for him to play a woman and, by extension, that it would be inappropriate to consider him a boy (actor). This logic seems to be fairly common. Indeed, as we have already seen, Cominius says that the beardless Coriolanus could "play

³⁶According to T. J. King, "evidence from eight Elizabethan playhouse documents shows that the boy actors in these companies do *not* play adult male roles, nor do adult actors play female roles" (6). James Forse, on the other hand, has argued that men did play female roles, especially the large ones. He cites a number of (mostly post-Restoration) documents as evidence of this phenomenon. He mentions, for example, an epilogue which states that "men act, that are between / Forty and fifty, wenches of fifteen" and another anecdote about a performance that was delayed because "the queen was shaving." There is, however, much evidence to the contrary, and not just that cited by King. In *The Book of Sir Thomas More*, to provide another instance, a group of players stage a play within the play. When one of them explains to More that the troop consists of four men and one boy, he replies "But one boy? then I see, ther's but few women in the play." When the player then explains that there are three female parts, More responds, "[a]nd one boy to play them all. By'r Lady, he's loden." Another problem with Forse's argument is that he seems to employ a modern definition for the term "boy." At one point, he notes that Nicholas Tooley and Alexander Cook both played women in a 1590 production of *The Seven Deadly Sins*, commenting that "Tooley, then 15, might possibly fit the description of a boy, but Cooke, at two or three years older, certainly cannot." Forse thus anachronistically insists that anyone of about eighteen years of age must have been considered a man. His argument is nevertheless useful in that it begins to challenge one of the most basic assumptions about Elizabethan theatrical companies.

the woman in the scene” (2.2.89-94). In citing this evidence, I do not mean to suggest that beard growth actually determined which roles an actor would play, or that it was necessarily a factor in deciding when an actor would shift from playing women to men or perhaps drop out of the company altogether (though it may have been).³⁷ Instead, I am suggesting that to the extent that the professional divisions of the adult theatrical companies were constructed along the same lines and in the same terms as the more general gendered divisions between men and boys (in this case, through beard growth), the theatrical companies, and the theater as an institution, could be said to (re)produce gendered norms and categories.

But if the theater helped to perform the cultural work of differentiating men and boys, and if it produced that difference as, in part, a difference of facial hair, we should note that it simultaneously highlighted the prosthetic nature of the beard. When Bottom is assigned the role of Pyramus in the very scene from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* which I cited above, he asks “What beard were I best to play it in? . . . your straw-color beard, your orange tawny beard, your purple-in grain beard, or your French-crown color beard, your perfit yellow” (1.2.90-96). In this passage, it is the artificiality of the beard that is foregrounded. Moreover, the joke here seems to be that the rude mechanicals subvert the beard conventions of the adult companies: whereas Bottom has to put on a beard in order to play the “masculine” Pyramus, Flute — the hairy boy-man — must remove his in order to play Thisby. In fact, Flute does not shave his beard to play the role of a woman;

³⁷There is remarkably little evidence about when and why boys started to play men's roles. J.B. Streett analyses the existing dramatic and historical records about actors such as Ezekial Fenn and Theophilus Bird and tries to determine what roles they played and until what age. Streett contests the notions that these particular actors played women's roles until the age of twenty-four (although he does not deny that it was possible in general). He claims that the “one sure conclusion” to be derived from the material is that “there was no set age at which a boy or young man stopped acting women, since Fenn had stopped by nineteen and Bird was still doing it at twenty-one” (464). Andrew Gurr only addresses this issue in passing, citing Streett's article for his information. Demonstrating that age was not the criteria used to determine the type of roles played by an actor does not — of course — prove that the presence or absence of the beard *was* one of the criterion used. But it would be consistent with this assertion insofar as the growth of facial hair could occur at different ages for each of the different actors. In addition, if the historical studies about beard growth are correct, it may not have been uncommon for boys to remain beardless until their early to mid-twenties. They would therefore have been able to play women until that age (which is again consistent with what we know about stage practice). In Herbert Moller's article “The Accelerated Development of Youth: Beard Growth as a Biological Marker,” he argues that in the early modern period facial hair “consistently matured several years later in the life course than it does in the twentieth century” (754-55). Moller cites biographical information for a men such as Rembrandt and Louis XII who did not begin to grow beards until twenty-three and twenty-six respectively.

rather, as Quince instructs him, he “play[s] it in a mask” (1.2.49). The mask referred to here may have been something like the eggshell masks listed in the documents from the Revels Office.³⁸ But however this mask was constructed, it is clear that the smooth chin in this scene is itself prosthetic. Consequently, we might say that the contrast between the bearded and the beardless is presented not as a contrast between the prosthetic and the non-prosthetic (or “real”), but as the difference between two prostheses.

* * * * *

I have tried to demonstrate that in the Renaissance the beard was one of the primary ways in which masculinity was materialized and that it was therefore not simply a “secondary” sexual characteristic. The centrality of beards in early modern culture has been somewhat obscured for us by the comparatively limited investment in them within our own culture. Indeed, as I suggested at the beginning of this essay, at times it seems as if we quite literally fail to see the Renaissance beard. But once we have acknowledged the importance of facial hair within early modern culture, we also need to acknowledge that its subsequent decline demonstrates, yet again, the historicity of the human body. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that the waning cultural investment in facial hair demonstrates the historicity of the *male* body. This latter qualification is particularly significant because, as Katherine Park and Robert Nye have recently suggested, there is a tendency within current scholarship to concentrate primarily on the female body and the ways in which female physiology was understood and materialized, and while this research is important for helping us to understand how ideas about femininity and the female body have changed, it risks rendering the male body transparent and a “history of man’s body and its pleasures” probably impossible (56).

But if early modern facial hair thus in some sense “made the man,” we must bear in mind that it was also, as we have seen, malleable or prosthetic. In fact, we might therefore say that masculinity itself emerges as somewhat prosthetic. Although the prosthetic nature of masculinity was most apparent on the stage where beards, as we have seen, were frequently put on and taken off, it was by no means restricted to that particular social space. The theater simply dramatized and accentuated the prosthetic nature of masculinity in general. This notion of a “prosthetic” masculinity may seem counterintuitive to many modern readers for we tend to assume that gendered identity is an essential aspect of our being and as such is largely fixed, and certainly cannot be detachable. Indeed, “essential” is often equated

³⁸The account books list payments “for egges to trymme vyzerdes . . . iid” (236; 263).

with “unalterable.” But as we have seen, this assumption does not subtend Renaissance ideals of masculinity or discourses about facial hair, for the beard was understood to be constitutive of manhood and at the same time vulnerable to change, or even erasure. Furthermore, once we recognize the prosthetic nature of early modern masculinity, it becomes apparent that this notion of identity not only allows for possible changes or rearticulations over time, but actually requires them. To return to Butler’s formulation, we might say that both masculinity and the beard itself had to be constantly made matter.

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