



**University of Guelph
Department of History**

MA Thesis Defence

Student: Sasha Jones

Date: Tuesday, April 15, 2025

Time: 10:00am - 12:00pm

Place: In-Person (contact
histacademic@uoguelph.ca for location)

“‘[A] Poverty and Beggarly Want of Hair’: Sociomedical and Sociocultural Perceptions of Aged Hair among Eighteenth-Century British Men”

Abstract

This thesis explores the sociocultural and sociomedical perceptions of aged hair among eighteenth-century middle-class British men and how it functioned as an external manifestation of natural bodily processes that occurred with age. This thesis explores how grey and thin hair were widely accepted symbols of growing older, disseminated and perpetuated in eighteenth-century British society by descriptive and prescriptive sources that associated the aged appearance of men's hair with men's loss of patriarchal authority, growing dependence, and emasculation, resulting in a new aged masculinity.

Using a variety of primary source materials including haircare manuals, old age guides, satirical literature, comedic anecdotes, and ego documents, this study demonstrates how social and cultural perceptions of aged hair infiltrated eighteenth-century society. It offers a unique perspective into how these sources evoked cultural anxieties about having grey and thin hair by highlighting the ways the appearance of head hair became synonymous with advanced life stage. This study follows a meticulous exploration of what it meant to *look* old, how aged hair marked a new aged masculinity, and how sociomedical concepts of hair influenced perceptions of old age. Despite the mundanity of aged hair, it held significant sociomedical and sociocultural implications among eighteenth-century British men.

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