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Masculinity and Danger on the Eighteenth-Century Grand Tour

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Englishmen have always travelled. According to French Abbé Le Blanc, they travelled more than other people of Europe because `they look upon their isle as a sort of prison; and the first use they make of their liberty is to get out of it'.(1) For young elite males who travelled to France and Italy for up to five years, the Grand Tour was, most historians agree, ‘intended to provide the final education and polish’.(2) There is, however, less agreement about what that ‘education’ entailed. Most scholarly investigations have focused on the fashioning of Grand Tourists’ taste and connoisseurship, or on their learning to develop ‘social ease through exposure to different places and peoples.’(3) Stephen Conway's suggestion that the Tour was 'essentially a European education’ is compelling, given that eighteenth-century English aristocracy cultivated a ‘cosmopolitan cultural style’.(4) The Tour, he argues, encouraged a ‘specifically European outlook’**,** which included polish and refinement, appreciation of classical art and architecture, theatre and music as well as continental cuisine, wine and fashion.(5) Above all, elite youth went on the Grand Tour to perfect their French since it was spoken at all European courts and was the language of diplomacy.(6) No English gentleman could be considered accomplished if he did not speak French. All this education was ultimately meant to shape an individual who would be ‘resolutely British’ and understand classical civilization’s supposed commitment to public spirit’.(7)

Despite a general consensus about the justifications for the Tour, one question has remained unanswered: why was the family heir sent abroad, often when still a teenager, at a time when travel was indisputably and widely acknowledged to be dangerous? Danger might start, as it did for Joseph Addison, with falling into the sea at Calais.(8) It might also be, for a parent, the possibility that a son might fail to benefit from his Tour. Lady Stafford complained how ‘My poor Head is full of you and your going abroad…I assure you my Sleep is often interrupted with my Anxiety about it,’(9) on account of her son Granville’s future situation and ‘Figure in Life’ depending utterly ‘upon his Conduct and Connections when Abroad'. The vaunted experience of ‘wholesome hardship’ of European travel (10) included the climate, the bad lodgings, the threat of being robbed, entanglements in inappropriate relationships, and the ‘horribly real’ (p.37) dangers to health and to life that Sarah Goldsmith’s Grand Tourists, and their companions, actually experienced.

The main argument in *Masculinity and Danger on the Eighteenth-Century Grand Tour* *[2]* turns this question on its head. As Goldsmith asserts, ‘The Grand Tour occurred precisely because of the difficulties

and dangers involved, rather than in spite of them' (p.27). Parting from notions of danger as threat, her archival study shows that danger was productive, especially of masculinity and the superiority of the elite. This innovative argument is first supported by a rigorous historiography of the concept of danger in the eighteenth century, explored in chapter 1. This chapter reflects on the way contemporary risk studies and the history of emotions can be historicized and applied to understand the plural notions of danger – real or rhetorical - that elite young males faced while abroad, including sickness or injury. Goldsmith brings out fascinating and intimate details about who cared for these Tourists, ranging from local physicians to members of the Margrave of Anspach's court, when Philip Yorke fell during a hunt, and about the range of emotional responses of travellers' families. Moral dangers are more complex to categorize in part because of changing perceptions of the historiography about the meaning of activities considered 'illicit', from immoral to acceptable expressions of 'forms and discourses of masculine sociability' (p. 55). Ultimately, Goldsmith concludes, 'a highly confrontational relationship with danger was an important means of asserting one's masculinity' (p. 73).

The rest of the book explores this relation by focusing on more than thirty young aristocratic and gentry Grand Tourists' recounting their experiences of different dangers while abroad: the dangers of war, courted by the young men in chapter 2; the dangers inherent in travel in chapter 3; the dangerous physical exploits the Grand Tourists sought and achieved, in chapter 4. The lens of danger is used in chapter 5 to consider the physical and emotional responses produced by the encounters of Grand Tourists and their companions with danger. Servants, who are usually invisible in accounts of the Tour, have a role to play in Goldsmith's comprehensive analysis. She shows how - constructed as 'the emotionally uncontrolled "others"', who might be 'seized with panic' at the edge of a precipice - servants demonstrated that 'dangers did indeed engender uncontrollably fearful reactions' (p. 192). These were fear which Grand Tourists by contrast, were, able to control. This gave elite travellers the opportunity to make 'personal claims towards their innate abilities of superior self-control and by extension their right to command others of lesser status' (p. 193), and presents a new perspective on the diverse ways in which the elite constructs and maintains its superior status.

Physical risks, encounters with 'often idealized' dangers to cultivate 'hardy martial masculine virtues of courage, along with self-control, daring, curiosity and endurance, were used to construct an identity that was simultaneously British, elite and cosmopolitan (pp. 3-4). This is all the more plausible when one considers what the youths had just left by going abroad: either the damaging softness of the home (11) or 'the tedious confinement to Books and Studies' (12) in schools that prized, and prided themselves on 'hardy' mental and physical discipline under surveillance.(13) 'Hardy' was also a key word for the masculine behaviours and qualities sought on the Grand Tour (p. 19). This not only highlights the continuity of concerns over the education of elite males, but marks out what the Grand Tour offered: a space for the unfettered exercise of hardihood and the seeking of danger. It is not surprising, therefore, to read about the six-day expedition to the glaciers of Savoy by a group of eight friends and tutors led by William Windham. A key point for Goldsmith's argument is that Windham recorded not the sublime or 'delightful horror' of the mountains, but the 'physical … strain of moving through a hostile terrain … where a misstep would result in death'; the 'increasingly dangerous route' the young men followed - clinging with hands and sticks when going upward - and then their 'partly sliding on our Hands and Knees' downward (pp. 146-48). The scaling of Mount Vesuvius was an even more risky and challenging encounter with danger. William Bentinck climbed the volcano in 1727 and recalled the 'quantity of cinders and hot ashes, which make one fall back again about three quarters of each step one takes'. It was 'the hardest work I ever did in my life' he later commented (pp. 151, 160).

One site of danger often left out of accounts of the Grand Tour has been young men's encounter with the military. But as Goldsmith reminds us, eighteenth-century Europe was embroiled in enough military conflicts for 'war and its accoutrements' to provide trevallers with 'a touristic spectacle, a social occasion and an educational opportunity' (p. 75). The 'martial itinerary' undertaken by many young elite Tourists, shows that 'the Grand Tour was a means of training young men as Britain's future political, social and military leaders' (p.84). By participating in war, and 'seeing the troops rather than just reading about them'

(p. 85), youths were able to ‘celebrate martial virtues’ such as ‘courage, stoicism, honour and endurance’ (p. 109) as markers of a successful elite masculinity. A number of Tourists travelled to fields of battle. John Holroyd, later 1st Earl of Sheffield, who described himself as ‘military mad’ (p. 80), visited the destruction wreaked upon Dresden and Prague during the recent Seven Years’ War; Sir Francis Basset, a member of the Cornish gentry, deliberately travelled ‘into the “field”’ to visit his friend the Prussian general Prince Leopold of Brunswick. Years later, Sir Francis recounted not just seeing many men killed but that ‘the brains of a serjeant struck Him’ (p. 75). Such visits were part of the Grand Tourists’ ‘agenda of sociopolitical networking’ (p. 84).

One of the recurring comments by scholars of the Grand Tour concerns its homogeneity: ‘travellers visited the same sites, went on the same excursions, read the same books and made the same observations in their own journals and correspondence’; Grand Tourists followed ‘a fairly fixed canon of cultural landmarks’ and ‘a standard itinerary and a standard curriculum’ (14). Yet, it is diversity that predominates in Goldsmith's book: diversity of characters, experiences and responses to these experiences, and above all diversity of masculinities. In Goldsmith's argument, it was not just the experience of danger that constructed Tourists’ masculinities, but the narratives about danger they composed in their letters, diaries or memoirs. These served to construct the variety of masculine identities they performed - ranging from ‘hardy masculinity’ to identities based on ‘fashion, sensibility and literature’ (p.185). Goldsmith links the ‘emotional regime of eighteenth-century British elite maleness’ to the Grand Tour as an institution and to Tourists’ written accounts of their experiences, examining closely the vocabulary available to them at the time to communicate or mute the emotions provoked by the dangers they encountered. They could thus present variously ‘stoicism, courage and sensibility’ (p. 191). Such diversity suggests that hegemonic masculinity does not necessarily imply homogeneity.(15) At the same time, this diversity must be placed - , as Goldsmith reminds us - within a wider, more homogenous elite discourse ‘centred on power, command, emotional hierarchy, emotional self-control and authority’ (p.208).

One of the pleasures and a great strength of this book is that it engages the reader, chapter after chapter, with the same young men and their vividly described adventures, exploits, pleasures, illnesses and relationships. By the close I felt I knew a few of them as individuals whose distinctive character developed and at times surprised as their story unfolded. The ‘brashly confident’ (p.33). William Windham, who had an ‘utter abhorrence of restraint’ (p.139), proved to be a skilful and scientific-minded leader on the admittedly foolhardy climb of the Alpine glacier. The fashion-conscious aesthete Viscount Nuneham who though he disliked physical discomfort and the cold - and was more concerned with cutting ‘a fashionable figure’ with his marvellous fine pelisse than wearing a coat over it to be warm (p. 200) - also cultivated the ‘wit and humour that later became an important part’ (p. 203) of his masculine identity and ambition. What better illustration of the range of masculinities performed by the Grand Tourists?

Sarah Goldsmith has written a provocative and fascinating book which asks fresh questions and offers ground-breaking insights into the ever intriguing Grand Tour. Her impressive command of the archival materials and her wide-ranging historiographical research make *Masculinity and Danger* a significant contribution to the scholarship on the Tour, and encourages us to rethink the construction of superior elite masculinities and the maintenance of aristocratic ideals and values.

Notes

(1) Jean Bernard, Abbé Le Blanc, *Letters on the English and The French Nations*, Dublin, 1747, Vol. 1, p. 37.

(2) Rosemary Sweet, *Cities and the Grand Tour: The British in Italy, c.1690-1820*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012, p. 2 .

(3) see for example Clare Haynes, ‘A trial for the Patience of Reason? Grand Tourists and Catholicism after 1745, *JECS*, vol. 33, No 2 2010: 195-206, p. 196.

(4) Gerald Newman, *The Rise of English Nationalism: A Cultural History 1740-1830*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1987, p. 39.

(5) Stephen Conway, *Britain, Ireland, and Continental Europe in the Eighteenth Century: Similarities, Connections, Identities*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, p. 190.

(6) Michèle Cohen, ‘The Grand Tour: Constructing the English Gentleman in Eighteenth-Century France', *History of Education*, 1992, vol 21, No 3: 241-257.

(7) John Brewer ‘ Whose grand tour?’, in María Dolores Sánchez-Jáuregui and Scott Wilcox eds, *The English Prize: the Capture of the Westmorland, an Episode of the Grand Tour*, London: Yale University Press, 2012, pp 45-61, p. 50.

(8) P. Smithers, *The Life of Joseph Addison*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954.

(9) Lord Granville Leveson Gower (first Earl Granville), *Private Correspondence*, ed. Castalia, Countess Granville, 2 vols, London: John Murray, 1916, Vol. 1, Letter from Lady Stafford to Granville Leveson Gower, February 14, 1792, p. 40.

(10) Francois Maximilien Mission, *A New Voyage to Italy*, 2 vols, London, 1695, vol. 2, p. 305.

(11) Cohen, ‘The Grand Tour’.

(12) Joseph Atwell, cited in Brewer, ‘Grand Tour’, p. 51. Atwell accompanied William Clavering Cowper, second earl Cowper, on his Tour in 1729-30.

(13) See for example Vicesimus Knox, *Liberal Education*, London, 1781.

(14) Sweet, *Cities*, p. 4; Haynes, ‘Grand Tourists’, p.196; Cohen, ‘Grand Tour’, p. 242.

(15) See Michèle Cohen, ‘ “Manners” Make the Man: Politeness, Chivalry, and the Construction of Masculinity, 1750-1830’, *Journal of British Studies* 44, April 2005: 312–329, p. 312.

Painting: Gentleman on the Grand Tour: John Corbet (1751–1817); The Honourable John Tollemache (1750–1777); John Chetwynd-Talbot (1750–1793), Later 1st Earl Talbot; James Byers (1733–1815); Sir John Rous (1750–1827), 6th Bt, 1st Earl of Stradbroke; John Staples (1736–1820); and William McDowall. John Brown (1752–1787) (attributed to), National Trust, Ham House

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