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The Wig. A Hairbrained History. Luigi Amara
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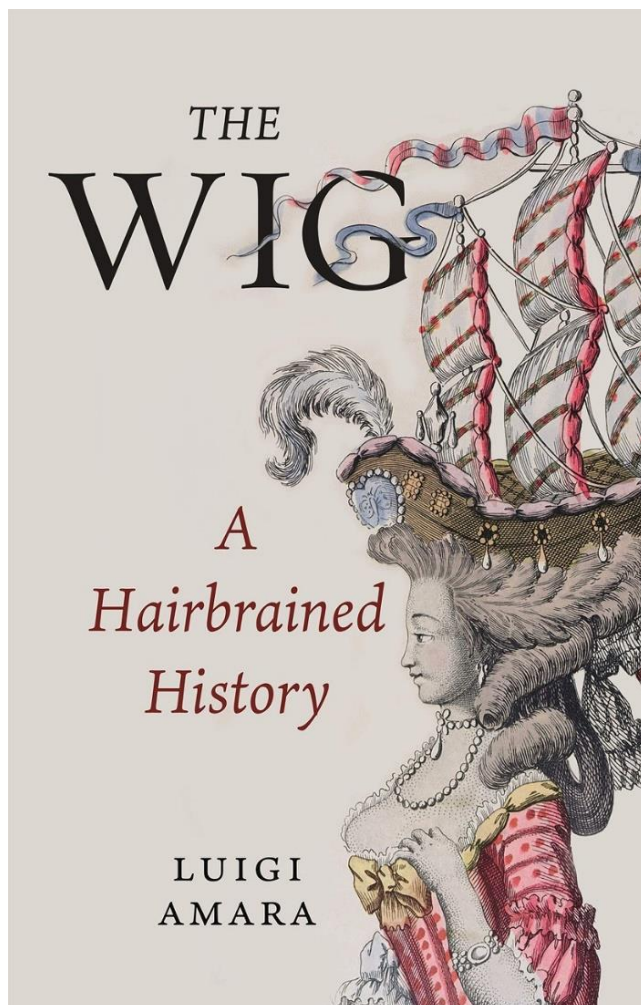
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The Wig: A Hairbrained History, Luigi Amara, Reaktion Books, London, England, 2020, Bedside Reading, Photo Acknowledgements, 50 Black-and-White Illustrations, 20 Colour Illustrations, 256 pages, Hardback, £15.00.

Luigi Amara studied philosophy at Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM). As an editor, he was the founder and head of editing for the magazine *Paréntesis*. Amara lives in Mexico where he has authored several books (including some for children), essays, and a collection of poetry. His award-winning work has earned accolades, including the Premio Internacional de Poesía Manuel Acuña en Lengua Española 2014 for the book *Nunca*. Amara once again writes a book that is no doubt conducive to discussion.

The Wig: A Hairbrained History covers the many topics connected to these artificial hairdos. He transmits his fascination for the wig not only through the written word, but also through an array of images. By exploring this subject through the lens of numerous novels and films, including characters from both ancient and contemporary times, Amara tackles this neglected fashion element with very diverse references.

This book is organised thematically into 33 chapters which are between four and nine pages. This structure can be a little difficult to follow at times. It may have been more appropriate to use a chronological structure as that would eliminate any confusion that the reader may have and to create a consistently flowing narrative as the reader transfers from chapter to chapter. Nevertheless, this book makes it possible to follow the evolution of this capillary artifice.

In the chapter titled “The Indiscreet Charm of Hair” (pp. 102-110), Amara illustrates how the wig is strongly linked to coquetry and that the wig has an anthology of symbols extending back into antiquity. The author evokes in particular the link between hair and cosmology through the Greek poet Callimachus and the

Latin poet Hyginus, in the chapter “The Hemisphere in a Wig” (pp. 76–80). Based on various authors such as Ovide or Martial in his chapter “Capillary Plagiarism” (pp. 95–101), Amara shows that at a time when many people owned wigs, the hairstyles became a true social marker evolving towards ever more luxury and sophistication. These wigs are identified on the antique sculptures and detailed in the chapter “Stony Hair” (pp. 170–176). In “The She-wolf of The Night: Messalina” (pp. 27–32), he also devotes an entire chapter to the third wife of the Roman emperor Claudius.

If the Middle Ages are little mentioned because of the loss of this tradition, the modern period is very well documented. The revival of the wig begins with the premature baldness of King Louis XIII. At this time, the wig is a sumptuous feature, an element of prestige and the author explores this theme through 10 chapters: “The Rage Called Wig” (pp. 33–42); “The Counter-Philosophy of the Wig” (pp. 49–56); “Musical Curls” (pp. 87–94); “Towering Hairdos” (pp. 124–132); “Abbé de Choisy: or, The Inner Woman” (pp. 133–140); “A Bald Wig in Search of a Head” (pp. 155–161); “In and Out of the Theatre” (pp. 162–169); “Reinvention by Hair” (pp. 193–202); “A Knife Named Guillotine” (pp. 230–237); and “Casanova, Wigs and Masks” (pp. 20–26). He thus approaches the wig in many different contexts. Amara explores the peruke through philosophy, crossdressing, musical composers such as Lully, Bach, Handel, Vivaldi, and Mozart. Amara illustrates the strong eccentricity of this ornament which reached its highest peak on the eve of the French Revolution.

Several popular figures are also described in this book, such as the tennis player André Agassi (“Samson at the Roland-Garros,” pp. 43–47); the artist Andy Warhol (“Andy Warhol’s Wig,” pp. 70–75); the photographer Cindy Sherman (“Cindy Sherman in Simulationland,” pp. 141–146); and even criminals like Jacques Mesrine (“Wigs at the Extremes of Crime,” pp. 177–185). One of the great strengths of this book are the chapters dedicated to the wig’s use in literature and cinema. In “The Chimeric Wig” (pp. 209–214), Amara lays out a focused examination of wigs in literary works like that of Roland Topor. Amara’s exploration of the wig’s significance in cinematographic works is spread over two chapters: “On the Other Side of the Mirror of Horror” (pp. 81–86) and “The Future Was a Purple Wig” (pp. 57–62). Amara also covers various themes, such as the wig as an emblem of justice (“Dressing up Justice,” pp. 118–123); fetishism (“The Tangled Mop of Fetish,” pp. 223–229); or as a relic (“On Remains and Other Relics,” pp. 111–117). Finally, the author closes his work on the metamorphosis of the self via the wig and once again underlines the duplicity of this artifice (“The Discourse of False Hair,” pp. 238–247).

If the approach of mixing different eras and sources is interesting, the book lacks an archaeological approach of this artefact (especially with reference to the wigs of Egyptian mummies). Likewise, a more academic approach would have been more appropriate. Indeed, the lack of referencing of the sources is problematic and the bibliography added at the end of the book is quite weak (with about 20 references). The thematic division of this book is novel, but at times confusing and repetitive. This work could also be strengthened by a conclusion to tie everything together and reinforce the author's structural decisions. In the same way, because the book is framed from an Anglo-American and European perspective, this book would not be appropriate for readers interested in wigs outside of this cultural context. However, this study is well written. With this book, the author demonstrates real passion for his subject. The variety of sources covered is especially relevant. The images included in each chapter help to visualise the discourse. Luigi Amara's book has clearly required some in-depth research and as such offers a good deal of information. Thus, this book addresses an interesting enquiry and gives an overall picture of the long and multi-faceted story of the wig.

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Dr. Betty Ramé has a PhD in Aegean archaeology from the University Panthéon-Sorbonne under the supervision of Professor Haris Procopiou. Her PhD thesis was titled, *Adorning the Head in the Aegean Bronze Age: From Hairstyles to Headdresses*. She is an associate researcher at the French National Centre for Scientific Research laboratory ArScAn (CNRS-Archéologies et Sciences de l'Antiquité). During her PhD, she developed a technological approach by studying several Aegean gold headbands in various Greek museums in order to understand their use (during the life of their owner or strictly funerary use). In parallel, she has also developed a database integrating all the iconographic sources of the Aegean Bronze Age depicting individuals with a hairstyle or a head ornament. This study points out regional trends, chronological changes, and answers the question of whether they are identity markers. She also conducts experiments to understand the wearing conditions of headdresses.