

Spassky At A Safe Distance, Issue 8
or
“A (In)Complete History of Beards, and the Wearing of Them”

1: Introduction

2: Spassky’s Senior Speculation

3: Story + Bonus



1

Ideas are like first dates – they never go where you want them to. Initially I wanted this to be a little opinion-thingy about beards. To do this I had to have some context to the evolution of beards, and the wearing of them... That context got the old cerebellum “hmm”-ing, and “What?!”-ing, and those “hmm”-ings and “What?!”-ings, being more interesting than any thought I could ever concieve on the subject of beards, I turned 2 into what it now is: an incomplete and tunnel-viewed tour through the history of the beard – a tour after which you will never see a beard in the same way again.

This week’s story is August Heat, by W.F. Harvey.
It’s the scariest thing I’ve yet attached to this periodical.
I hope you’ll read it.
Just get a flashlight or something first.

2

The Beard is about as old as the Face, and the Beard took its good time before transcending the Face, and becoming an entity of its own. Being a bit more precise, it took about 300 000 years for the beard to get emancipated, and it took place in – as the historian would say – The Ancient World:

In Mesopotamia, when people weren't inventing civilization, they were oiling their beards, and curling them – in obvious plagiarism, mark you, of the Greeks.

O! the ancient Greek beards! Not a centimetre of a true olympian man's face was ever hairless, and not one bit of this hair didn't have a curl in it.

The beard was a sign of honour in ancient Greece. Consequently, this meant that an insult to the beard was an insult to the person upon whom the beard was germinating...Pulling a man's beard in Ancient Greece would find its modern equivalent in slapping someone in all the places one ought not be slapped in, and tying the bow on the operation by shouting "Let's kill each other!", or something of that effect.

Yes, people duelled over a tug at the beard.

Yes, people died in duels over a tug at the beard.

But beard-pulling wasn't only a problem in bar-room disputes, they were also military problems. This insomuch that Alexander the Great commanded every soldier's beard be shaved before war, so that the Trojans, or whatever, wouldn't conquer the mighty army of Zeus' by pulling at its beards.

Beards and war wouldn't go together for a good while yet.

Matter of fact, beards wouldn't go together with anything for a good while yet.

With Christianity's advent in Europe, the beard was quick to be outlawed as something sinful.

It took the Crusades to get beards back on the "Won't Land You In Hell"-list (one can't be expected to do one's god-fearing duty of shaving whilst doing one's god-fearing duty of genociding)

This leads into the middle ages, where people started obsessing over beards again. Like in ancient Greece, honour was measured by the length of the beard. Once upon a time – that time being somewhere between year 912 – 973 – there lived a guy named Otto. Otto happened to be king of the Holy Roman Empire; he also happened to have a beard so glorious that when he would swear oaths (about, like, not conquering the world) he would not swear by his God, or his mother – he would swear by his beard. One can only imagine the eruption of global panic whenever ol' Otto stepped near a barber-shop.

Beards were cool until the 18th century. Fashion then was to look young and look good whilst wearing macarons, and beards weren't much help to either of those ambitions (the macaron especially – nothing works with macarons except fire)

It was also just about then that it was in the European fashion to smack an adventure-cap on your macaron, and go about exploring the world.

Adventurers found many cool things (and then stole them), and many cool people (and then stole them too), and found out many cool things about these people. One of these things was that most men wore beards. The European men, therefore, who had shaved, plastered and rinsed every atom of their beards, put on wigs, put on white powder and Pirate Ship-loads of make-up, were – somehow – assumed to be women by natives..

Because of this, many natives didn't take these poor explorers as seriously as these poor explorers hoped, so to earn some respect, and prove their masculinity, these poor explorers...demonstrated...their possession of...certain entities...fixed in a region where... the moon don't shine.

Needless to say, beards came back in the 19th century.

At first – pre 1850's – beards were seen as a sign of radicalism for some Karl-fusing Marx-reason, and people didn't fancy wearing them.

People forgot about this, I suppose: there was rather a beard-craze starting from the 1850's, and everyone wore them: Abe Lincoln, Charles Dickens and Darwin, Bob Burke, and even Joe Hooker all sported beards.

The church – kind of ironically – were the greatest proponents of the beard: citing Jesus and Samson (biblical hero, "Strongest Man To Ever Live") as satisfied customers of the product. They went a bit far in some places.

The church decided that it was sinful to shave one's beard, "lest one sex should be mixed up with the other". I suppose enough men went about in dresses and bonnets to make some clergymen confused.

The beard hadn't lost much steam following the industrial revolution, until Germany started bullying the French, and the world decided to get people killed defending them.

Never support the French.

Shaving became important again, because no-one in the trenches wanted to wake up with a colony of lice making out with them. It's also hard to put on a gas-mask with a beard.

People at home also wanted to look more dignified and solemn in wartime, so less Carl Marx-beards, and more Carl Marx-after-a-good-shave-beards.

The war ended! People were happy, wanted to celebrate, wanted to get lucky – wanted to look sharp. Beards took a smoke break the 20s and 30s, because of what I just said, and also because movie-stars started starring in movies and didn't take beards with them. Guys wanted to look like famous actors, basically.

War again.

Facial hair worn by presidents, and other faces of other countries, kind of made many moustaches go into Style – and one notable moustache evicted from Style. This, paired with beards – as before – being outlawed in the military, made beards take a vacation.

Not-war again! In the 1950's, like pre 1850's, beards became a sign of radicalism – Fidel Castro, Che Guevara –, and also a sign of individualism and nonconformity. 1960's was much of the same, but on drugs – literally. You have that hippie-image in your head already, I don't feel I have to explain this part. Musicians and other demented sorts kept the thing and the fashion going throughout the 70's.

The 80's to the 20's beards are difficult to define, so I won't. As a wise man once said, "It is what it is." And I can't argue with that. It certainly is.

Story of the Week: [August Heat \(W.F. Harvey, 1910\)](#)

Bonus: [Where You Can Read Textbooks From the 19th Century!](#)