

## Strange Things Out of Hair: Baldness and Masculinity in Early Modern England

Anu Korhonen  
*University of Helsinki*

In the recent history of masculinity, the male body has gained ground as a fresh field of interest, parallel in many ways to earlier emphases on the female body in women's history. This article explores male baldness as a constituent of masculinity in early modern England. Drawing from printed texts of various genres, combined with evidence from diaries and (auto)biographical writings, it shows that baldness could have many meanings to sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Englishmen. The article argues that the key contexts for understanding hair loss were age, health, and physical attractiveness—all linked to questions of honor and shame, but most often discussed with an ironic tone. Matters of outward appearance were deemed trivial, particularly in the case of men, and baldness too emerges as an ambiguous marker of masculinity—one best taken rather lightly.

READING EARLY MODERN TEXTS ON BALDNESS, one cannot escape noticing how insistently it is portrayed as a laughing matter. Is there anything serious to be said about the history of hair loss in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English culture? Encountered by countless men, and in its natural form gendered as exclusively male, baldness was certainly a constituent element of early modern masculinity. Yet it seems to have been so in a highly ironic way.

It is clear that there can be no absolute and shared view of what something simultaneously so commonplace and complex as baldness means, either now or in the past. Early modern people did not automatically think according to a specific theory or evaluative agenda when they saw a bald person, or indeed when they experienced baldness themselves. Reactions to baldness were no doubt to a large extent contingent and idiosyncratic. Surely, when engaging in their day-to-day activities, many—maybe even most—bald men saw no need to ascribe any specific meaning at all to their lack of hair. Nevertheless, everyday phenomena often carry the greatest load of cultural meaning.

In what follows, it will be argued that baldness indeed had meanings in early modern men's lives, and that the most important cultural contexts for discussing them were old age, health and medical knowledge, and physical attractiveness. The question lurking behind all these discursive frames was that of honor and shame: on the one hand, baldness was everywhere, and there was nothing sensational about anybody's loss of hair; on the other, there was always the possibility that baldness had negative practical repercussions, be they medical or social. These tensions also resulted in a curious rhetorical commonplace: for any even half-serious discussion of baldness, the chosen trope had to be irony.

Baldness was, of course, nothing new in sixteenth-century England. Why,

then, should we look at it specifically in the early modern period? It might be suggested that certain social changes make this time an interesting one for the subject of hair loss. Some of the major cultural readings of bald pates in late medieval culture were to do with shaving, and these were now being lost. With the institutionalization of the judiciary and its rulings, shaving no longer figured as ritual punishment. Post-Reformation culture grappled with the changing meanings of the monk's tonsure, once a mark of humility but now, belonging only in the old faith, a sign of hypocrisy.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, another standard meaning was on the wane: fools, who had provided good reason to interpret baldness as a mark of stupidity, were losing their place in the social imaginary.<sup>2</sup> These figures were still present as a background to new emphases, but the sixteenth century signals a time for a more personal understanding of baldness, giving new meanings to shaving, homing in on involuntary hair loss, and centering more on looks than inner qualities or religious purpose.

Historians and literary scholars such as Elizabeth Foyster, Alexandra Shepard, and Mark Breitenberg have laid the groundwork for interpreting sixteenth- and seventeenth-century manhood by focusing on the key themes of patriarchal power and social status, physical strength, the rule of reason, and control of emotions and sexuality—whether early modern men followed these maxims or questioned and displaced them through counter-codes and opposition. Less lofty materials could also figure in negotiating manhood, and they could intertwine with the aforementioned ideals to illuminate them from different angles. This suggestion concurs with Will Fisher's approach to beards and codpieces—indeed it is the beard that comes closest, both symbolically and materially, to how hair figured in constructing masculinity. Beards most often represented the ideal qualities mentioned above. Baldness turned them problematic. To play with Fisher's elegant notion of materialization of gender, perhaps baldness could be seen as an instance of dematerializing masculinity. The absence of the material marker typically associated with ideal masculinity was as much, and sometimes maybe more, a constituent of masculine gender as the marker itself.<sup>3</sup>

Baldness was often conceptualized as a change—as loss of hair. When men grew old, fell ill, or simply lost their mane, what had once been a masculine head of hair turned into its culturally determined opposite, shedding some of the signs of vigorous manhood but at the same time acquiring another set of meanings also associated with masculinity. One interesting factor in baldness is exactly this process: how was masculinity constructed at the cultural moment when, in an

<sup>1</sup>Marjo Kaartinen, *Religious Life and English Culture in the Reformation* (London: Palgrave, 2002), 84–88.

<sup>2</sup>Anu Korhonen, "Fellows of Infinite Jest: The Fool in Renaissance England" (PhD diss., University of Turku, 1999), 154–57.

<sup>3</sup>Elizabeth Foyster, *Manhood in Early Modern England: Honour, Sex and Marriage* (London: Longman, 1999); Alexandra Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Mark Breitenberg, *Anxious Masculinity in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Will Fisher, *Materializing Gender in Early Modern English Literature and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Elliott Horowitz, "The New World and the Changing Face of Europe," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 28 (1997): 1181–1201.

individual's life, it was under greatest risk? Could the absence of hair constitute another masculinity? Or was it necessarily only a diminished form of something defined by the presence of hair? It seems that baldness could suggest a manhood beyond manhood—a different phase in a man's life against which the physically vigorous standard image of adult manhood could be contrasted. Yet baldness did not merely signal resignation, decrepitude, or approaching death; many bald men were relatively young, whatever the reason for their hairless state. It is reasonable to expect that baldness must also have been understood as an inherited condition, which may well have given cause for a more lenient outlook.

It is difficult to find early modern men explaining in any of the texts they produced what they thought about their own baldness. In contemporary diaries and autobiographies, for example, outward appearance was not a popular topic for discussion. Nobody lamented his baldness or indeed celebrated it in the genre of personal writing, so far as can be found. The route around this problem is to look at baldness as a cultural phenomenon, discussed in various genres of printed writing, not as a personal experience but as a focus of attention that opens up a range of possible interpretations. These, perhaps, were also the materials through which early modern men and women could understand baldness in their own lives.

#### SHAMEFUL PATES

One of the paradigmatic baldness stories in European history is found in the Bible. In 2 Kings, chapter 2, the prophet Elisha is mocked by some children for his baldness. Elisha does not take this lightly but curses the children, whereupon God sends two deadly she-bears to avenge Elisha, and that is the end of the badly behaved brood.<sup>4</sup> The prophet clearly thought taunting him with his baldness was a grave insult, but why should this be? What is so shameful about baldness that children use it to poke fun at prophets, and the prophets need to answer by summoning she-bears?

The relative shame associated with male hair loss is attested by the long history of disguising or remedying it, familiar even from Egyptian papyri. Early modern readers could encounter several bald-headed men in ancient Greek and Roman cultures, Julius Caesar as the most prominent among them: they would have known from Suetonius's *Historie of Twelve Caesars* that

finding by experience, that the deformity of his bald head was oftentimes subject to scoffes and scornes of back-biters and slaunderses, [Caesar] tooke the same exceedingly to the heart: and therefore he both had usually drawne downe his haire that grew but thin, from the crowne toward his forehead: and also of all honours decreed unto him from the Senate and People, he neither received nor used any more willingly, than the privileged to weare continually the triumphant Lawrel giurland.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup>All biblical references are to the Geneva Bible (1560). See also Patricia Rose, "Bears, Baldness, and the Double Spirit: The Identity of Donatello's Zuccone," *Art Bulletin* 63, no. 1 (1981): 31–34; Kerry Segrave, *Baldness: A Social History* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1996), 3.

<sup>5</sup>Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus, *The Historie of Twelve Caesars*, trans. Philemon Holland (London, 1606), 19. Segrave, *Baldness*, 3–5.

If Julius Caesar was ashamed and resorted to comb-overs and laurel wreaths, no wonder some stigma lingered on. Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century men no longer had the power to summon biblical bears, but they still thought baldness was shameful, and thus effective as insult. “Bald-pated” appears, for example, as invective used by Cambridge men in the court cases analyzed by Shepard. Conversely, because hair was such a visible marker of masculine virility and honor, pulling of hair, by either women or other men, also figured as a gesture of shaming and subordination in defamation litigation.<sup>6</sup> Clearly, hair made a difference.

Building on Shepard’s findings, it seems that slurs on individuals’ personal appearance were not, on the whole, frequent in the early modern vocabulary of insult. Nor was referring to baldness an especially efficient affront on its own: it can be found when a long list of insults was employed. Even if hurling abuse about someone’s “bald-patedness” was not the most effective of insults, it is significant for purposes of this essay that baldness had some potency as a slur. Suggesting the dishonor of lacking hair worked towards establishing the importance of hairy heads to the standard image of masculinity. Baldness may often have entered the picture only as a rhetorical device and a convenient ground of abuse when extra weaponry was needed, but there is no question that bald men could still be mocked on the street, as Elisha was in times gone by.

Making fun of another’s baldness was not good behavior, even if such rudeness sometimes appeared far from the context of street fighting. Samuel Pepys reported in 1663 that when Queen Catherine of Braganza was delirious during an illness, she rather impolitely commented on her doctor’s looks and behavior, “Nay, Doctor, you need not scratch your head, there is hair little enough already in that place.”<sup>7</sup> The feverish queen’s ramblings were not so much a direct insult as an involuntary breach of decorum; mentioning somebody’s hair loss was not respectful. Had she been in sound mind, Catherine might not have chosen to utter the joke, and Pepys, who preferred his queen suitably courteous, found gossip on the “weaknesses of princes” distasteful.

A whiff of ritual shaming lingered on in early modern discourses of baldness. The line between shaved and balding heads was sometimes thin, and both were easily associated with some degree of humiliation. Even if shaving was no longer a form of public punishment, it could be performed as private humiliation. In institutionalized male mobbing, shaving denoted degradation and submission, and it has survived as such to this day. Thomas Dekker, the playwright and pamphleteer, toyed with the idea that Turks marked their captured Christian slaves—and made their status evident to the slaves themselves—by shaving off their hair to the skull.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup>Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood*, 162, and note also the role of hat-doffing and pulling of beards on 145–46. See also Horowitz, “New World,” 1190–91. Garthine Walker, *Crime, Gender and Social Order in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 43, 90–91.

<sup>7</sup>Samuel Pepys, *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, ed. Robert Latham and William Matthews (London: G. Bell & Sons, 1971), 4:348–49.

<sup>8</sup>Thomas Dekker, “The Guls Horne-booke,” in *The Non-Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker*, ed. Alexander B. Grosart (London, 1885), 2:227. On medieval uses of ritual shaving, see, for example, Barbara Hanawalt, “Of Good and Ill Repute”: *Gender and Social Control in Medieval England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 24.

More figuratively, the Puritan schoolmaster and clergyman Thomas Hall, writing about *The Loathsomnesse of Long Haire* in the mid-seventeenth century, called for baldness to punish followers of fashion: after all the “frizzling, crisping, curling, laying out their haire, their perukes, the hanging down their locks, or tufts, or whatsoever they had, they should have baldness, when they had torne off their haire through the extremity of misery.”<sup>9</sup> Having one’s own hair shaven off could sometimes be a practical choice, particularly for one habitually wearing a wig, or it could be a gesture of grief and humility,<sup>10</sup> but if the shaving was performed by anyone else, it turned into a weapon of humiliation and control.

The medical writer John Bulwer summed up the demeaning connotations of shaven heads in his book on body modification, *Anthropometamorphosis* (1650):

Shaving (generally speaking) being servile, ridiculous, and proper to Fooles and Knaves, and infamous blot of effeminacie, an index of ignominie, calamity and damage, uncomely, because allied unto depiled baldnesse, being in sooth a voluntary, spontaneous, and wilfull baldnesse shaving of the head unto the quick, being from all antiquity appropriated unto Fools, being proper in them to signifie the utter deprivation of wit and understanding, and at first began in mockery and to move laughter.<sup>11</sup>

Bulwer’s interpretation of the historical significance of shaving invested contemporary wig-wearers’ practices with a questionable intent. More importantly for our purposes here, it introduced the themes of deformity and laughter. Speaking about voluntary shaving, however, was different from discussing baldness from other causes, and Bulwer does make this distinction. Having one’s head shaven just for the fun of it was disgraceful in a way that involuntary hair loss was not, yet both provided material for the comedy of street theatre, where baldness in any guise could be shameful. This insult potential of baldness is taken up first, for the themes of humiliation and shame are never far from discussions of baldness, whatever the context. Even when the context was old age, the most common cause of hair loss in the early modern understanding, a bald head did not necessarily invite a positive or even impartial response.

#### OLD AND BALD

Early modern culture was emphatically visual; old age too was in many ways defined and envisioned through its visual markers. Among these markers,

<sup>9</sup>Thomas Hall, *The Loathsomnesse of Long Haire* (London, 1653), 123.

<sup>10</sup>For example, in February 1623/4, the Countess of Bedford described to Jane, Lady Cornwallis, how the recently widowed Lady Richmond had, in keeping with an earlier vow, cut off her hair “close by the rootes”—not quite bald, but very short for women—as a visible sign of her great loss. Jane Cornwallis, *The Private Correspondence of Jane Lady Cornwallis, 1613–1644*, ed. Lord Braybrooke (London: S. & J. Bentley, Wilson & Fley, 1842), 88–89. See also Robert Bartlett, “Symbolic Meanings of Hair in the Middle Ages,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th ser., 4 (1994): 52–54.

<sup>11</sup>John Bulwer, *Anthropometamorphosis* (London, 1650), 48–49.

baldness had a prime place.<sup>12</sup> It often appeared as a direct metaphor for time, old age, winter, or other sorts of change.<sup>13</sup> "Shedding of hayre is the end of nature: insomuch as few men lyuing vntill full age, becommeth not balde: and the best natures sonest," wrote the moralist Leonard Wright, venturing on somewhat paradoxical ground.<sup>14</sup> Baldness was a component of a transitional masculinity. An individual's life course was divided into a beardless boyhood, hairy adulthood, and balding old age. If a growing beard differentiated an adult man from a mere boy, then baldness marked the potential loss of adult manhood, caused by the infirmities of advanced age.<sup>15</sup> In early modern parlance, the young and the reckless tended to have "more hair than wit"; healthy heads of hair could be linked with inexperience and youth. Old age, when baldness most often appeared, was symbolically linked with experience and good judgment.<sup>16</sup> Despite the bad press that old age often received in their time, early modern writers repeatedly stressed that it should be respected, and baldness could also be a sign of wisdom, or simply a marker of a life lived to the full. These positive meanings seem not to have gained an upper hand on the discursive field of hairlessness. Furthermore, any positive connotations that baldness may have had were restricted to men.

It is worth noting that women were not thought to go bald naturally, although illness could cause hair loss even for them. Old age did not really figure in these constructions. Baldness was considered a predominantly male phenomenon and, for that reason, retained its masculine connotations even if presenting a problematic version of masculinity. When women's baldness was described, the set of assumptions employed was rather different. It figured as an extreme punishment

<sup>12</sup>Emily Cockayne, *Hubbub: Filth, Noise and Stench in England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 35, 37; however, on markers of feminine old age, see Lynn Botelho, "Old Age and Menopause," in *Women and Ageing in British Society Since 1500*, ed. Lynn Botelho and Pat Thane (Harlow: Longman, 2001), 44, 51; and Aki C. L. Beam, "'Should I As Yet Call You Old?' Testing the Boundaries of Female Old Age in Early Modern England," in *Growing Old in Early Modern Europe: Cultural Representations*, ed. Erin Campbell (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 102–3.

<sup>13</sup>Both Father Time and the Goddess Time were associated with baldness, and elderly people were proverbially "bald as coots." Seizing an occasion, furthermore, was referred to as "taking time by the forelock, for she is bald behind," and, according to an almanac, in winter "the bald-pate woods are periwig'd with snow." See William Shakespeare, *Comedy of Errors* 2.2.70 and 107, and *King John* 3.1.324, in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997); Morris Palmer Tilley, *A Dictionary of the Proverbs in England in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1950), 119, 668; and Bernard Capp, *English Almanacs 1500–1800: Astrology and the Popular Press* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979), 225.

<sup>14</sup>Leonard Wright, *A Display of Dutie* (London, 1589), 38. Risking a step too far, could Wright perhaps be speaking from personal experience, counting himself among the "best natures"? If the identification J. Sears McGee suggests in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* is correct, Wright was only in his early thirties when the book was published.

<sup>15</sup>Paul Griffiths, *Youth and Authority: Formative Experiences in England, 1560–1640* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), 222. Fisher, *Materializing Gender*, 98–99, 111.

<sup>16</sup>Wright, *Display of Dutie*, 38; Thomas Dekker, "Satiro-mastix," in *The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker* (London: John Pearson, 1873), 1:239; and Keith Thomas, "Age and Authority in Early Modern England," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 62 (1976), 207–10, 244–45. On the conflicting ideas of old age, see also Creighton Gilbert, "When Did a Man in the Renaissance Grow Old?" *Studies in the Renaissance* 14 (1967): 7–32; and J. A. Burrow, *The Ages of Man: A Study in Medieval Writing and Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1986), 155–62.

for immoral behavior, while men habitually grew bald for natural reasons, without having to succumb to sin to deserve it. In most cases, male experience of baldness was informed by a much more neutral moral position than women's (although sexual immorality could contribute to male baldness too). Women's baldness was depicted, and probably affected women in real life, infrequently enough to be almost immaterial for constructions of aging womanhood; instead, gray hair did the trick. Even if hair loss was an anomaly that had no great general consequence for the ideologies of womanhood, on a personal level, women affected by hair loss were in a worse position than men experiencing the same.

Early modern people were keenly interested in how their bodies changed, in sickness and in health. Among other things, following the signs of one's body was a way of reflecting on one's life stages. In his autobiography, the sixteenth-century music teacher and composer Thomas Whythorne contemplated portrait painting and surmised that, whereas young people had their portrait painted to admire their good looks, older men, who could no longer expect any beauty to show in their pictures, wanted instead to witness the passing of time in their features. It had been twelve years since his last portrait, so Whythorne decided to commission another portrait, to set down how time had altered him: "And for that I saw by my last counterfeit that I was much changed from that I was at that time, as by the long and fullness of my beard, the wrinkles on my face, and the hollowness of mine eyes; and also that as my face was altered so were the delights of my mind changed..."<sup>17</sup> Contemplating age was not a neutral exercise: Whythorne was clearly delighted to report that many judged him younger than he was, on account of his youthful looks.<sup>18</sup> Hair loss seems not to have troubled him at this stage, but a receding hairline is clearly visible in his surviving 1569 portrait, painted seven years later still. Nevertheless, his attention to his aging features was quite detailed. As signs of age, his prominent beard and wrinkles were akin to baldness, albeit in the case of the beard more positive. Baldness he could have hidden under a wig or sheltered with a cap should that have been a problem. One did not usually sit for a portrait without covering a bald head, most often with a skullcap—although, as the prolific writer and translator Richard Brathwaite suggested in one of his satires, painters could also flatter their subjects by adding what was lacking: "Hee will not abate you an haire, if he be exquisite; having none, he will supply the want of that excrement with a curious shadow, and so procure an artfull ornament."<sup>19</sup> Not only did early modern men follow their aging from their portraits; they also gave the best possible impression to other viewers. In any case, Whythorne's changed face, in his own opinion, also reflected changes in his mental state.

Similarly, studying the early sixteenth-century German costume book of Matthäus Schwarz, Gabriele Mentges found that Schwarz's descriptions of himself

<sup>17</sup>Thomas Whythorne, *The Autobiography of Thomas Whythorne*, ed. James M. Osborn (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 115.

<sup>18</sup>Whythorne, *Autobiography*, 117.

<sup>19</sup>Richard Brathwaite (Clitus Alexandrinus), *A Cater-Character, Throwne Out of a Boxe* (London, 1631), 9–10. The term "excrement" is used here in the early modern sense: hair consisted of excess matter secreted by the humoral body.

revolved wholly around his physical person, both his body and the clothes he wore, and that both reflected the passing of time and his personal history. As time went by, Schwarz had himself portrayed naked and commented that he had grown “fat and portly,” testifying that bodily makeup was extraordinarily important in at least some early modern men’s self-understanding. Both his social standing and his experience of masculinity were represented in his outward appearance. Schwarz had no problem with baldness; rather, he exemplifies the notion that, to quote Mentges, the male body was a “site of critical self-orientation,” and hair was certainly one factor in this.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, another German interested in his body’s changes, Hermann Weinsberg, did remark on his balding head in his *Gedenkbuch* and complained that haircuts got no less expensive despite his loss of hair.<sup>21</sup>

As the examples of Whythorne, Schwarz, and Weinsberg show, early modern men looked for and sometimes recorded changes in their bodies, and they reflected on how these changes were linked to their life situations and advancing age. Despite the focus on order and self-control, early modern identities were not unchanging even on the personal level; while going through life’s stages, men accommodated new identities according to the meanings ascribed to their particular ages. Baldness could function as a material peg on which the experience of old age was fastened, and it could signify advancing age to those around the balding person.

It would be wrong, however, to ascribe any definite meaning to baldness. It could suggest different things in, and for, men of different ages, and not all balding men were old. For those growing bald with advanced age, the meanings of hair loss would have been different from those fashioned by someone experiencing baldness from an early age. Not so much a question of good looks—wrinkles and other physical signs of old age took away handsomeness in any event—elderly men’s baldness was associated with social dangers. If providing for one’s family and keeping a patriarchal hold over the household were central facets of honorable adult manhood, old age threatened to rob men of their ability to retain these functions.<sup>22</sup> Baldness could signal the approach of a time when economic and social dependence would necessarily imply lessened manhood and even, at its worst, social ostracism. It also reminded people of the physical threat of illness and death. In social imaginary, baldness was a visualization of not only weathered wisdom but also bodily and intellectual ruin. Here, again, early modern men and women could refer to the Bible: the story of Samson and Delilah, in Judges 16:16–30, illustrates graphically the potential of hair loss to denote a failure of masculine powers. When Delilah continually pestered Samson, demanding to know where his great strength lay, Samson got so upset that he revealed the source of his strength: he

<sup>20</sup>Gabriele Mentges, “Fashion, Time, and the Consumption of a Renaissance Man in Germany: The Costume Book of Matthäus Schwarz of Augsburg, 1496–1564,” *Gender & History* 14, no. 3 (2002): 382–87, 394–95.

<sup>21</sup>Robert Jütte, “Aging and Body Image in the Sixteenth Century: Hermann Weinsberg’s (1518–97) Perception of the Aging Body,” *European History Quarterly* 18, no. 3 (1988): 267–68.

<sup>22</sup>On male provision and patriarchal power, see Foyster, *Manhood*, 39; and Alexandra Shepard, “From Anxious Patriarchs to Refined Gentlemen? Manhood in Britain, circa 1500–1700,” *Journal of British Studies* 44, no. 2 (2000): 85–89.



would lose all his muscle if his head were shaved. When divulging his weakness to the treacherous Delilah, Samson's main fault may have been foolishness; even so, early modern readers located the loss of his potency in the metaphorical powers of male hair.

If masculinity in its full powers was to be strong, dominant, and in control, its shadow side consisted of fear and anxiety. One could even say that baldness, in all its triviality, was another facet of the ubiquitous "anxious masculinity" discussed by Mark Breitenberg.<sup>23</sup> Not only were male bodies inherently disruptive of the patriarchal system they constituted; they also in many ways exposed men's lack of control over their lives and experiences. Baldness signified a body's betrayal, its lapse towards infirmity. It was not something to be embraced as a blessing; it was a blight to be borne with a stoical grin. When early modern men paid attention to the material fact of baldness, it was cloaked in irony, sometimes in satire. Threats of the bodily decline could be controlled not only by reining in emotions and desires but also by making use of the rhetorical devices and social attitudes that rendered baldness and old age seemingly laughable.

In this way, baldness marks a fault line in masculinity. It may not have been very significant in itself, as a bodily characteristic, and its practical effects could be negligible. But the complex reverberations of its meanings were tied to many disparate strands in thinking about and experiencing masculinity. Following Fisher's handy metaphor of visual constituents of gender working in the manner of weights on a scale, gradually tipping the balance one way or the other, one might characterize this sort of baldness as a special kind of weight, tipping the balance toward old age and the infirmities and potential dependencies it brought, diminishing or indeed "dematerializing" the kind of masculine identity that an individual might have formed in the prime of his life. Baldness could be a visual marker of a gradual loss of the trappings of power so central to patriarchal ideology, but how individual men experienced it in their lives varied wildly. Not all bald men were old or unhealthy; on the contrary, some were vigorously masculine in a way that turned baldness towards a completely different set of meanings. Baldness was not a switch to do away with masculinity—to again employ Fisher's terminology—but a facet of the complex organization of masculine imagery and identity.<sup>24</sup> Bald men were always very definitely men. Even so, baldness was not a masculine trait that anyone aspired to; it was one of the discursive and material limits against which masculinity and its meanings could be constituted.

#### HEALTH, MEDICINE, AND THE BODY

John Aubrey's seventeenth-century biography of Thomas Hobbes, in *Brief Lives*, describes Hobbes's losing his hair when growing old: "In his old age he was very bald (which claymed a veneration) yet within dore, he used to study, and sitt, bare-headed, and sayd he never tooke cold in his head, but that the greatest trouble was to keepe-off the flies from pitching on the baldnes."<sup>25</sup> The bald and elderly

<sup>23</sup>Breitenberg, *Anxious Masculinity*, 2–3 and passim.

<sup>24</sup>Fisher, *Materializing Gender*, 111.

<sup>25</sup>John Aubrey, *Aubrey's Brief Lives*, ed. Oliver Lawson Dick (London: Secker & Warburg, 1949), 154.

Hobbes seems not to have lost his sense of humor—or maybe he really did have trouble with flies. Another direction this observation points to is that baldness was thought to constitute a health risk. Where hair would have shielded one from weather and air, baldness exposed the head to the elements. From Hobbes's (or Aubrey's) joke it can also be gathered that, while Hobbes wore a hat outdoors, as men habitually did, his choice to go bareheaded inside his study was not standard practice and was even considered dangerous. Consider how baldness was linked to health and medical knowledge.

Until the late seventeenth century, the standard explanation for hair loss was, predictably, based on humoral theory: baldness was caused by excess dryness and coldness. As the medical writer William Clever explained in *The Flower of Phisicke*, “moist exhalations in the flesh, do nourish and greatly comfort the haire,” and, by the same token, “if those exhalations bee altered, either by malign vapours, or corrupt blood, or distempered by the contagion of colde diseases, the haire decline and vanish therewithal.”<sup>26</sup> Loss of moisture and heat was a typical effect of simply growing old, but it could also be caused by numerous illnesses. Gender distinctions in hair growth as well were explained in terms of humors: women, as the moister sex, were less troubled by hair loss than men. Humoral theory also allowed for convenient individual variation: as people's humoral constitutions were different, baldness too assailed people differently.

Even if, according to the theory, hair was excess matter that needed to be purged from the body, it had clear benefits for health. Hair shielded one from the elements and worked as a convenient barrier between the body and the world, in normal circumstances allowing the right amounts of moisture and vapors to exit the body. Also based on humoral theory was the idea that shaving hair could serve as a medical procedure, used to recover or preserve health in some humorally induced conditions. A shaven head could allow a free outlet for harmful vapors and rheum gathering in the body.<sup>27</sup> Even if shaving is different from natural baldness, it can testify to the importance of humoral theory in interpreting bald heads.

One major way to induce coldness, and thus baldness, according to both moralists and medical men, was too much sexual activity. The puritan pamphleteer Philip Stubbes counted baldness among the “euills whoredome bryngeth to mans body in this life”; together with dimmed sight, impaired hearing, infirm sinews, weakened joints, wrinkled face, dulled spirits, failing memory, and various illnesses, “it maketh hoare haire, balde pates: it induceth old age.”<sup>28</sup> Clergyman and

<sup>26</sup>William Clever, *The Flower of Phisicke* (London, 1590), 88–89. See also Thomas Elyot, *The Castell of Health* (London, 1580), fols. 3r–7v; Levinus Lemnius, *The Touchstone of Complexions*, trans. Thomas Newton (London, 1581), fol. 69v; [Pseudo-Aristotle], *The Problemes of Aristotle* (London, 1607), sigs. A4r–5r. But cf. J[ohn] S[hirley], *A Short Compendium of Chirurgery* (London, 1678), 122–23, where humoral theory is no longer significant. As a humorally engendered state, baldness also had links to the environment and climate theory. See Juan Huarte, *The Examination of Mens Wits*, trans. Richard Carew (London, 1594), 116. See also Fisher, *Materializing Gender*, 132–33, 139–40.

<sup>27</sup>For a slightly exaggerated view, see Synesius of Cyrene, *A Paradoxe, Prouing by Reason and Example, That Baldnesse Is Much Better Than Bushie Haire*, trans. Abraham Fleming (London, 1579), sigs. C3r–4r.

<sup>28</sup>Phillip Stubbes, *The Anatomie of Abuses* (London, 1583), fol. 54r. Perhaps Samson's unfortunate fate could be referred to here as well: on a metaphorical level, Delilah's treachery served to point towards

author George Hakewill noted that even women, who in earlier ages had been protected from such male plagues as gout and baldness by their feminine nature, had lately lost their modesty: they were now going bald as well.<sup>29</sup> From a medical standpoint, Clever agreed, but in less colorful language: “thorow excesse venerie falling into cold diseases,” some men’s “haire decayeth, waxeth thin, and vtterly looseth in the roots.”<sup>30</sup>

Although hair loss could be induced by many illnesses even in the early modern interpretation, its most striking cause, and the one most often mentioned in printed literature, was syphilis.<sup>31</sup> For example, Leonardo Fioravanti’s medical manual, published in John Hester’s translation in 1580, describes and suggests remedies for “a disease which causeth the haire and bearde to fall away,” resulting from “vsing company with women corrupted with the pockes.” Gradually, “by the same practise we see that those whose haire doth fall away, doe fall into great infirmities of the pockes, although not all, yet the most part.”<sup>32</sup> When baldness was not caused by old age, the popular imagination often linked it with the pox—and its harsh cures.

In the case of women, the connection was perhaps even stronger. The main medical frame for female balding was the pox, and its main moral frame was sexual excess, especially prostitution. A particularly “feminine” context for discussing baldness, however, was the use of cosmetics, also ideologically linked with prostitution. Early modern white face paints usually contained mercury sublimate and ceruse, both causing damage to skin, loss of teeth, and loss of hair. Although men, courtiers especially, also wore paint, the link between female pride and baldness found strength even by reference to the Bible: Isaiah 3:16–17, a popular passage that was also cited in the “Homily against Excess of Apparel,” recorded that the Lord frowned upon proud women who reveled in their clothes, ornaments, and fashions, and that, to punish them, he would “make the heads of the daughters of Zion balde.”<sup>33</sup>

Frequent use of mineral-based cosmetics was known to effect hair loss, and references to “bald burnt parchment pates” called forth images of prematurely

29

the general dangers of sexual pleasure, even if too much sexual activity was not the overt cause of Samson’s fall.

<sup>29</sup>George Hakewill, *An Apologie or Declaration of the Power and Providence of God in the Government of the World* (Oxford, 1630), 169–70.

<sup>30</sup>Clever, *Flower of Physicke*, 88. See also the epigram to one Mr. More, “To Morus, the Baulepate,” where being born under the “Venus starre” and being “lull’d . . . upon Venus lap” has caused hair loss. Note also the reference to the bald-pated fool designated Morus that seeks to link the epigram to the venerable—and, one has to say, much wittier—exchanges between Erasmus and Thomas More. William Gamage, *Linsi-Woolsie, or Two Centuries of Epigrammes* (Oxford, 1613), sig. E6r.

<sup>31</sup>Margaret Pelling, “Appearance and Reality: Barber-Surgeons, the Body and Disease,” in *London 1500–1700: The Making of the Metropolis*, ed. A. L. Beier and Roger Finlay (London: Longman, 1986), 102. Claude Quétel, *History of Syphilis*, trans. Judith Braddock and Brian Pike (Cambridge: Polity, 1990), 50, 57.

<sup>32</sup>Leonardo Fioravanti, *A Short Discours vppon Chirurgerie*, trans. John Hester (London, 1580), fol. 21r–v.

<sup>33</sup>Isa. 3:16–17. John Jewel, *The Seconde Tome of Homilies* (London, 1563), fol. 115v.

aging women suffering from the adverse effects of pretended beauty.<sup>34</sup> The wanton and sexually overactive maiden Dalila of the play *Nice Wanton*, for example, not only had exchanged her yellow locks for a bald head but was also crooked; disfigured by pock marks; suffering from aches, pains, and shaking hands; unable to eat properly; and going blind—baldness went along with her being “foule and horrible to se.”<sup>35</sup> Even if Dalila is a figure in a morality play and an exaggerated vision of female baldness, the allusions to sinfulness are very typical—and almost entirely absent from corresponding discussions of male baldness. There is a telling difference between early modern and our contemporary gendering of baldness: both figure baldness as predominantly male, but early modern culture was also keenly interested in depicting female baldness in specifically moralistic terms. This had a concomitant effect on how the mental link between masculinity and baldness was constructed. In early modern literature, women’s baldness was a potent symbol for the progressive degeneration caused by the worst female sins: sexual promiscuity was tied to several varieties of depravity, deception, and disorder, and all breaches of morality were encapsulated in the image of ensuing illness, death, and damnation. Even if male baldness could be linked with the pox, its moral context was markedly more lenient.

In real life, of course, even women could recognize hair loss as a normal symptom of less moralistically loaded illnesses. Alice Thornton records in her *Autobiography* how a violent ague she fell into after a miscarriage weakened her body such that she could not walk or stand up: “The haire on my head came off, my nailes of my fingers and toze came of, my teeth did shake, and ready to come out and grew blacke.” Her daughters Kate and Alice lost their hair when suffering from smallpox, while her son Robert did not.<sup>36</sup> This sort of baldness was often temporary, however, and indeed it is rare to find any mention of real women who were permanently bald—perhaps because they would have taken great care to appear only with their wigs.<sup>37</sup> Illness, of course, could touch both men and women.

These were extreme cases. The more standard interpretation, particularly for men, was that hair loss was caused by either a malignant humor that rooted out the

<sup>34</sup>*Nice Wanton, the Tudor Facsimile Texts* (London, 1560; repr., 1909), sig. B1v. Thomas Nashe, “Pierce Penilesse His Supplication to the Divell,” in *The Works of Thomas Nashe*, ed. Ronald B. McKerrow (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958), 1:182. On early modern cosmetics, see especially Frances Dolan, “Taking the Pencil Out of God’s Hand: Art, Nature and the Face-Painting Debate in Early Modern England,” *PMLA* 108:2 (1993).

<sup>35</sup>*Nice Wanton*, sig. B1v.

<sup>36</sup>Alice Thornton, *The Autobiography of Mrs. Alice Thornton, of East Newton, Co. York* (Durham: Surtees Society, 1875), 87–88, 157–59.

<sup>37</sup>A rare horror story of female hairlessness concerns Mary, Queen of Scots. Conscious to the last of the value of spectacle, she went to her death bewigged. When the executioner lifted her severed head to show it to the spectators, he was left clutching only her cap and wig, while her “very grey and near bald” head rolled back to the floor. The gruesome image also testifies to the importance, for women, of hiding baldness even in the most extreme circumstances. John Guy, *“My Heart Is My Own”: The Life of Mary Queen of Scots* (London: Harper Perennial, 2004), 8. Other biographers have chosen the view that she only wore her gray hair short to accommodate a wig. See Antonia Fraser, *Mary Queen of Scots* (London: Folio Society, 1969; repr., 2004), 525; and Retha Warnicke, *Mary Queen of Scots* (London: Rout-

hair, or by lack of the proper humors to nourish hair growth and keep skin healthy.<sup>38</sup> To remedy these complaints, dozens of recipes were suggested in early modern household books. These were often based on different sorts of lard and fat—especially bear's grease—aimed at softening and nourishing the skin, and herbal and animal ingredients for balancing the humors and restoring growth. Many promised confidently a fully recovered handsomeness: "Ye shall take a Hedgehogge, and burne it all to coales, and put the powder or ashes made fine and small, with Beares grease: and laye this oyntment ouer all the head of a balde man, and it will make his haire growe as fayre as euer it was."<sup>39</sup> Some manual writers did not seem very confident in the effectiveness of their advice: "It is sayde that Myse dung, with the ashes of burned Waspses, and of hasel Nuts, and a lytle vinegar of Roses put therto: doth trymly decke a bauld place with heayrs: if the same place be often tymes rubbed or annoiynted therewith."<sup>40</sup>

The ingredients of these remedies may seem somewhat outlandish today; nevertheless, they were ordinary fare in the medicinal kitchens of early modern home physicians. It is interesting that there is such a wealth of these recipes, suggesting that some effort was indeed devoted to curing baldness. Most household books of secrets refrain from commenting explicitly on what caused hair loss or baldness, but this was their way with most illnesses and complaints. All of them offer suggestions for making ointments and plasters to remedy hair loss and baldness—it was not a rare complaint, and certainly not one that early modern people would have considered unnecessary to treat. Neither do the recipe manuals suggest whether the remedies were devised for men or for women, but since the popular perception of the rarity of women's baldness was so widespread, there is little need to think that housewives would have prepared the plasters predominantly for themselves. When bald patches appeared on their heads, early modern men could benefit from the ministrations of their medically enlightened wives, or the expertise of barbers.<sup>41</sup>

If baldness needed to be medically treated, and if it indeed signaled a medical problem, one might speculate about its practical significance for early modern individuals. There is no way of knowing exactly what balding men were thinking, but consider the conjunction of practical hair loss and common knowledge about its medical meanings. Hair loss told the man experiencing it that his body was changing: it was losing moisture and growing cold. Thomas Whythorne

<sup>38</sup>Humphrey Lloyd, *The Treasury of Healthe* (London, 1550), sig. A4r. J. S., *Short Compendium*, 122. Concerning problems with different organs manifesting loss and change of hair, see Elyot, *Castell of Health*, fols. 3r–7v.

<sup>39</sup>Alessio Piemontese (pseud., Girolamo Ruscelli?), *The Thyrd and Last Parte of the Secretes of the Reuerende Maister Alexis of Piemont*, trans. William Warde (Amsterdam: Theatrum Orbis Terrarum, 1566/1977), fol. 34r–v.

<sup>40</sup>Thomas Lupton, *A Thousand Notable Things* (London, 1579), 130.

<sup>41</sup>See, for example, Lloyd, *Treasury of Healthe*, sigs. A4v–B3v; William Bullein, *Bulleins Bulwarke* (London, 1562), fols. 3r–4r, 77v–79r, 88r; Piemontese, *Thyrd Secretes*, fol. 34r–v; Alessio Piemontese, *The Fourth and Finall Booke of Secretes*, trans. Richard Androse (Amsterdam: Theatrum Orbis Terrarum (1569/1977), 1:32, 2:49–50; Thomas Vicary, *A Treasure for English Men* (London, 1587), 86; John Partridge, *The Widowes Treasure* (London, 1586), fol. D5r–v; Thomas Jeamson, *Artificiall Embellishment* (London, 1665), 104; and Pelling, "Appearance and Reality," 94–95, 102.



## A MANLY ORNAMENT

If baldness in women constituted striking ugliness—like the aforementioned Dalila, all bald women were foul and horrible to see—men could, for the most part, escape such extreme censure. Yet baldness emerged as a question of looks and attractiveness for men too. Even if there was an inbuilt tension in early modern masculinity as to how important questions of outward appearance should be, beauty could certainly bring many benefits to men as well as to women. The loss of good looks that baldness signified was, at least to an extent, a source of some anxiety.

Even for medical men and anatomists, hair was not just about usefulness and health. Its major effect was attractiveness. After explaining that hair shields the brain from hot and cold and is thus necessary for health, the London surgeon Thomas Vicary went on to extol its aesthetic functions: hair “maketh the forme or shape of the head to seeme more seemelier or beautifuller. For if the head were not heyred, the face & the head should seeme but one thing, and therefore the heyre formeth and shapeth the head from the face.”<sup>44</sup> Helkiah Crooke, the royal physician, agreed: hair was useful in four respects, as cover, as defense, as a way to consume excremental matter, and as “an ornament vnto the partes vnder them.”<sup>45</sup> Lack of hair, on the other hand, was a “deformity,” as the fictional lady discussants of *A Discourse of Auxiliary Beauty* clearly and repeatedly state, and deformity here does not just point to a specific feature departing from a norm; deformity was the common early modern term to denote “ugliness” in general.<sup>46</sup> It was all about the combination of aesthetic proportion and practical function—a man’s body was a perfect blend of both. Attractiveness was very central to constructions of masculinity, even if bodily beauty was usually considered a more feminine quality.

It is no wonder, then, that a more personal tone could also link baldness directly to the experience of how one seemed to others:

Because all and euerie one of vs, euen by the inclination and drawing on of Nature, couet to be faire, handsome, and well fauoured: to the attein- ing wherof, haire wel growen, is no slender helpe, which euen Nature her selfe hath appointed to spring and increase with vs, as we our selues rise in age. When this ornament of haire decaieth and falleth away, it striketh sore torments into the heart.<sup>47</sup>

This quote comes from the satirical *A Paradoxe, Prouing by reason and example, that Baldnesse is much better than bushie haire*, written by Synesius of Cyrene, a fourth- and fifth-century Greek bishop, and published in Abraham Fleming’s English translation in 1579. It could hardly be seen as a straightforwardly personal account of baldness, but with a small stretch of the imagination one may infer that thoughts like these were at least deemed plausible in their sixteenth-century guise. Longing for beauty, and all of the social benefits it was supposed to bestow on a

<sup>44</sup>Thomas Vicary, *The True Anatomye of Mans Body* (London, 1586), 12.

<sup>45</sup>Helkiah Crooke, *Microcosmographia* (London, 1615), 70.

<sup>46</sup>*A Discourse of Auxiliary Beauty* (London, 1656), 43–44, 77–78.

<sup>47</sup>Synesius *Paradoxe* sig. A4r.

person, was only human, and for men, who in early modern opinion could not otherwise boast of a particularly beautiful body, hair was clearly important. Maybe, as Synesius and Abraham Fleming emotively suggest, hair loss was a torment to the male heart, perhaps more so than other changes in one's appearance.

"How ugly is a bald pate?" snorted Thomas Dekker in his satirical guidebook for fashionable young men, *The Guls Horne-booke*, and answered: "it lookes like a face wanting a nose." A good head of hair, by contrast, "giues euen to a most wicked face a sweet proportion, and lookes like a meddow newly married to the Spring."<sup>48</sup> Early modern trendsetters clearly had need for outwardly well-furnished heads. Lady Mary Wroth, in *The Countess of Montgomery's Urania*, describing an especially repellent old dwarf, concentrated especially on his problem hair: "his haire had beene blacke, but now was growne grisled, yet still kept the naturall stubbornnesse of it being but thin, and those few hairees desirous to be seene stood staring, neither were they of any equall length, but like a horses maine."<sup>49</sup>

The dwarf had no beard "to distinguish his sexe," but abundant hair grew out of his huge wart—the damaging effects of the wrong kind of hair in the wrong places could hardly be made more graphic. Good hair was a sign of virile youth glowing like a spring meadow, but a balding head nodded towards bodily deformity and the ravages of time. Both texts make fun of fashionable young men's vanity and craving for newfangled ornamentation. In this context, a bald pate surely seemed more of a humiliation than in real life. Attractiveness, after all, was not the primary signifier of status for adult males in early modern England.

On the contrary, excessive attention to fashion and appearance, including long locks and barber-curled tresses, was counted as effeminacy: these were visual signs of city gallants and carpet knights; more suited to ladies' chambers than manly pursuits. Sixteenth-century satire ruthlessly targeted good-looking men sporting "Fair amber tresses of the fairest haire / That ere were waved by our London aire."<sup>50</sup> In conduct books, such as Baldassare Castiglione's *The Courtyer*, translated by Thomas Hoby and published in 1561, male vanity was also exemplified by attention to hair: it was the vice of "curiosity" and "preciseness to carrie a mans heade very stedfast for feare of ruffling his haire, or to keepe in the bottom of his cappe a looking glasse, and a combe in his sleeve, and to have alwaies at his heeles up and downe the streetes a Page with a Sponge and a Brush."<sup>51</sup> But even if setting one's curled locks in front of a mirror or having one's tresses pampered at the barber's signified effeminacy, healthy hair and reasonable attention to its care was a sign of manhood. Since talking about male grooming was such a taboo in a culture that wanted to stress strength, power, and reason as masculine attributes, not much frank talk about male hair can be found in early modern texts. However,

<sup>48</sup>Dekker, *Guls Horne-booke*, 227.

<sup>49</sup>Mary Wroth, *The Countess of Mountgomerie's Urania*, ed. Betty S. Travitsky and Patrick Cullen (Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1996), 113.

<sup>50</sup>John Marston, "Satyres," in *The Works of John Marston*, ed. J. O. Halliwell (London: John Russell Smith, 1856), 3:221. See also "The Insatiate Countesse," in *Works of Marston*, 3:107; and Patrick Hannay, *A Happy Husband* (London, 1618), sig. B3v.

<sup>51</sup>Baldassare Castiglione, *The Courtyer*, trans. Thomas Hoby (London, 1561), 47.



the palpable anxiety and the relentless humor present in discussions of baldness testify that hair was exceedingly important to men's sense of masculinity. Male attractiveness and sexual confidence were both tied to discussions of baldness.

Indeed, the single most important reason for coveting bodily beauty, according to early modern writers, was the effect it would have on the opposite sex. This was true for both men and women. Beauty was thought to give rise to love, where deformity only brought about loathing. The Neoplatonically inspired emotion theory dictated a direct link between outward appearance and social and affective accomplishment. This is the context in which early modern readers would have understood Synesius when he ironically lamented not only his own sorry fate but the aesthetic torments his looks brought to the ladies: "what offence haue I committed, that I should become so vnsauourie and vnsweete a morsell vnto women kinde?"<sup>52</sup> Even if the tone of the *Paradoxe* forces one to take it all with a pinch of salt, it seems that the clarity with which possible male anxieties are pointed out signals that worries about masculine appearance were not negligible. Only after stating the obvious can the case for paradox be presented and baldness actually emerge as better than bushy hair. In studies of early modern masculinity, virility and sexual prowess have been labeled as central ingredients of successful manhood.<sup>53</sup> An unsavory appearance was no help at all in striving for sexual success.

Men too, then, conceptualized their desirability largely in terms of looks. Outward appearance may not have been a crucial factor in furthering men's relationships with women, but it certainly helped, and handsome men frequently attributed their apparently lively sex lives to the pull of their beauty. In his brief life of the traveler Sir Henry Blount, Aubrey related a joke that bears on this theme. One night in Heycock's ordinary in the Strand, Sir Henry, a quick-witted baldy, listened to Colonel Bettridge, "one of the handsomest men about the Towne," brag about "how much the woemen loved him." For Sir Henry, this was a bit much: "Sir H. Blount did lay a wager, that let them two goe together to a Bordello, he only without money, with his handsome person, and Sir Henry with a twenty-shilling piece on his bald croone, that the wenches should choose Sir Henry before Bettridge; and Sir H. won the wager."<sup>54</sup> How is one to read this jest? It seems the idea that good looks were important for men's success with the ladies is only reinforced by the tale. However, other things mattered. Predictably, prostitutes preferred money over looks, and maybe also well-behaved gentlemen over vain braggarts. This may not have been quite as self-evident as one might think, considering that contemporary male fictions about prostitutes and their reasons for

<sup>52</sup>Synesius *Paradoxe* sig. A4v.

<sup>53</sup>Anthony Fletcher, *Gender, Sex, and Subordination in England 1500–1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 93. Fletcher, "Manhood, the Male Body, Courtship and the Household in Early Modern England," *History* 84 (1999): 426–27. See also Jonas Liliequist, "Masculinity and Virility: Representations of Male Sexuality in Eighteenth-Century Sweden," in *The Trouble with Ribs: Women, Men, and Gender in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Anu Korhonen and Kate Lowe (Helsinki: Collegium for Advanced Studies, University of Helsinki, 2007), available at [http://www.helsinki.fi/collegium/e-series/volumes/volume\\_2/index.htm](http://www.helsinki.fi/collegium/e-series/volumes/volume_2/index.htm). Edward Behrend-Martinez, "Manhood and the Neutered Body in Early Modern Spain," *Journal of Social History* 38 (2005): 1076–77, 1083.

<sup>54</sup>Aubrey, *Brief Lives*, 25–26.

entering the trade were so different from current understanding. Yet it is curious that the place to arrange a contest of masculine prowess was a brothel, as if prostitutes were the best arbiters of manly worth. In a way, of course, they were. In the early modern imagery, if not always in reality, prostitutes competed for clients with their beauty, and the most successful could choose their clients on the basis of who pleased them best. Today, of course, a prostitute's choosing to be paid for her services rather than offering them for free is not much of a joke. But perhaps even more may be read in the story. How about a suggestion that a sense of humor countered the negative effects of baldness? Or that baldness was perhaps not quite as detrimental to a man's attractiveness to women as men generally feared?

What, then, was the link between a bald pate and sexuality? Virility and sexual prowess were not primarily talked about in these terms, but, following a medieval tradition, male physiology, maturity, and virility all had their bodily manifestation in abundant hair, be it beards, body hair, or head hair.<sup>55</sup> Baldness, as such, was probably neither here nor there when men assessed their sexual success, but the link to disease, particularly the pox, and the link to old age made baldness a significant threat in the shadow of which sexual anxiety too could appear. And, most important, if baldness was seen as unattractive, and both lust and love were ideologically tied to handsomeness, then baldness necessarily threatened to reduce one's chances in the emotional games of sex.

#### PARADOXICAL PLEASURES

Too bleak a picture ought not to be painted, however, for there are also some texts that depict baldness in a positive light. Sometimes it could just be a fact about somebody's appearance.<sup>56</sup> In humorous texts, baldness could go well with a general pleasure-loving stance to life; the Cobbler of Canterbury was strong, large, tall, well-set, and broad-chested—and bald-pated. Nevertheless, he “was a mate / That loued well a bony lasse” and enjoyed his ale, sporting the red nose of all inveterate drinkers of popular literature. Nothing pitiable about this baldy!

Indeed, one standard way of coping with baldness was to turn it into a joke or use it as a prop in a jest. The few early modern Englishmen who are known to have been bald seem to have had good fun at the expense of their bare heads. Both bald men mentioned in John Aubrey's *Brief Lives*, Sir Henry Blount and Thomas Hobbes, certainly seem to have been aware of the comic potential of baldness. Aubrey expressly commented on Hobbes's easygoing nature: “being naturally of a cheerful and pleasant humor, he affected not at all austerity and gravity to looke severe,” and even though this observation mainly ties in with the kind of beard

<sup>55</sup>Joan Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science, and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); 181. See also Karen Harvey, “The Substance of Sexual Difference: Change and Persistence in Representations of the Body in Eighteenth-Century England,” *Gender & History* 14, no. 2 (2002): 215–16.

<sup>56</sup>In an early newspaper announcement, for example, John Cox, a young servant on the run from his master after having stolen a horse, a gold ring, manuscripts in chemistry, some money, and a pair of brass pistols, was described simply as being “of a low stature, of a ruddy complexion, without hair, wearing a periwig.” *The Publick Intelligence, Communicating the Chief Occurrences and Proceedings within The Dominions of England, Scotland, and Ireland* (25 February to 3 March 1655): 362.

Hobbes wore (whiskers, and only a small tip under his lip), his humorous attitudes can surely be extended to his courageously sporting an uncovered head when at home.<sup>57</sup>

Jestbook heroes like the Cobbler of Canterbury presented a different set of masculine qualities from those of patriarchally inflected conduct books, more in line with the rebellious youthful maleness suggested by Shepard, and the quirks of their outward appearance too receive a different interpretation in this context. However, baldness was also a general sign of comic character, as witnessed by real-life and stage fools. Natural fools, whom professional comedians to some extent imitated, were usually shaven, both to keep them neat and tidy and also as a vague form of medical treatment of their witless condition, so baldness too, in some cases, came to be associated with the ready laughter that fools were expected to inspire.<sup>58</sup> In the late sixteenth century, even Catholic monks' shaved heads could be associated with laughter: Simon Robson's collection of witty sentences, *The Choise of Change*, lists "three things vsed by monks which prouoke other menne to laugh at their follies," mentioning first their hairless crowns: "They are shauen and notcht on the head like fooles."<sup>59</sup> In the Protestant context, religious baldness seemed false modesty, not true humility, and thus it could be easily used to turn contentious imagery upside down.

Wig-wearers' shaven heads too invited comic treatment. Joseph Hall, bishop of Norwich, satirized them in quite a funny narrative in *Virgidemiarum*: on the street he meets what looks like a "lusty courtier" with abundant hair and salutes him with all due decorum, but when the courtier raises his "bonnet" in a return greeting, the wind blows off his "Periwinke." The "headless" man starts and runs after his wig, the wig "overrunning" him in the "sportfull" wind and finally landing in a ditch. While fetching his unruly wig, the raging man curses all courtesy, and Hall stands laughing at the "bar'd bone" of his head. A head shaven to accommodate a wig was satirized as pride—how could the fashionable periwigs made of animal hair or the "floor-strowd locks from of the Barbers sheares" honorably replace one's own perfectly decent hair?<sup>60</sup> That in itself was folly enough, but the second proposition introduced by wigs was that they were used to cover up worse problems.

Indeed the fashion for wigs could be—satirically—explained as a consequence of the prevalence of syphilis and the ensuing hair loss. The witless gallant Bizardo of the play *The Wit of a Woman* comments on his fashionable comrade Bragardo's wig by raising this question: "a periwig, a pox on it: and yet I curse to late: for, but for the poxe, it had neuer been vsed, for I haue heard that in olde time, balde men were had in great reuerence."<sup>61</sup> This was not to be taken seriously, but

<sup>57</sup>Aubrey, *Brief Lives*, 153–54.

<sup>58</sup>Korhonen, *Fellows of Infinite Jest*, 156–57.

<sup>59</sup>Simon Robson, *The Choise of Change* (London, 1598), sig. K1v. Their other funny characteristics were bare feet, reminiscent of beggars; and the ropes they used for belts, as thieves might. See also Kaartinen, *Religious Life*, 88.

<sup>60</sup>Joseph Hall, *Virgidemiarum* (London, 1597), 60–61.

<sup>61</sup>A Pleasant Comodie, Wherein Is Merily Shewen: *The Wit of a Woman* (London, 1604), sig. G3r. See also Richard Corson, *Fashions in Hair: The First Five Thousand Years* (London: Peter Owen, 1965),

still the idea of a lost golden age when baldness did not matter, or was indeed a venerable condition, resonated with an audience of men negotiating issues of their masculinity. Wearing a wig could be just a fashion statement, but if the reason for adopting it was involuntary baldness underneath, questions about the wearer's manly status emerged as well.

If hiding one's baldness under a wig could be comic, so was reveling in one's baldness—but at least that could be done with an appealing note of irony. Praise of baldness was indeed a common comic theme, one that even Lady Emilia in Castiglione's *The Courtier* listed among entertaining paradoxes, together with praise of the fly and the quartan fever.<sup>62</sup> Thomas Dekker, for example, made great play of extolling bald pates in *Satiro-mastix* (1602). First, two of his characters, Sir Vaughan and Asinius Bubo, joke about a certain bald knight and come to the conclusion that it is “an excellent quallitie to bee balde,” Bubo even adding, “if I might ha my will, Ide rather be a balde Gentleman then a hairy; for I am sure the best and tallest Yeomen in England haue balde heads: me thinkes haire is a scuruie lowsie commodity.” However, a disagreement ensues and their companion Horace is given leave to expound upon the usefulness and grace of hairy heads: baldness makes a man “bare in name and in authority” and diminishes his honor in the eyes of others, or, as Horace concludes, “if faire haire to beauty ad such grace / Baldnes must needes be vgly, vile and base.” Despite all of the debating, none of these characters are serious. The key to the scene can be found in the final comment by Mistress Miniver, a witness to the whole exchange: “By my truely I neuer thought you could ha pickt such strange things out a haire before.”<sup>63</sup> Dekker's debates were presented tongue firmly in cheek.

Hair was indeed a subject trivial enough to seem very silly if debated seriously; baldness was counted among such favorite topics for praise as women, folly, and the ass, as exercise in paradox, rhetorically proving the unprovable and untrue. Fleming, the translator of Synesius of Cyrene's *Paradoxe*, felt the need to justify his preparation for publication of “a toie so ridiculous, as this appeareth to be, penned in the praise of Baldnesse,” but clearly thought it was all good fun. The subject matter of the book, he promised potential buyers, would be entertaining, if not particularly edifying: “Whosoeuer therefore, at some euening vacation from their necessarie affaires, shall pleasantlie passe ouer this prettie Pamphlet (being but a houres reading)” could find a welcome distraction, and maybe also learn something of the fine art of arguing a case.<sup>64</sup> Devising absurd positive meanings for baldness was a game, an example of the Renaissance delight in intellectual play that could be indulged in to hone one's debating skills and to entertain one's listen-

205; 215–16; Quétel, *History of Syphilis*, 57.

<sup>62</sup>Castiglione, *Courtier*, sig. N2v. See also Barnabe Rich, *Opinion Diefied* (London, 1613), 2; and Rosalie Colie, *Paradoxia Epidemica: The Renaissance Tradition of Paradox* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), 3–4.


<sup>63</sup>The debate continues with another character, Crispinus, praising baldness by applying a *memento mori* theme and even cosmic imagery. Dekker, *Satiro-mastix*, 227, 238–40. See also Dromio's and Antipholus's baldness banter in Shakespeare, *Comedy of Errors*, 2.2.70–108.

<sup>64</sup>Fleming in Synesius *Paradoxe* sig. A2r–v.

ers. But true paradox was not just funny. The mock encomium often chose as its topic something that mattered. Of course, on the ideological level, men's worries about their hair were silly and inconsequential. At the same time, mocking eulogies gained a greater effect if impending baldness was a genuine threat.

All in all, baldness could not be counted as a good thing. The insistence with which early modern writers tried to present it as inconsequential itself gives reason to think it may not have been so. It was difficult to talk about hair loss seriously, because its status as a marker of masculinity was so precarious—outward appearance and the body's vulnerable qualities went against the standard definitions of masculinity and threatened to suggest effemination. No matter how clearly early modern people associated both natural baldness and shavenness with men, not women, its masculine meanings lay not in reinforcing what was considered proper for men but in what threatened to diminish manhood.

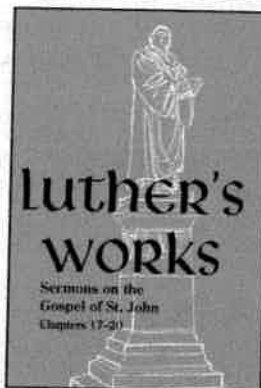
Baldness, and the question of male appearance in general, did indeed contribute to the larger, more ideologically loaded spheres of masculine identity. The anxieties produced by one's appearance, particularly its failings, deformities, and signs of aging, could be counted among the emotional weaknesses that men needed to control. Effeminacy lurked around the corner every time good looks was the goal of a man's actions. If baldness in many ways signaled problematic manhood, it also demanded not to be taken too much to heart, or masculine ideals would be breached from another direction.<sup>65</sup>

What can one make of the tension between the triviality apparent in most discussion on baldness and the seriousness with which masculinity's more dignified characteristics could be debated? There is a potential ideological conflict between the wish to define masculinity as strength, prowess, reason, and control and worrying about such a trifle as a bald pate or such "feminine" concerns as outward appearance. Could a manly man dabble with ointments to make his hair grow? Could he talk about his baldness seriously, without seeming effeminate, or was it safer to resort to humor? The mock encomia, the satire on vanity, quipping about flies on one's bald pate, letting girls in a brothel decide what is man's crowning glory. It is all to do with this tension. Sometimes not being serious was the surest way to maintain masculine honor. 

<sup>65</sup>On masculinity and control of emotions, see Katherine Hodgkin, "Thomas Whythorne and the Problems of Mastery," *History Workshop Journal* 29 (1990): 21; Fletcher, "Manhood," 95, and Foyster, *Manhood*, passim, esp. 139. On fears of effeminacy, see Fletcher, "Manhood," 87; and Susan Shapiro, "'Yon Plumed Dandebrot': Male 'Effeminacy' in English Satire and Criticism," *Review of English Studies* 39, no. 155 (1989): 406–8.

## Introducing NEW volumes for **Luther's Works: American Edition**

Concordia Publishing House is pleased to announce an expansion of Luther's Works: American Edition. The new volumes of the classic series are translated into clear, accessible, modern English, making them ideal for undergraduate use. In addition, the introductions and footnotes make significant academic contributions and thus are an important resource for graduate-level research. The new volumes present texts that have been the focus of recent scholarship, most of which have never before appeared in English. Read what scholars are saying:



"Among the greatest and most prolific theologians of Christian history, Martin Luther still speaks to us today. This twenty-volume new series splendidly complements its fifty-five-volume predecessor and offers a treasure-trove of writings never before available in English, writings crucial to understanding Luther's life, thought, and profound influence throughout the centuries. Offering readable yet reliable translations, well introduced and appropriately annotated, this new series should delight scholars as well as engage laity and clergy."

*Mark U. Edwards, Jr., Academic Dean, Harvard Divinity School*

"Concordia Publishing House is providing a tremendous service to historians, theologians, pastors, and students by producing these new translations of Luther's works. The editors have chosen key texts for illustrating Luther's life and thought, from his earliest works to the biographies written soon after his death. The volumes devoted to Luther's sermons, lectures, and disputations are especially welcome, because they will give English readers a more complete picture of Luther the preacher and professor."

*Amy Nelson Burnett, Professor of History, University of Nebraska—Lincoln*

### **Become a subscriber and save.**

**Volume 69 (John 17–20) is now available • 15-5169LLW**

**Volume 58 (Sermons V) will be available late 2010**

Each volume is currently priced at \$49.99, but as a subscriber you pay only \$34.99 plus shipping, a 30% saving. Volumes will release once a year and will be shipped to you automatically.

### **Features of Luther's Works: American Edition**

- Clear English translation is accessible for undergraduate use.
- Edited according to the highest academic standards with introductions and notes that offer readers helpful guides to the context and content of the reformer's writings.
- Significant genres of Luther's writings are expanded, such as sermons, prefaces, disputations, and biblical interpretation.
- Translation is fully cross-referenced to the authoritative Weimar Edition.
- Indexes for Scripture citation, persons, and subjects are included.



**Order at [cph.org](http://cph.org) or call 1-800-325-3040**

*Learn more at [cph.org/luthersworks](http://cph.org/luthersworks)*