Simone Broders (Erlangen): "She Broke Your Throne, and She Cut Your Hair’ – An Iconography of Hair and Masculinity in English Literature and Culture"

Abstract

Not only does hair play a crucial part in creating a first impression, it is also the only part of the body that can be quickly altered, shaped according to fashion, or easily replaced. Hair is an icon of power, as in the Biblical Samson’s loss of his superhuman strength by cutting his hair, or in Freud’s reading of the Medusa myth as a symbolic act of castration (Freud, 1922); male hair is also used to stake social or political claims, as in the powdered wigs of eighteenth-century drawing rooms (Powell & Roach, 2004). Nonetheless, recent studies on hair tend to focus on the female (Ofek, 2009).

This study problematizes the cultural and iconographic legibility of male hair in terms of self-fashioning of the male body, highlighting examples from different periods, such as Alexander Pope’s *The Rape of the Lock* (1712), in which hair reveals the Augustans’ anxieties of falling short of classical ideals of masculinity. In Romanticism, long-haired men have become rebels, but also personifications of the dark aspects of male desire. My thesis is that the archetype of the Magician in contemporary culture – which comprises not only the Dumbledores and Gandalfs who populate fantastic film, but also highly adaptive male characters with showy hair such as the androgynous Jack Sparrow – negotiates male ways of self-fashioning. The Magician’s hair symbolizes his ability to re-shape perceptions of reality as well as his reliance on mental strength in an ever-changing world.