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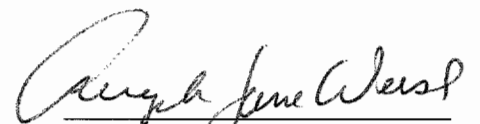
The Culture of Beards in Shakespeare

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Master of Arts
Department of English,
Seton Hall University

May 06, 2008


Thesis Mentor


Second Reader

Literature Review

There has been extensive scholarship relating to representations of masculinity, gender, and otherness in the works of Shakespeare. Scholars agree that the descriptions of the characters are keys to understanding the way Shakespeare related these ideas to his audience. Male characters who were not adult men were given feminine descriptions. In addition, the gender of the characters was created by dialogue and costumes because boys played the roles of both adult men and women. Some descriptions were indistinct, and introduced the audience to characters that existed outside of English society.

In “Naked Lear,” Millicent Bell explains that the clothes worn by citizens during the times of Elizabeth and James I represented the social class people belonged to. Laws were passed to prevent citizens from dressing out of their class. Bell argues that in *King Lear* the social classes of the characters and their identities are determined by their clothing. She claims that Shakespeare used the importance of clothing to demonstrate that the human identity is “transformative” (61). According to Bell, the identities of Kent and Edgar are transformed by their dress. The fact that their social class is reduced is secondary compared to the alteration of their identities; accordingly, their transformation foreshadows King Lear’s own metamorphosis. Lear is stripped of his social class and becomes someone else. King Lear is referred to as “the old man” after he removes his royal garbs, and his new title suggests that he is a different person (60).

Gender identity is also altered by dress in several of Shakespeare’s plays. Many scholars believe that gender lines were blurred on Shakespeare’s stage because he had boy actors playing female characters who were disguised as men. In “Androgyny Seen Through Shakespeare’s Disguise,” Robert Kimbrough articulates that Shakespeare’s

comedies “encompass the full range” of androgyny (19). Kimbrough explains that the “personal/social” and the “psychic/mythic” aspects of androgyny exist in the comedies of Shakespeare (19). He argues that “sex is genetically determined. Gender is not” (19). The gender of the actors was determined by their costumes. Charles Casey’s article, “Gender Trouble in Twelfth Night” adds support to Kimbrough’s theory. He believes that gender is created in Shakespeare’s plays, and that male actors playing women who are in drag is not supposed to be part of Shakespeare’s comedic elements. Kimbrough finds more support from H. R. Coursen who argues in his work, “Disguise in Trevor Nunn’s Twelfth Night” that “the disguising of gender in Shakespeare becomes an intersection at which the issues of sexuality can be explored” (84). The element of disguise is a doorway that allows actors to explore the multiple dimensions of a character which are both physical and psychological.

It is important to point out that the physical appearance of Shakespearean actors was only part of their performance. The language used in the play also helped to create the gender of the characters. Catherine Belsey uses the ideas of Saussure and Derrida in her article, “Disrupting Sexual Difference: Meaning and Gender in the Comedies” to deconstruct sexual difference in Shakespearean comedies. Belsey argues that language defines the roles of men and women; therefore, the lines of gender in literature can be blurred. According to Belsey, “fictional texts neither reflect a real world nor prescribe an ideal one. But they do offer definitions and redefinitions which make it possible to reinterpret a world we have taken for granted” (633-634). Shakespeare’s audience would associate gender with the language that the characters in the play used. Mary Thomas Crane’s theory supports Belsey’s idea that language creates identity. “In Male Pregnancy

and Cognitive Permeability in Measure for Measure,” Mary Thomas Crane uses cognitive theory to argue that language can create our perception of the mind and body. She says that the identities of the characters were able to change because of the ability of their minds to invent different versions of the “self” through the language used (279). When boy actors spoke from the female perspective, the lines of gender blurred because the audience knew that the women were really boys; however, the audience was able to identify the boys as women because of the language that the actors used.

The identities of the characters were also created by the dialogue that happened between the performers and their audience. Schleiner argues in “Voice, Ideology, and Gendered Subjects: The Case of *As You Like It* and *Two Gentlemen*,” that there are “gendered ideological subjects” formed by both the characters in the plays and the audiences that watched the performances (285-288). Louise Schleiner concentrates on *As You Like It*; however, she also analyzes the language used in many works of Shakespeare. Her analysis shows that the lines in Shakespeare’s works had different meanings to the varying class levels at his performances. The audience’s psyche defined their perception of the work; therefore, his works were subjective as were the gendered ideologies.

Dialogue and clothing were essential in defining the identity of Shakespeare’s characters; however, the most important aspect of the male identity recreated on the stage was beard growth. Mark Albert Johnston explains in his article, “Playing with the Beard: Courtly and Commercial Economies in Richard Edwards’s *Damon and Pithias* and John Lyly’s *Midas*” that the male beard was “arguably the most important of all the visual social signifiers performed on the Elizabethan stage, signifying in its absence as well as its presence and gesturing toward a complex interplay among masculinity, theatricality,

and economics” (79). The presence of the beard on the stage was representative of early modern Englishmen. Beards on the faces of Englishmen represented masculinity, status, and wealth.

Herbert Moller also discusses the significance of the beard in early modern England. In “The Accelerated Development of Youth: Beard Growth as a Biological Marker,” Moller theorizes that facial hair is one biological marker “in the history of the West” (748). He argues that socioeconomic conditions and genetics play a role in determining the age that boys will grow facial hair. Moller articulates that beard growth occurred later between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries than it happens in males now. He goes on to argue that “Shakespeare and his public” were aware that beard growth was latent in young adults (754). That is why boy acting companies purchased prosthetic beards. Young men had to wear prosthetic beards in order to play the roles of adult males. The audience would not have seen them as adult men if they were beardless because boys were considered a separate gender from men and women during Shakespeare’s time. The prosthetic beards enabled the boy actors to play the parts of men because men were characterized by facial hair. Will Fisher argues that the beard was the dominating characteristic that defined gender for Europeans during the sixteenth century. He points out that beards separated men from boys and women. That is why the majority of men in portraits that were painted during the sixteenth century were bearded.

Gender and masculinity were the physical and social aspects of the beard that were associated with the Englishman; however, facial hair wasn’t always favored in England. In his book, *One Thousand Beards: A Cultural History of Facial Hair*, Allan Peterkin discusses the history of the beard. There were many centuries when Europeans

did not wear facial hair. In these periods, it was dangerous to walk the streets of Europe bearded. Men with facial hair were associated with otherness. This belief changed when Europeans encountered the Indians of the Americas. Elliott Horowitz theorizes in his work, "The New World and the Changing Face of Europe," that the beard became the distinction between Europeans and the "New World Other" (1181). There are historical accounts that many explorers neglected shaving their beards during their expeditions. When the Conquistadores arrived in the New World, their appearance was striking to the Indians because they were not accustomed to facial hair. According to Horowitz, the Indians were described as being smooth, and it was extremely rare to find an Indian with facial hair.

Beardedness in Shakespeare's works continues to raise different theories about the significance of facial hair and the male identity. Most research focuses on gender identity and facial hair. There is also research on the beard as a marker of masculinity. The research on otherness is divided between those who focus on beardedness as otherness and the other caused by beardlessness.

The Culture of Beards in Shakespeare

Beards have either been part of dominant or sub-cultures throughout the history of England. The popularity of the beard fluctuated because of the influential ideologies, trends, and religious decrees of Spain, France, and Italy on early modern England. In the 6th and 7th centuries, Europeans associated beards and long hair with economic status. The beards and heads of slaves were shaved during this time in order to separate the master from his servants. Remnants of this practice, in the 9th century, created the assumption that those who were beardless or had short hair were inferior, and members of the servant class. The beard was such a distinguishing facet in the determination of one's identity that a nobleman's title could be stripped if his beard were removed. Religious procedures also affected whether or not beards were worn by European society. The Roman Catholic Church often instituted change by ordering their priests to either grow or shave their beards. This practice extended out from the church and established change throughout Europe.

In his book, *One Thousand Beards: A Cultural History of Facial Hair*, Allan Peterkin discusses the historical and cultural significance of the beard. England expanded and became more powerful in the later centuries of the middle ages. English society began to create trends and influence the faces of Europe. There were times when the culture rejected the beard because it was out of fashion or because it was associated with those outside of the English society. Peterkin states that beards were so scarce in England during the thirteenth century that it was dangerous for those who were bearded to walk the streets. During this time beards were associated with foreigners. It was possible for the bearded to be removed from England or worse (27).

Over the centuries, beardedness and beardlessness was also influenced by the Catholic Church's vision of facial hair; however, England began to resist the traditions of the Catholic Church. Beards became fashionable in England during the fourteenth century because many members of the English upper-class were bearded. The clergy hoped to change this trend by forbidding priests to grow beards, since society followed the trends of the church in the past. Their efforts failed because many priests disregarded this rule and grew out their beards (27). The trends of England swayed priests to grow their beards rather than the church convincing the English to shave theirs. Many English clergy also used their beards to make religious statements. During the sixteenth century, the Roman clergy unanimously stopped wearing beards but the Protestants grew out their beards as part of their separation from Catholic Church (31).

Kings also influenced beard growth because it was in the best interest of their subjects to present themselves in whatever manner showed their allegiance to the kingdom. Henry VI issued a decree in 1447 that outlawed the wearing of mustaches. The decree stated that the upper lip had to be shaved every two weeks (28). According to Peterkin, in 1521, Henry VIII cut his hair short, kept his beard, and ordered his court to follow suit (29). Ironically, Peterkin states that in 1535, Henry VIII taxed citizens that were bearded even though he was bearded himself (30). Between the years 1542-1553, several anti-beard decrees were passed. Many of these decrees affected lawyers because English attorneys were not allowed to be bearded. In 1553, a decree permitted attorneys to wear beards if they paid a beard tax. The monarchy ended the practice of taxing the bearded by repealing all of the anti-beard laws during the 1560's (30-31). During this period there was a rise of a "growing facial-fur lobby" in England that consisted of

dominant members of English society. They believed that the beard was part of an Englishman's identity (31-32).

The plays of Shakespeare demonstrate the significance of the beard during the sixteenth century. Plays reflect the history and the culture of the society that the playwright exists within. Shakespeare understood that many things were symbolized by beardedness or beardlessness, and his works reflected the various associations with the beard. Many scholars have theorized about the symbolic nature of the beard in Shakespeare's plays; however, they tend to focus on one distinction that beards symbolize in a work. Distinctly different meanings associated with facial hair co-exist within Shakespeare's plays.

Gender and Masculinity

One of the meanings associated with the beard in the works of Shakespeare is gender distinction. Will Fisher argues in his essay, "The Renaissance Beard: Masculinity in Early Modern England," that the beard during the renaissance distinguished men from both boys and women (157). During this period women, boys, and men were considered to be three separate genders. The beard was one of the characteristics associated with adult males. The majority of women during the Renaissance did not have hair on their faces. Also, most boys did not grow facial hair until they were in their early twenties. Boys who could grow a beard were not permitted to until they established their place in society. Fisher states that we must understand the differences between our understanding of gender differentiations and people's understanding throughout the Renaissance:

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” (158).

Fisher offers physical evidence to support his argument about the significance of the beard. He backs up this statement with a transgression into art history. He brings to our attention that the majority of men in portraits from 1530-1630 have “some sort of facial hair”. According to Fisher, Roy Strong collected “approximately three-hundred-and-fifty portraits of men...” in his “encyclopedic” work, *Tudor & Jacobean Portraits*. In this collection “over three-hundred-and-twenty...” men are “...depicted with facial hair” (158). Fisher points out that “for every portrait of a man without a beard, there are about ten portraits of men with beards” (158). This information suggests that nine out of every ten men were bearded between the years of 1530-1630.

Some may argue that the reason so many men have beards in the portraits is because it was a fashion trend to wear a beard. That is a reasonable assumption; however, there were several styles of beards worn during that period. Fisher’s research concluded that “there were at least fifteen distinct and recognizable beard styles worn at the time...” (159). It is logical to acknowledge that trends tend to have variations, but not to the degree that beards had. Many of the styles seemed to represent a man’s social class, strength, and profession. This suggests that beards were not a fad but part of the masculine identity.

Fisher argues that there is evidence beyond portraits that support his theory that the beard was part of the masculine identity during the Renaissance (159). He points out that beards were “common on the Renaissance stage” (159). Fisher states that beards were “mentioned in all but four of Shakespeare’s plays; and in *As You Like It* alone, there are over twenty references to them” (159). He points out that even if beards are not mentioned in *Richard III*, *Henry VIII*, *Titus Andronicus*, and *Pericles* that does not mean that actors did not wear beards during their performances (Fisher 159).

There is support for Fisher’s theory in Elliott Horowitz’s work, “The New World and the Changing Face of Europe.” Horowitz points out that Henry VIII was known for having a red beard (1196-1198). One of the most historic accounts of Henry’s beard was in 1519 (1197). According to Horowitz, Henry VIII and Francis I, the king of France, made a pact through letters that they would not shave their beards until they met with one another. It is noted that when Henry VIII and Francis I met they were both bearded (1198). One of the things that actors were known for was exaggerating characteristics of historic figures. Since it is documented in history that Henry VIII often grew out his beard, then Fisher’s argument that Shakespearean plays that did not mention beards still may have had bearded actors is probable.

Documents have survived that show false beards were worn by boy actors. Fisher provides a list of beards that were rented by a boy acting company for their performance of *Alba* in 1604 (163). The list that Fisher cites shows that there were many different kinds of beards rented for the performance. It is plausible to assume that the style and color of a beard was just as significant as having one. If a beard’s appearance warranted nothing then there would not have been the need for actors to rent or purchase different

kinds. Likewise, we can surmise “that differing styles of facial hair seem to confer different degrees of masculinity” (173).

Fisher articulates that the beard is “associated with the ‘masculine’ social roles of soldier and father” (172). According to Fisher, “a beard announces a man’s ‘Manhood’ or social position”. Similarly, Fisher argues, “just as beard growth was partially correlated with martial ability, it was also partially correlated with reproductive capacity” (173). The beard was not just a symbol of this thought process; it was medically believed that beard growth was related to the “production of semen” during the Renaissance. Therefore, the hairs of a man’s beard represented his fertility.

Many scholars have researched the importance of the beard as a symbol of the masculine identity. Herbert Moller also states that beard growth was associated with masculinity; however, he adds that the economic and social status of males was also correlated with the accumulation of facial hair. He explains that beards were a genetic marker that signified when a boy became a man. Prior to the nineteenth century, beard growth occurred much later than it does now (750-755). According to Moller, between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries most males grew a beard by the age of 21 (754-755). Moller explains that “in social life, a young man’s role depended on his status and ability” (754). Society used facial hair as an indicator of a young man’s potential and as a measurement of his experience.

Beard growth usually occurred in young men by the age of twenty-one in the sixteenth century. Moller discusses that males who did not grow a beard by this age were insecure about their future (753-755). Many young men turned to hair growing products because they believed that there were fewer opportunities for beardless men. Moller states that a famous Swiss physician, Felix Platter (1536-1614), wrote in his diary that he and a friend bought

nostrum to promote beard growth (753). Platter was over nineteen at the time of this purchase. Moller adds that when Platter was twenty he wrote a letter to his father that expressed his concern that “he might not be licensed by the board of physicians in Basel because he was still beardless and looked too youthful” (753). Moller adds that Platter was allowed to start his practice at the age of 21 even though he “lacked the facial mark of male maturity, so important in his time to convey the image of medical credibility” (753). According to Moller, later portraits of Platter present him “with a mustache and a well-trimmed beard” (753).

Mark Albert Johnston also theorizes that the beard was a major signifier of a man’s masculinity, wealth and position in society. According to Johnston:

From a modern perspective, it is easy to assume that the arrival of a beard was a matter of maturation in a physiological sense, but it is important to resist this logic since we know that boys who were still apprentices were dissuaded from sporting beards by charges levied against their Masters. Rather than acting as a naturalized marker of adulthood (a logic that patriarchy has an obvious interest in maintaining), the beard seems to have been largely a constructed signifier that conformed to the laws of both courtly and commercial economics (92-93).

The laws and customs of the sixteenth century could render a man a boy due to his economic condition regardless of his ability to grow a beard. Therefore, the beard became a symbol of both a man’s masculine and economic identity. Johnston argues that the growth of a beard symbolized a commodity that men tried to obtain (91). This association with the beard may have stemmed from the rein of Henry VIII (79-80).

Although Henry VIII demanded in 1535 that everyone in his court grow his beard, Henry was bearded for a long time before he ordered his court to maintain beardedness. (79). Johnston states that “Henry appears in a 1520 portrait by an unknown artist with a neatly trimmed but conspicuously present beard” (Johnston 79). Ironically, coins were produced by England’s mint in 1526 that had the image of Henry VIII clean shaven on the coins. According to Johnston, Henry VIII persisted in fostering the style of his court, and had gold coins produced in 1544 with the image of himself bearded. This helped to influence Henry’s court to associate masculinity and wealth to the golden beard of their king (80). According to Johnston, Henry VIII was one of the reasons that the presence of beards on the stage was important during the sixteenth century.

The connections that society had with the beard spread to the Renaissance stage. Since the theater companies consisted of mostly boy actors during this period, prosthetic beards were widely used. Johnston argues, “it is easy to imagine that the early modern prosthetic beard was necessarily most profoundly realized as visually constitutive of masculinity in productions by troupes of boy actors” (80). Johnston states that “the early modern beard was arguably the most important of all the visual social signifiers performed on the Elizabethan stage, signifying in its absence as well as its presence and gesturing toward a complex interplay among masculinity, theatricality, and economics” (79). The use of prosthetic beards on the stage allowed the audience to associate the gender, economic, and social status of the character portrayed.

In his work, “Prosthetic Gods: Subject/Object in Early Modern England,” Fisher argues that the beard was one of the objects that were “commodified” during the renaissance (16-17). The audience accepted the identities of the bearded actors because the sixteenth

century was filled with characteristics and relationships that were negotiated through the material culture of the early modern period (16). Beards were considered a product of position, wealth, and masculinity; therefore, the beard was an external object of the man separate from his body. Fisher states, "I believe that any detachable/attachable part that shapes or produces an individual's identity might usefully be understood as a kind of prosthesis" (Fisher 17). It is understandable why the word "prosthesis" entered the English language during the sixteenth century (Fisher 16).

Gender was also created by prosthetics on the stage during the sixteenth century. In "Naked Lear," Millicent Bell theorizes that "most of the human qualities that make up personhood are things that are put on or taken off" (55). Boys were considered a different gender than men and women; therefore, they assumed a different gender when they wore a prosthetic beard, wig, royal garb or a dress. One might wonder why the audience accepted the constant flux of gender on the Renaissance stage; however, the answer is simple. The Renaissance was an unstable period where anyone could become rich or impoverished overnight (55-56). Some farmers lost their land and became wanderers, and others were able to make profits off the shortages of crops that existed in the period. It was a common occurrence for a man to go to sleep and wake up the next morning poor. Likewise, a man who had very little could become rich overnight. This instability literally caused people to become "a different man or woman as readily as one could change one's clothing" (55). According to Bell, "life itself, in the years when Shakespeare wrote, illustrated the malleability of personal being" (57). The actors that Shakespeare employed and the characters that they played reflected this period of constant change. Gender was prosthetic during this period because it was an extension of the actor created by his costume (64).

Gender distinctions were often blurred because of the prosthetic nature of gender. In Shakespeare's time, the audience accepted that his female characters were women even though they were played by boys (Kimbrough 17). Robert Kimbrough theorizes why this was possible in his essay, "Androgyny Seen Through Shakespeare's Disguise." Kimbrough states:

Because androgyny in its simplest form appears in Shakespeare when character of one sex experiences thoughts and emotion beyond those traditionally associated with gender vales of sex, transsexual disguise provides a laboratory testing-ground where one can isolate such moments of heightened, broadened awareness (21).

This is based on the idea of androgyny or "the premise that being a human being entails more than one's sex identification and attendant gender development. Sex is genetically determined. Gender is not" (Kimbrough 19). Shakespeare's actors were gendered by the costumes that they wore and the thoughts that they spoke.

Catherine Belsey argues in her essay, "Disrupting Sexual Difference: Meaning and Gender in the Comedies," that the language used in Shakespearian plays defined the roles of men and women. Belsey maintains that "fictional texts neither reflect a real world nor prescribe an ideal one. But they do offer definitions and redefinitions which make it possible to reinterpret a world we have taken for granted" (633-634). Some of the roles that were defined as male and female were blurred by Shakespeare's casting. Male characters played the roles of females; therefore, when a woman was acting outside of her role she was still essentially male. Likewise, male characters played female characters that were posing as men. In this sense, the gender lines were distorted because it is hard to say which gender was speaking.

Shakespearean comedies created a “fragmented identity neither male nor female” (647). According to Belsey, the gender roles have been deconstructed because the “metaphysical polarities of men and women” have been removed by the variability of the characters. Shakespearean comedies did not create an a-sexual or bi-sexual “mode of being”; however, the plays “disrupt the system of difference on which stereotyping depends” (648).

The Other

Between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries, facial hair was also a feature used by Europeans to distinguish themselves from the Indians of the “New World.” Elliott Horowitz articulates in his essay, “The New world and the Changing Face of Europe,” that “the conspicuous absence of facial hair among the overwhelming majority of male natives, whether on account of their nature or their culture, suggested to many that the beard was an essential aspect of the white men’s whiteness” (1182). Horowitz mentions that the beard was associated with masculinity; however, the absence or presence of facial hair became a significant attribute that Europeans used to distinguish themselves from the “New World” inhabitants (1183-1184). The evidence that supports Horowitz’s theory is found in “European writing” and “on European faces in early modern times, especially during the sixteenth century.

Beards were associated with “the other” prior to the first encounter of natives in the “New World” in 1492 (1185). The reason for this was that beards were an attribute associated with Jews and Muslims who represented otherness to Europeans (Horowitz 1188). In some areas, Jews and Muslims were forbidden to shave their beards in order to distinguish them from Christians (1188). One of the primary reasons for this was that

Jews and Muslims were not supposed to marry or procreate with Christians. Textual accounts that mention the significance of beards before 1492 express that Europeans were “clean shaven” and those who practiced otherwise were “the other” (1188-1189). This practice started to change when the account made by Christopher Columbus and his crew reached Europe (1186).

Horowitz discusses how Christopher Columbus and his crew did not keep up with shaving on their voyage (1186). The Indians in the “New World” were astounded and scared by the bearded Europeans. Horowitz provides a historical example of the encounter:

The Indians... were astonished when they saw the Christians, frightened by their beards, their whiteness, and their clothes; they went up to the bearded men... and ran their hands over the beards, marveling at them, because they had none, and carefully inspecting the whiteness of the hands and faces (qtd. in Horowitz 1186)

This encounter and the many others that followed made beards a characteristic of Europeans for both the Indians and the Europeans themselves (1187). The Indians thought that the bearded men were gods (1194).

Indians were not the only people who were marveled by the explorers. Explorers were admired by the people of Europe. Europeans began to associate the beard with “strength, conquest, and empire” because of the Spanish conquistadors and their conquests in Mexico (1194-1196). The people of the court of Spain were astounded by Hernando Cortes and all of the riches he brought back from his conquests (1193). The bearded Cortes presented “the (unbearded) Aztecs” to the court of Charles V (Horowitz

1193). The image must have been one of startling contrast. The successes of Cortes and other explorers became tales that people told. The images of the bearded conquistadors and the bearded explorers became iconic and lead Europe to change their associations with beards and otherness (1195-1196).

The Bearded Female as the Other

Bearded females represented another form of otherness. The male identity was threatened by the bearded female. “The gendered economy of patriarchy” had its foundation in the economic and sexual maturity of males (Johnston 1-3). According to Johnston in his work, “Bearded Women in Early Modern England,” many plays during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries contained women who had metaphoric beards (4-5). Most of these women were depicted as having some economic and social status; however, their beards were not visible and were understood as being down below (2-4). The female characters did not secure their status until they acquired the physical presence of the beard by marriage to a male figure (2-5). Shakespeare followed this patriarchic model because most of his plays that have women with some economic and social power end with the women getting married. *Macbeth* is the only play where Shakespeare presents to his audience the idea of otherness that is associated with the bearded female.

In *Macbeth*, the three witches are bearded sisters. Johnston states that “Banquo wants to reinscribe the trio and thereby render them subordinate, their beards *forbid* his doing so...” (21). The physical representation of the beard prevents the witches from being “...forced into procreative marriage...” (21). The “trio” is a functioning other that represents the “cultural wonders within the gendered economy of early modern England”

(22). Shakespeare alludes to his audience that Banquo can not distinguish the gender of the three witches because they have the symbolic mark of the patriarchy.

The Other Gender Created by Castration

There are plays in which beards, or their absence, create representations of otherness through characters that are eunuchs. Kathryn M. Ringrose examines the historical significance of eunuchs in her essay, "Eunuchs in Historical Perspective" (495). According to Ringrose, the word eunuch comes "from the Greek word for bed" (496). This is fitting because the original position of eunuchs was guarding the bedchambers of aristocrats. Ringrose argues "that eunuchs fell outside of clearly defined gender categories yet had access to positions of great status and power" (496).

There are documents that compare eunuchs to females; however, "they were considered men, though men with different attributes, talents, and physiology when compared to whole men" (496). Since eunuchs resembled women we can assume that they most likely lacked facial hair. We can also conclude that they also symbolized "otherness" because they had characteristics that were neither completely male nor female. This lack of distinction was associated with "New World" Indians as well (Horowitz 1183). According to Horowitz, both Michele da Cuneo and Fernandez de Oviedo, who sailed with Columbus on his second journey, documented that the Indians were beardless and had "sodomitical tendencies" (1183). The appearance and practices of the Indians in the "New World" removed them from the gender roles that Europeans associated with both males and females.

Eunuchs also fell outside of the distinctions that separated men from women because they were men that were prominently hairless without genitals. Many eunuchs throughout history were intentionally castrated (Ringrose 497). Ringrose points out that there are several types of castration. Historically, the most common types of castration were the “removal of the testicles and the removal of all the male sexual organs” (497). Ringrose argues that the removal of all the sexual organs was often the practice of societies where eunuchs were created to resemble women without really being women. Most eunuchs are castrated before they hit puberty; therefore they lack facial and genital hair. In many cultures, eunuchs were “objects of sexual desire in brothels” or “...destined to serve women” (497).

These castration practices were first practiced by cultures in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. The Chinese were skilled the most in castration procedures (497). The Chinese had the lowest fatality rates associated with castration. Unfortunately, Islamic cultures did not develop the tools or the skills that the Chinese did. In the Islamic society, eunuchs were fully castrated, and the fatality rates were very high. The eunuchs were usually slaves from Africa that were castrated in Egypt. The mortality rates associated with the castration process did not prevent the custom from spreading into western society.

Christian societies also made use of castration procedures (500). It was very common for Byzantine monks to be castrated. Ringrose points out that even though castration was practiced “it was never officially condoned by the church” (500). This was evident by Italy’s denial of the castration process that helped develop their vocal superiority (Rosselli 144). John Rosselli discusses the influence of Byzantine monks on

the development of Italy's castrati in his essay, "The Castrati as a Professional Group and a Social Phenomenon", *1550-1850* (146). Castrati were young boys that were castrated in order to permanently capture their vocal strength and octave capabilities. Rosselli argues that there is not enough evidence that there were castrati in Western Europe before 1550. He points out that there were castrati singers in Byzantine for centuries (146).

According to Rosselli, the first recorded castrati singer in Italy was a Spaniard. The castrati joined the Sistine Chapel choir in 1562 (146). Rosselli articulates that "by the early years of the seventeenth century there were castrati employed all over Italy as the court singers of ruling princes (in camera or cappella or both), in Württemberg from about 1610, in Vienna from 1637 or earlier, and by mid-century in Dresden" (147). It is evident that Shakespeare was aware of the castrati because the vocal talent of the castrated is discussed in *Twelfth Night* and *Antony and Cleopatra*.

Culture and Beards in Shakespeare

Shakespeare's audience consisted of men and women from all of England's social classes. His plays were successful because he was able to entertain a diverse audience. One of the reasons for Shakespeare's success was that he took social norms that everyone valued and used them in his plays. The importance of facial hair in Shakespeare's society is one of the themes represented in his works.

The growth of a man's beard was associated with masculinity, gender, and the European during the Renaissance. These associations made the beard the most important physical characteristic that defined a man's identity. A young man was not considered fully masculine until he could grow a beard. Latent beard growth was just one of the difficulties that young men faced. Decrees and traditions were in place to regulate the

growth of beards. Many young men could not grow a beard until he established himself in a trade or as a knight. The apprentice laws forbade young men to grow out their beards until they completed their training, and most pages were not permitted to wear a beard.

Boys without an established career and beard growth were considered to be a different gender from both men and women. One of the reasons they felt this way was because they believed that beardless boys could not produce heirs because they thought beard growth was related with fertility. When a young man showed signs of beard growth it was an indicator that he would soon become a man by their standards. It was rare for an adult English male to be beardless during Shakespeare's time because society placed a lot of importance on the growth of a man's beard.

Beards were not always so highly regarded in England because beard growth in the early part of the middle ages was associated with outsiders. These outsiders represented an otherness that existed outside of European societies. When colonization of the Americas began, Europeans discovered a new other in the Indian. The Indians that Europeans encountered in the new world were beardless. The beard was one of the ways that European men distinguished themselves from the Indians. This distinction was carried over from the New World to Europe.

The social, physical, and psychological importance of facial hair during the Renaissance has been immortalized in the works of Shakespeare. All of the meanings that the English associated with beards are represented in Shakespeare's plays. Sometimes the presence or absence of facial hair has multiple meanings in one play. Several works use the beard to represent the masculine identity. In other works,

Shakespeare uses the beard to distinguish the gender roles of men and boys. Also, there are a few plays that the absence of facial hair is used to create characters who are outside of English society. There are very few plays by Shakespeare that do not mention beards. Beards were important in Shakespeare's culture, and that is why facial hair is prevalent in his work.

Gender in Shakespeare

Eunuchs have a long history in Asia and Europe; that is why it is not surprising that they are characters in the courts of Shakespearean plays. In Shakespeare's play, *Antony and Cleopatra*, Mardian is a eunuch and castrati. This is articulated by Shakespeare in the following lines where Cleopatra is speaking to Mardian. Mardian asks Cleopatra what she desires (1.5.9). She responds:

Not now to hear thee sing. I take no pleasure
 In aught an eunuch has. 'Tis well for thee
 That, being unseminared, thy freer thoughts
 May not fly forth of Egypt. Hast thou affections? (1.5. 9-12)

This play is set in Egypt where castration practices have been documented. Since Cleopatra says she does not want Mardian to sing, we can gather that he may have had a strong singing voice. When Cleopatra says that she does not want what the eunuch has to offer that relates to his masculinity. Mardian has been castrated, and can not assert his manhood sexually. Cleopatra then asks Mardian if he has feelings, and he answers:

Not indeed, madam, for I can do nothing
 But what indeed is honest to be done
 Yet have I fierce affections, and think

What Venus did with Mars. (1.5. 15-18).

Mardian is acknowledging that he can not pleasure Cleopatra sexually; however, he has desires, and he wonders what gender that he represents in society. Since he is a eunuch he is castrated, and probably lacks facial hair. Eunuchs were effeminate looking because most were castrated before they reached puberty. Mardian's gender can not be defined in the literal sense according to the values during that period in history. Facial hair and the production of heirs were two attributes that helped to define the male gender in Shakespeare's time. Mardian can not be defined as a man because he is missing these male characteristics. Also, despite the fact that Mardian is feminine, he lacks the female reproductive organs; therefore, he is not a woman either. His gender is an otherness that is created by the combination of male and female characteristics.

Shakespeare also uses eunuchs in his play *Twelfth Night* to represent gendered otherness. A young woman named Viola was saved by the captain of the ship that she was on. The captain explains to Viola that Orsino the Duke of Illyria has rejected those that sought to marry him. Viola asks the captain to disguise her as a eunuch:

Conceal me what I am, and be my aid

For such disguise as haply shall become

The form of my intent. I'll serve this duke.

Thou shalt present me as eunuch to him. (1.2. 49-52)

Viola is beardless because she is a woman, and she is castrated by nature; therefore, she can sing and be perceived as a eunuch. When Viola says that she can speak to the duke about many different types of music she is eluding that she has more to offer than her voice. Eunuchs were used as objects of sexual pleasure. It is possible that Viola is

saying that she will use her sex appeal on the duke. Shakespeare would not have been able to present this play to his audience if they did not associate certain characteristics with eunuchs. Likewise, we can speculate that boy actors were able to fit the part by exhibiting the androgynous features of eunuchs.

Masculinity

Facial hair was a genetic marker that indicated when boy became a man. The ability to procreate was associated with the growth of the beard. During Shakespeare's time they believed that men could not produce heirs until they were able to grow a beard. They thought that beardless young men could not produce heirs. This idea is articulated in Shakespeare's play, *Troilus and Cressida*. Fisher explains:

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 (Fisher 174).

Shakespeare's audience understood that the growth of Troilus's facial hair symbolized his father's and his own fertility (Fisher 174). Each hair represents an heir that Troilus will produce. Troilus is asserting that he is a man because he can produce heirs.

The fact that the growth of beards was associated with fertility it was considered that boys without facial hair were not able to produce offspring (Fisher 176). This made them unlikely candidates for marriage (Fisher 177). Fisher argues that this is represented

in Shakespeare's play, *Much Ado About Nothing* "when Leonato suggests" that Beatrice could choose a husband without a beard (Fisher 177). Beatrice replies to Leonato:

What should I do with him--dress him up in my apparel
and make him my waiting-gentle-women? He that hath a beard
is more than a youth; and he that hath no beard is less than a
man; and he that is more than a youth, is not for me,(2.1. 28-31).

Fisher argues that Beatrice "considers a beardless male to be 'less than a man'" because a beardless male cannot procreate; and she would have no use for him (177-178). Beatrice does not want a boy who can not fulfill his obligations as a husband; however, she also does not want to be with a man who is a lot older. She is looking for a man who is youthful and has all of the qualities that are associated with the masculine identity.

The masculinity and fertility of Octavius Caesar is questioned in Shakespeare's play *Antony and Cleopatra*. Cleopatra refers to him as a boy in the first scene of the play when he sends a messenger with news for Antony:

Nay, hear them, Antony.
Fulvia perchance is angry; or who knows
If the scarce bearded Caesar have not sent
His powerful mandate to you: 'Do this, or this
Take in that kingdom and enfranchise that.
Perform't or else we damn thee' (1.1. 21-25)

Shakespeare's audience would assume that Caesar was barely a man; therefore, they would not see him as a threat. Shakespeare plays with this notion because Caesar is a

threat to Antony; however, Shakespeare fools the audience by reinforcing their perception of masculinity. Antony refers to Caesar as a child:

To him again, tell him he wears the rose
Of youth upon him, from which the world note
Something particular. His coin, ships, legions,
May be coward's, whose ministers would prevail
Under the service of a child as soon
As i'th command of Caesar (3.13. 19-24).

Beard growth was associated with strength during the sixteenth century. The description of Caesar implies that he does not have a beard. It is plausible that the audience during the renaissance would assume that Caesar is still a boy; therefore, he is not capable of being a soldier in combat. Shakespeare's characters refer to Caesar as a boy throughout the play. Caesar's fertility, power, and fighting capabilities are questioned because he is beardless.

Masculinity and fertility are themes in many of Shakespeare's plays. There are several associations with beards and masculinity and fertility in Shakespeare's play, *As You Like It*. The speech that is made by the character, Jacques, discusses the many stages that a man goes through. He makes several references to beards in his speech:

Then the whining schoolboy with his satchel
And shining morning face, creeping like a snail
Unwillingly to school (2.7.142-146).

The schoolboy's face is described as shining like the morning. The young boys are beardless, and their smooth faces are reflecting the light of day. The resistance that is

associated with learning appears to represent that boys did not want to grow up. The next phase is associated with fertility:

And then the lover,
 Sighing like furnace, with woeful ballad
 Made to his mistress's eyebrow (2.7.146-148).

At this stage, boys begin to lust after women; however, they do not have the faculties to enter into sexual intercourse with them. In addition to beards being associated with fertility, they were also considered a sign of strength and valor, which is the next phase of manhood in the speech of Jaques:

Then, a soldier,
 Full of strange oaths, and bearded like a pard,
 Jealous in honour, sudden, and quick in quarrel,
 Seeking the bubble reputation
 Even in the cannon's mouth (2.7. 148-152).

When the boy becomes a soldier he is fearless, and will do nothing to dishonor himself. He will put himself in harms way in order to gain the reputation as a fierce soldier. It is also clear that a beard begins to grow on the boy's face at this stage because the boy's beard is being compared to a leopard's whiskers (1622). The next few lines describe the boy's appearance as a man:

And then the justice,
 In fair round belly with good capon lined,
 with eyes severe and beard of formal cut,
 Full of wise saws and modern instances;

And so he plays the part (2.7. 152-155).

The man has become wise with age, and this is demonstrated in the description of his face. He now has a full beard in the style of his position, and eyes that have seen many battles. The boy has disappeared, and the man remains. The boy's transformation into a man is not complete until the growth of his beard reaches a length where it can be fostered into the fashion worn by soldiers.

Later in the play, Orlando carves poetry for Rosalind into palm trees. Celia and Rosalind discuss who carved the poetry and addressed the poems to Rosalind. Celia and Rosalind discuss the identity of the poet:

Is he of God's making? What matter of man is he? Is his
head worth a hat? Or his chin worth a beard? (3.2. 187-188).

Rosalind is questioning Celia whether or not the poet is a man or a boy. That point is articulated by her asking what type of "man he is." The hat most likely represents a helmet worn in battle, which suggests that Rosalind wonders if the man is a soldier. She then asks if he is bearded. These are all characteristics that separated men from boys.

Celia responds to Rosalind that "nay, he hath but a little beard" (3.2. 189). This probably gave the audience during Shakespeare's time the impression that Orlando was not quite a man yet. Shakespeare hints to the audience that Orlando's position in life appears to be what has prevented him from obtaining full manhood. This is demonstrated when Rosalind, disguised as Ganymede, questions whether or not Orlando is in love with her:

A lean cheek, which you have not; a blue eye and
sunken, which you have not; an unquestionable spirit, which

you have not; a beard neglected, which you have not—but I
 pardon you for that, for simply your having in beard is a
 younger brother's revenue (3.2. 338-342).

Rosalind, as Ganymede, explains to Orlando that he lacks the signs of a man in love. She does not excuse him of anything except the fact that he does not have an overgrown beard. Rosalind associates the fact that Orlando's position is second to his older brother and this has stunted his growth.

Other

Gender and masculine attributes were often blurred on the Renaissance stage. These blurred distinctions often created the effect of androgyny; however, there were times when an otherness stemmed from the mixture of gender and female accumulation of masculine features. In Shakespeare's, *Macbeth*, the three bearded sisters defied the sixteenth century's rules that distinguished the role of gender and the masculine identity. The otherness is presented to the audience by the character Banquo's description of the witches:

How far is't to forres?—What are these,
 So withered, and so wild in their attire,
 That look not like th'inhabitants o'th' earth (1.3. 37-39)

Banquo is stunned by the appearance of the witches. At first, he believes that they can not be of this earth because the witches can not be categorized by ordinary gender or masculine markers. Shakespeare continues to use Banquo's dialogue to express this otherness associated with identity hybridism:

And yet are on't—Live you, or are you aught

That man may question? You seem to understand me
 By each at once her choppy finger laying
 Upon her skinny lips. You should be women,
 And yet your beards forbid me to interpret
 That you are so (1.3.41-45).

According to Johnston, “Shakespeare’s bearded women defy male desire and refuse to be defined by artificially naturalized binary in which their beardedness—the visual signal of their *weirdness*—figures as a hairy secret that must be negotiated, hidden or erased” (22). This occurs because Banquo can not remove the threat of “cultural castration” that is created by the beardedness of the witches. Their beards are not underneath and submissive, on the contrary, their outward beardedness symbolizes the patriarchal authority that was associated with the masculine identity.

The absence of facial hair also caused an understanding of otherness during the sixteenth century. The discovery of the “New World” and its inhabitants created distinctions between Europeans and the “New World” Indians that were based on physical characteristics and behavior. These distinctions were staged in Shakespeare’s play, *The Tempest*. The play contains symbols of otherness. Caliban represents “the other” or the “New World” Indian. Europeans associated Indians of the “New World” with distinct characteristics, and behaviors. One of the most prevalent characteristics is that the “New World” Indians were almost completely hairless. Caliban takes on the form and the alleged behaviors of the “New World” Indian or “the other.” The character Trinculo’s description of Caliban when he first encounters him supports this argument:

What have

we here, a man or a fish? Dead or alive?—A fish, he smells like a fish; a very ancient and fish-like smell; a kind of not-of-the-newest poor-john. A strange fish! Were I in England now, as once I was, and had but this fish painted, not a holiday-fool there but give a piece of silver. There would this monster make a man. Any strange beast there makes a man. When they lay out ten to see a dead Indian. Legged like a man, and his fins like arms! Warm, o’my troth! I do now let loose my opinion, hold it no longer. This is no fish, but an islander that hath lately suffered by a thunderbolt (2.2. 24-34).

Shakespeare describes Caliban’s appearance in great detail. Fish tend to have shiny smooth scales. The skin of a man that was virtually hairless would probably appear smoother and shiny without hair to dull its appearance. Therefore, Shakespeare most likely wanted the audience to picture Caliban as the “New World” Indian. This distinction is made when Trinculo says that a painting of a fish would not sell; however, everyone would pay to “see a dead Indian.” We are to assume that Trinculo believes that Caliban is a dead Indian who was killed by lightning. It is probable that Shakespeare’s audience would have equated the beardlessness of the islander Caliban with the “New World” Indian. Shakespeare strengthens this association with Caliban’s behavior emulating the documented behaviors of the “New World” Indian.

Horowitz explains that when Indians first encountered white men they thought that they were gods (1194). It is also common knowledge that Indians were not accustomed to drinking alcohol, and that they were amazed by its affects. Shakespeare

articulates the behavior and amazement of “New World” Indians with white men and alcohol. This is shown in the scene where Stefano gives Caliban liquor:

These be fine things, and if they be not spirits.

That’s a brave god, and bears celestial liquor.

I will kneel to him (2.2.108-110)

Shakespeare plays on the word “spirits” because on one hand the word represents something unearthly and on the other hand it represents liquor. Caliban believes Stefano is a god, and that Stefano has given him a substance from the heavens. It is clear that Caliban wants to serve this godly man. This point is articulated again by Shakespeare:

I’ll show thee every fertile inch o’th’ island,

And I will kiss thy foot. I prithee, be my god.

Caliban wants to worship Stefano, and serve him. More importantly, Shakespeare is bringing up another correlation with the “New World” Indians and Caliban. There is documented evidence that Indians thought of explorers as godlike; however, explorers depended on Indians to help them find food in order to survive. Caliban is offering the same care to Stefano by saying that he will show Stefano everything that grows on the Island.

Conclusion

When we examine the historical significance of beards during and before Shakespeare’s lifetime it is clear that beards symbolized many things to Europeans and to Shakespeare himself. The presence or absence of beards affected dominant and sub-cultures that existed during Shakespeare’s time. He presents most of the associations that society had with beards in his works. Gender distinction associated with facial hair is

prevalent in many of Shakespeare's plays. The beard was one of the characteristics associated with men in Shakespeare's time. Women and boys were both considered to be different genders than men. When a young man was able to grow a beard and established himself than he was considered to be an adult male. In addition, beard growth in Shakespeare's works is used to distinguish whether or not a male character is masculine. Many of the styles worn seemed to represent a man's social class, power, and occupation. This suggests that beards helped to create the masculine identity. There are also plays that associate beardedness with the European identity. When the Europeans encountered the "New World" Indians they were shocked that the Indians showed hardly any signs of facial hair. These encounters made beards the characteristic that distinguished Europeans from "New World" Indians. There were men who also fell into the category of "other" because they lacked the physical characteristics of men. Textual analysis of Shakespeare's plays supports the argument that beards were used to define gender, masculinity, and "otherness" in his work.

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