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Foppish Masculinity, Generational Identity and the University Authorities in Eighteenth-Century Oxbridge

Abstract

This article aims to bring Oxford and Cambridge back into the debate about elite masculine socialization in eighteenth-century England. The ancient universities in this period are too often described by historians as bastions of moral stability and man making. Here, a more complicated view of the universities' role in shaping the identities of young men in the eighteenth century is presented, which takes into account the significant effect of rising student ages, generational and class tensions. In particular, the article traces the characteristics and development of foppish masculine styles among Oxbridge undergraduates, highlights their opposition to book-learning and academic regulations, and analyses the increasing suspicion which they incurred from the university authorities against the background of the American and French Revolutions.

Keywords: Oxford; Cambridge; universities, masculinity, fops, eighteenth century

Historians working on masculine identities in eighteenth-century England, if they deal with the universities at all, tend to treat them rather unproblematically as bastions of moral stability and loyalty to the establishment, whose only role in shaping young men was to reproduce uncritically a rather ill-defined ideal of masculinity, based on what Philip Carter has termed 'the traditionally manly attributes of reason or sense.'[1] If we look, however, at accounts of university life produced at the time, by university-based commentators and undergraduates, we hear of debauched and decadent student subcultures, where foppish

and immoral behaviour prevailed, and the cherished role of Oxford and Cambridge as man-making institutions was called into question.[2]

Part of the responsibility for the lack of attention paid to student subcultures in the eighteenth-century universities arguably lies with the recent dominance of gender history in the eighteenth century by the cultural historical emphasis on mixed-sex sociability and urban settings. As a result, single-sex, rural or semi-rural settings like the university have been largely ignored as sites of masculine socialization. This has been compounded by an increasing tendency to view the Enlightenment itself primarily as a cultural movement, to be studied with an emphasis on cultural practices, once again in mixed-sex, urban and continental settings. While universities as centres of intellectual thought used to be central to studies of the Enlightenment, when it was generally treated as an intellectual movement, they have received significantly less attention in recent years. Historians need to look more closely at the specific cultural contexts and dynamics of the university environment. As predominantly single-sex institutions, it is perhaps easy to assume that the inculcation of masculine values went on relatively peacefully, uninterrupted by male-female conflict. Yet, as the work of Alex Shepard on concepts of manhood in sixteenth and seventeenth-century Cambridge highlights, there existed what she terms a well-established student 'counter-culture of violence and excess', modelling itself on the libertine character of court life, and characterised by excessive drinking and fighting.[3]

This article explores the continuing development of this student counter-culture against the background of the Enlightenment. Just because the attention of historians has shifted to the great urban centres, most importantly, London, does not mean the universities should be left out of the story. As it will show, a marked feature of student life at the eighteenth-century universities was a flourishing foppish subculture, in which masculinity was increasingly defined in opposition to the book-learning and academic regulation of the universities. Instead, students' masculine self-fashioning drew increased inspiration from the aristocratic coffee-house and salon culture of the capital (in contrast to the world of the

court in the seventeenth century), and indeed, from the great cities of Europe, particularly Paris. Far from being remote, rural bastions of moral stability producing 'men of sense', Oxford and Cambridge deserve to be considered as an integral part of eighteenth-century sociability.

More than this, though, it will argue that important changes affecting life at the universities over the course of the eighteenth century, above all rising student ages, and the background of the American and French Revolutions led long-standing countercultural behaviour among the student body, in particular, the donning of unorthodox fashions, excessive drinking and violence, to assume dangerous political overtones and to stoke unprecedented class conflict within the universities themselves. In this way, the traditional function of the universities as man-making institutions was called into question, and the university authorities took action, predominantly through curriculum and examination reform, to stem the tide and bring the increasingly self-conscious and confident student body back under their control.

Oxford, Cambridge and English masculinity

Carolyn Williams' discussion of Oxford and Cambridge in the context of eighteenth-century English masculinity provides a good example of the prevailing view of the universities as bastions of moral manliness in this period. In her study, *Pope, Homer and Manliness*, she claimed that 'the most popular method of instilling manliness in eighteenth-century England was a classical education.'[4] For Williams, the production of the 'man of sense', characterized both by intellectual achievement and moral probity, was a long and arduous process available only to the privileged few. 'Manliness', she wrote, 'operate[d] at the intersection of intellect and character, where clear thought [wa]s achieved by a deliberate effort to cleanse the mind of prejudice, and the resolve to speak and act rightly [wa]s supported by sound reasons based on examination of all available evidence – a process...requiring years of study.' 'Even the sketchiest knowledge of educational

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opportunities' at the time makes it clear, she concluded, 'that manly understanding was reserved for a privileged minority.'[5] At the public schools and universities, adolescent males could be moulded carefully into 'men of sense' over the course of several years in what she describes as 'an atmosphere of wholesome masculinity.'[6] In these institutions, boys and young men were 'subject...to strict surveillance and discipline from conscientious tutors, in an environment from which women were largely excluded.'[7]

Anthony Fletcher has written similarly of elite schools and the universities in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. For him, they hardly changed at all, seeming to have been little affected by the urban culture of politeness and sensibility. 'Their schooling and further education at university...was the foundation of the gentry's patriarchal command of English society'[8], he wrote. 'The fierce inculcation of the classical curriculum was the core of an overall process of hardening, of teaching self-control and endurance as the basis of a sophisticated form of manhood.'[9] This view of the universities as bastions of unchanging, traditional elite manhood is largely based on a study of conduct literature. A similar interpretation is offered in the most recent and comprehensive study of gentry masculinity, and one, which focuses in part, on adolescent masculinities, carried out by Mark Rothery and Henry French. Despite the advantages they gain in terms of personal subjectivity by focusing on family correspondence, like Williams and Fletcher, they allow the universities' reputation as a successful site of traditional elite masculine socialization to remain unquestioned, considering them 'a valuable staging-post in the development of masculine independence.' 'University life', they write, 'helped to resolve the tension between parental control and masculine autonomy by providing a regulated environment distant from familial authority, but also one in which surveillance by seniors was still possible.'[10]

In her important work on concepts of manhood in sixteenth and seventeenth-century Cambridge, Alex Shepard perceptively observes that, the universities' 'political, religious, intellectual and architectural significance has been privileged above their

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exploration as sites of socialisation, social relations and everyday life.'[11] The situation is similar in the eighteenth-century historiography. Historians of masculinity in eighteenth-century England have been more concerned with studying the lives of men in urban settings, particularly in the city of London. This forms part of a much broader development over recent decades to re-conceptualize the eighteenth century as an era of sociability, fashionable metropolitan culture and consumerism. This valuable and necessary revision has largely been the work of cultural historians, many of whom were, in the first instance, contributing to an important feminist critique of the Enlightenment. Scholars such as Dena Goodman rightly criticized the tendency of historians to present the Enlightenment uncritically as 'part of a mythical history of masculine reason said to begin with the Greeks and to move triumphantly through Aquinas, Descartes, Locke, Voltaire and Rousseau, to culminate in Kant, Hegel and modern science.' To combat this influential grand narrative, feminist critics of the Enlightenment seized on the new cultural history for its ability (in the words of Goodman) to 'shift attention away from ideas and texts as the products of masculine reason and male genius and toward those practices and institutions in which women figured centrally' such as the Parisian salon. When the Enlightenment was studied in this way as a set of cultural practices, rather than a set of ideas or texts produced by men, it appears, she rightly claimed, as 'part of a very different history in which men and women have both played roles.'[12]

As a result of the significant influence which this and similar critiques have come to exercise within the field of cultural history, the most frequently seen image of eighteenth-century England is now one of a primarily metropolitan culture, characterized by sociability, sentimentality, and, above all, by the principle of 'gender complementarity', in which both masculine and feminine values are seen as necessary to a civilized society. As a development within cultural history, and even more specifically, within feminist or women's history, the history of masculinity in eighteenth-century England has tended only rarely to step outside of this urban, mixed-gender context.[13] Models of manhood, developed

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in different cultural contexts, particularly within largely all-male environments such as the universities have, perhaps unsurprisingly, suffered from a relative lack of scholarly attention, a point made a few years ago by Karen Harvey.[14] These were, after all, precisely the institutions which critics saw as responsible for perpetuating the view of the Enlightenment as a 'mythical history of masculine reason.'

Rising Ages and Generational Identity

When looking at the English universities in the period of the Enlightenment, a helpful place to start is Alex Shepard's work on sixteenth and early seventeenth-century Cambridge. She draws a vital distinction between the official view of the universities as centres of learning, civility and godliness, places where young men were sent to complete the final transition to manhood, supervised by careful, diligent tutors, and what she terms 'a counter-culture of excessive consumption and bravura' developed amongst the student body itself.[15] As she rightly points out, a student culture of excess, although formed in conscious opposition to the 'official view' of the university held by the Cambridge authorities, did not necessarily destabilise traditional social hierarchies. Many student behaviours, especially ritualised violence and drinking bouts, were, she writes, 'implicitly condoned, if not licensed' by the university authorities, and were treated as an almost necessary phase of rebellion, an initiation into mature adult life.[16]

Much of what Alex Shepard has described for early modern Cambridge – the regular episodes of student violence, the counter-culture of drinking and eating to excess - is also readily visible in the eighteenth-century universities. What I will argue, however, is that important changes, both within the eighteenth-century universities, and in wider English society against the background of the American and French Revolutions, ensured that such behaviour came to be seen less as part of a necessary, even legitimate, phase of student rebellion, and increasingly as a troubling sign of the times, of the negative influence of French culture in England, and of the effeminate decline of elite English youth. In contrast,

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Shepard concludes for the earlier period, 'such conflict remained unthreatening to social and political order.'[17]

Few studies of the eighteenth-century universities take account of the significant social impact of the rise in the average age of students at matriculation. Shown clearly in the work of Lawrence Stone, the average student matriculating at Oxford at the start of the eighteenth century was just seventeen and a half. By the end, this had risen to eighteen and a half, meaning crucially that many more students would reach the legal age of majority (twenty-one) while still at university, putting increasing pressure on the traditional role of the college tutor *in loco parentis*.[18] What this effectively meant was that in comparison with the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when university was in many ways an extension of school, with the average matriculation age between fifteen and sixteen, Oxford and Cambridge were now responsible for supervising and training young adult males. Referring to Oxford freshmen in the middle of the eighteenth century, the playwright, George Colman the younger, declared,

> No character is more jealous of the Dignity of Man…is so inflated with the importance of virility, that his pretension to it is carefully kept up in almost every sentence he utters. He never mentions any one of his associates but as a gentlemanly or a pleasant man—a studious man, a dashing man, a drinking man - in short, there is no end to the colloquial manhood of these mannikins.[19]

Alex Shepard, Ruth Mazzo Karras and others have made the important point that the ancient universities in the early modern period should be conceived of as patriarchal institutions par excellence, critical in 'shaping hegemonic masculinity and conferring patriarchal privilege.'[20] However, when we focus on generational relations at the eighteenth-century universities, which were key to these processes, above all, the relationship between tutor and pupil, the universities appear anything but bastions of moral stability and uncomplicated agents of masculine socialization. Despite Rothery and French's description of college tutors as the 'essential intermediaries' in the transmission

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of elite masculine values,[21] one of the most significant features of life in eighteenth-century Oxford and Cambridge was a developing struggle for authority between the body of senior members (comprising all MAs, fellows, tutors and heads of colleges) and a newly assertive and articulate junior body made up of undergraduates and bachelors which frequently broke out into open violence. Adding to the impact of the rising student age was the growing tendency of undergraduates to reside longer in colleges, which not only meant that they were even older when they left the universities, but also that their sense of a shared student identity was stronger than in earlier periods. At the same time, tutors were actually becoming younger – as colleges purchased more and more Church of England livings, the rate at which fellows succeeded to these livings increased, meaning that tutors were frequently only in office for quite short periods of time and at many colleges were often only a few years older than the pupils they were responsible for.[22]

Over the course of the eighteenth century these changes combined to reduce significantly the authoritative distance considered necessary to the successful working of the quasi-parental relationship between tutor and pupil. The education which the universities provided was increasingly criticized by students, their parents and external commentators for producing either immature boys or effeminate fops. A frequent accusation was that the overall level of academic and moral instruction at Oxford and Cambridge was fundamentally unsuitable for institutions entrusted with the important task of turning boys into men. In the second edition of his notorious *Terrae-Filius: or the Secret History of the University of Oxford*, published in 1726, Nicholas Amhurst, declared that the preparations necessary for success in the university's B.A. examination were less challenging than the work of a schoolboy. 'For *Examination*', he wrote, it is usual for students to

> have the *skeletons* of all the arts and sciences…containing all the questions in each of them which are usually asked...and the common answers that are given... which in a week or fortnight they may get at their tongue's end...Is this a proper qualification for

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university degrees? Many a *schoolboy* has done more than this for his *breaking-up task*![23]

Recalling his own experience of Oxford in the early 1750s, Edward Gibbon reflected that his youthful curiosity and thirst for knowledge had been all but extinguished during his time there. Although, he observed, 'my taste for books began to revive…as soon as I left Magdalen,' it was 'the same blind and boyish taste for the pursuit of exotic history' as he had possessed at school. Throughout the whole of his Oxford education, he claimed that he had remained 'unprovided with original learning, unformed in the habits of thinking, unskilled in the arts of composition'.[24]

'A fop without education': Undergraduate masculine styles

As the work of Alex Shepard reveals, a student counter-culture of excess developed at Oxford and Cambridge much earlier than the eighteenth century. The crucial difference, however, was that while the libertine behaviour of the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries was inspired by the small and exclusive world of the court, eighteenth-century students emulated the much more accessible sphere of the metropolitan London fop. Moreover, against the background, first of the Jacobite riots, and then of the French Revolution, this student counter-culture came to assume sinister political overtones which its sixteenth and early seventeenth-century predecessor had not possessed. Indeed, as Shepard has stressed, student behaviour in early modern Cambridge often served to reinforce normative hierarchies with university culture being 'characterised by the accommodation of rule-breakers as well as the induction of young men into modes of male exclusivity and the normative conduct claimed by the patriarchal elite.'[25]

The image of Oxford and Cambridge as moral bastions of elite patriarchal manhood is based on a still popular idea of the university as somehow cut off from the centres of metropolitan culture whose study has come to dominate the history of eighteenth-century England. Yet, if we take a look at any number of contemporary commentaries, a defining

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feature of undergraduate identity seems to be an emulation of the life of London men of fashion. Writing in the *Intelligencer* in 1729, Jonathan Swift commented at length on the growing tendency among elite young men to reject the scholarly training of the universities in favour of a very different concept of manliness, the idle and luxurious life of a metropolitan fop. 'The Disposition of young Nobles' is such, he wrote, 'that they expect the Accomplishments of a good Education, without the least Expence of Time or Study, to acquire them.' Indeed, he continued,

> The current opinion prevails, that the Study of *Greek* and *Latin* is loss of Time; that Universities make young Men Pedants; that to dance, fence, speak French, and know how to behave yourself among great Persons of both Sexes, comprehends *the whole Duty of a Gentleman.*

Instead of concentrating on lectures and remaining within college bounds, students were much more likely to be found frequenting, in Swift's words, 'Chocolate-Coffee-Gaming Houses, Drawing-Rooms, Opera's, Levees, and Assemblies.'[26] Nicholas Amhurst commented similarly that adopting the appearance and habits of an urban fop was a deliberate visual statement on the part of undergraduates, indicating that their life as boys was over:

> I observe…that you no sooner shake off the authority of the BIRCH, but you affect to distinguish your selves from your dirty school-fellows by a new suit of *drugget*, a pair of prim *ruffles*, a new *bob-wig*, and a *brazen-hilted sword*; in which tawdry manner you strut about town…giving yourself airs in *coffee-houses* and *booksellers'* shops, and intruding your selves into the company of *us men*: from all of which, I suppose you think your selves your own master, no more subject to controul or confinement.[27]

From criticisms such as these, we see just how incorrect it is to insist that the universities in the eighteenth century remained untouched by urban culture and metropolitan fashions. In important ways, the alternative models of manliness developed in London were crucial

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in shaping notions of masculinity in Oxford and Cambridge. Writing in the early years of the twentieth century, Arthur Hamilton Gibbs put it well. 'Oxford', he declared,

> was not so far away from London as not to reflect the manners and habits of the capital, and since to the Bucks of London abnormal drinking was then the highest good form, it is not to be wondered at that the undergraduates, ever of tender years and advanced imitative faculties should give a brilliant reflection of the metropolis.[28]

As James Harris, later Lord Malmesbury, wrote in a letter reflecting on his days as a gentleman-commoner at Merton College in the mid 1760s, 'The set of men I lived with were very pleasant but very idle fellows. Our life was an imitation of high life in London.'[29]

To some extent, this may be explained as part of a much larger trend – the spread of key features of metropolitan life such as public parks and coffee houses to provincial centres – a development well-studied by Peter Borsay.[30] However, undergraduates also had regular access to the cultural life of the capital. There were many student newspapers and journals at both universities, which provided detailed news from London and the continent. The *Oxford Magazine*, for example, begun in 1768, featured a monthly collection of news and advertisements from contemporary London papers and journals. A number of undergraduates also made regular trips to and from London to socialise, buy clothes and visit relatives.

The conscious adoption of the dress and lifestyle of London men of fashion also reflected a growing sense of generational identity among students and a desire to express that difference by adopting an alternative masculine style. Thus many undergraduates were well aware that by appearing as fops they were courting the ire of the university authorities. As George Colman the younger explained:

> On my entrance at Oxford…as a member of Christ Church, I was too foppish a follower of the prevailing fashions to be a reverential observer of academical dress – in truth,…I was presented to the Vice-Chancellor, to be matriculated, in a grass-green coat, with the furiously-bepowder'd pate of an ultra-coxcomb, both of which are proscribed by the Statutes of the University.[31]

Again, with their explicit rejection of book learning, undergraduate fops directed themselves against the prevailing idea of scholarly masculinity which they dismissed as 'pedantry'. Ridiculing the 'lounger' and the 'smart', Nicholas Amhurst composed a letter supposedly from an undergraduate fop named Valentine Frippery taking issue with those who asserted that Oxford was a boorish, uncultured place:

> Oxford a boorish place! Poor wretch! I am sorry for thy ignorance. Who wears finer linen than Jack Flutter? Who has handsomer tie-wigs, or more fashionable cloaths, or cuts a bolder dash, than Tom Paroquet? Where can you find a handier man at a tea-table than Robin Tattle?[32]

Amhurst describes beautifully a day in the life of a 'smart' like Valentine Frippery. Of course, his account was intended to be humorous and should not be taken as strictly accurate. However, it was meant to be believable and shares with the descriptions of former undergraduates like George Colman, an emphasis on a deliberate inversion of the university regime:

> He is one of those who come in their academical undress, every morning between ten and eleven, to Lyne's Coffee-house; after which he takes a turn or two upon the park, or under Merton Wall, whilst the dull REGULARS are at dinner in their hall, according to statute; about one he dines alone in his chamber upon a boiled chicken or some pettitoes; after which he allows himself an hour at least to dress in, to make his afternoon's appearance at Lyne's; from whence he adjourns to Hamilton's about five; from whence (after strutting about the room for a while, and drinking a dram of citron), he goes to chapel, to show how genteelly he dresses, and how well he can chaunt. After prayers he drinks tea with some celebrated toast, and then waits upon her to Magdalen Grove or Paradise Garden, and back again. He seldom eats any supper, and never reads anything but novels and romances.[33]

A number of commentaries published in the early eighteenth century remark on the recent nature of the problem of toasts (daughters of local tradesmen keen to marry wealthy undergraduates) which would suggest that it was closely related to the significant increase in students from gentry families entering the universities which most historians agree took place in the latter part of the seventeenth and early eighteenth century.[34] In *Strephon's*

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Revenge, Nicholas Amhurst referred to 'that multitude of female Residentiaries…who have of late infested our learned retirements.'[35] Ambrose Philips, editor of the journal, *The Free Thinker*, was even more specific, writing, in June 1718, that the large-scale rendezvous of university men with toasts in Oxford's public parks had only 'been a custom these Two years.'[36] Also remarked upon was the rising age of university freshmen, the group seen as most targeted by toasts. Amhurst, for one, connected the apparent rise in the number of these women with the fact that the average freshman now had 'the appearance of a man.'[37] Mere school-boys had been replaced by 'young Men of…warm Inclinations'[38], who (crucially for toasts on the look-out for rich husbands) would reach the age of majority, and thus be able to marry without their fathers' consent, before quitting university.

Complaints about the university failing to train students for manhood also emphasized another aspect of unmanly behaviour, which was seen as characteristic of both the boy and the fop, namely a tendency towards uncontrolled violence. As Philip Carter explains, although this may seem at first to 'contradict the classical connection between effeminacy, weakness and cowardice', eighteenth-century understandings of effeminacy stressed a lack of 'ability to think in a consistently rational manner' which 'prompted individuals to engage in violent and potentially fatal acts.'[39] In the first half of the eighteenth century, students at both universities, although particularly at Oxford, with its strong ties to the Jacobite cause, were strongly criticized for engaging in violent riots in favour of the deposed Stuart family. In the course of such riots many students flagrantly disrespected the university authorities and senior members who tried to intervene to prevent them taking part. In a particularly violent outbreak at Oxford celebrating the third anniversary of the great rebellion of 1745, two undergraduates, James Dawes and John Whitmore, openly declared for the Pretender. When a university proctor attempted to remove them from the scene, Dawes physically assaulted him, declaring boldly, 'I am the man that dare say God bless King James the 3d and tell you my Name is Dawes of St Mary

Hall. I am a man of an Independent Fortune and therefore am afraid of…no man and no proctor.'[40]

The theme of social or class distinctions within the universities is once more raised by Dawes' comment that his confidence in assaulting the proctor and defying the formal university hierarchy was his identity as a 'man of an Independent Fortune.' This kind of incident, in which private means and social status seemingly empowered students from noble and wealthy gentry families to assert their superiority within the bounds of the university, seems to have increased in the eighteenth century along with the number of students from these social strata. While in the case of Dawes and Whitmore, the university may be seen to have won, given that both students were arraigned before the Court of King's Bench and given prison sentences of two years and a large fine, this was by no means always the case. Growing conflict between undergraduates and university officers along class lines caused senior members at both universities increasing anxiety over the course of the eighteenth century.[41]

One such case which did not go well for the university authorities was that of the Oxford undergraduate, Hon. William Craven, who had been arrested by a proctor, Richard Scrope, in 1763 for refusing to give up several friends sheltering in his college rooms after being caught 'drinking at a public coffee-house' after curfew.[42] Some ten years after the incident, which ended with Craven giving the proctor a half-baked apology, Scrope published a long pamphlet detailing his part in the affair, in an attempt, he claimed, to rescue his damaged reputation. He had recently heard that a friend of Craven's had badmouthed him at a public event, accusing him of deliberately and maliciously seeking to ruin the reputation and fortune of the young noble. The whole account is marked by painfully sharp social distinctions, which reveal clearly the extent to which academic authority was effectively challenged and even set aside in the face of wealth and rank. When Scrope tried to gain entry to Craven's rooms, he tells the reader, the door was summarily shut in his face, 'which rudeness was followed by a very insolent speech and

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an oath' after which Craven, 'in a very rude and haughty manner questioned me about my business there'. 'I had a right by the statutes', Scrope declares, but 'he denied my authority, treating me with much derision and contempt.'[43] Scrope did ultimately withdraw from the college when no college officers could be found to support him. So strongly did he feel about the incident that he declared the 'the force of all the wholesome statutes…would have been entirely eluded', if he had not pursued his complaint.[44]

The case is of particular interest as Scrope clearly saw it as typical of many others involving wealthy, noble undergraduates and university officers. In recent years, he declared, 'loud complaints…have been made of the too great relaxation of [academic discipline]', and he referred to 'some very spirited and judicious steps' recently taken 'to curb licentiousness and extravagance.'[45] 'Noblemen and men of fortune', he continued, 'should reflect how particularly incumbent it is on upon them to yield a strict conformity to the excellent rules of government established there for the sake of others, as well as their own.' They should not encourage 'students of inferior classes…who, vainly fond of being distinguished by them, besides being diverted from their studies, upon their due progress in which they are to depend for a livelihood, are drawn into a dissipated, licentious, and extravagant course of life.'[46] There is real bitterness in his pamphlet and he draws attention to the sharp social divisions within the undergraduate body as well as between the often lower born university officers and the students, many of whom were from noble and gentry families.

This kind of tension was also common, it seems, between tutors and students. The man behind the Oxford publication, *The Loiterer*, James Austen, writing in 1790, paints an insightful picture of what he claims are typical tutor-pupil relations, with arrogant, ill-qualified tutors and angry pupils:

> With [a] slender stock of knowledge and without any acquaintance with the world or any insight into characters, [the tutor] enters on his office with more zeal than discretion, asserts his own opinions with arrogance and maintains them with

> obstinacy, calls *contradiction*, *contumacy*, and *reply*, *pertness*, and deals out his *jobations*, *impositions*, and *confinements*, to every ill-fated *junior* who is daring enough to oppose his sentiments, or doubt his opinions.

However, as Austen points out, this arrogance often stemmed from a tutor's consciousness of his own social inferiority. For, as he points out, 'few who have better prospects chuse to undertake so disagreeable an office.' [47]

Scholarly masculinity and counter-revolution

After the Jacobite riots, the universities were already alive to the increasing importance of politics in the self-fashioning of undergraduate identities, and were noticeably anxious following the outbreak of the American Revolution and the reported participation of many college students in the rebellion. Several historians of masculinity in eighteenth-century England have observed a shift somewhere in the last two or three decades of the century away from 'gentlemanly politeness' towards an emphasis upon what has been termed 'manly simplicity.'[48] In particular, scholars have highlighted a hardening of gender boundaries, a decline in gender complementarity and the emergence of domesticity and separate spheres as influential ideologies in middle-class culture. These changes have been interpreted variously as forming part of the evangelical 'reformation of manners'[49] and the influence of romanticism[50], where stress was placed on inward rather than outward manliness, as an emotional reaction to the shock of the American Revolution and the need to reclaim the language of simplicity and sober patriotism from the American rebels[51], and, most commonly, after 1789, as a reaction to what many saw as the debauched, brutal and chaotic world of French Jacobinism.[52] So far such a shift has been discerned in many areas of life – in science[53], political discourse[54], on the stage and in the musical hall[55], in the writing of poetry[56] and history[57], and, to some extent, also, in the private morality of

bourgeois families[58] – but not until now in the universities. This has much to do with the fact that this shift has often been seen as a reformist and republican, anti-aristocratic discourse, distinctly popular in nature, in the words of John Tosh, serving 'as a marker to distinguish the broad mass of citizens from the privileged and idle.'[59] However, as Matthew McCormack has shown, conservative elites also mobilized the language of simplicity, sobriety and independence to support their cause, particularly in the ideological context of anti-Jacobinism[60] and this was no less true of the universities in the final years of the eighteenth century.

According to Vicesimus Knox in the mid 1790s, the foppishness of undergraduates had not diminished significantly. Few wish 'to appear and be a scholar', he complained, the majority preferring to be 'merely [men] of fashion and pleasure.' They ignored their classical training, relying on tricks, deceit and borrowed Latin and Greek compositions to cheat their way through university examinations.[61] As such they were left 'fop[s] without education, knowledge, taste, and a power of conversing with sense and spirit.'[62] Being a fop came to be associated with superficial continental learning and a neglect of 'solid' and 'manly' classical scholarship. Beforehand, the immature behaviour of undergraduates, in particular their taste for rioting, just as their fondness for courting women and wearing urban fashions, had been seen by the university authorities as unbecoming but not particularly threatening. In the same way, their passion for French comedies and romances which was previously taken as just another token of their foppish lifestyle was reinterpreted as politically threatening against the background of the French Revolution.

In particular, the universities were suspicious of undergraduates who not only dressed extravagantly as individuals but attempted to organize themselves into groups or societies with special uniforms. At some point between 1788 and 1791, for example, George Canning, together with Lord Henry Spencer and several other undergraduates at Christ Church, Oxford, formed a debating society. Here, extravagant dress, in this case, a

special uniform which paid homage to Demosthenes, Cicero, Pitt and Fox, was associated not simply with disobedience but with radical republican ideology. The group proposed dangerous Whig and even revolutionary toasts, and debated controversial political issues. In this atmosphere, Fox's own fondness for France and French culture and his regular trips to Paris while an undergraduate at Hertford College were remarked upon as he became one of the most radical supporters of the French Revolution in Britain.[63] Following his example, Canning and his friends quickly became a source of concern to the Dean of Christ Church, Cyril Jackson, who dealt the society its death blow when he convinced Canning to leave.[64] At Cambridge, there were several instances of junior members protesting explicitly in favour of the Jacobin cause. In the later 1790s, for example, a crowd of students gathered on Castle Hill in Cambridge to listen to the Duke of Bedford, who, dressed 'in a Brutus crop, in contrast with the full-bottomed wigs of the Seniors, and powdered locks of the Undergraduates of the University, stood up above the crowd, and made a long and vehement harangue in favour of those revolutionary measures which he had come there to advocate.'[65]

In this sense, the universities may be seen as tying in with a process which several historians have highlighted in wider British society in the latter part of the eighteenth century, namely the growing tendency to associate extravagant urban fashions and the figure of the fop with the evils and extremes of the French Revolution.[66] The last years of the eighteenth century witnessed several crackdowns by the university authorities on any and all breaches of academic dress by students. Moreover, we repeatedly see both foppishness and immaturity used to characterize the revolutionaries in America and France. At this time, the university authorities saw those who fell victim to radical and revolutionary ideology generally as immature and rebellious children, which only reinforced their fear that undergraduates would be particularly susceptible. In Oxford, in particular, the fondness of the Jacobins for the new sciences and their dismissal of ancient learning were seen as characteristic of their intellectual and moral immaturity. As the

Rector of Lincoln College, Edward Tatham, put it: They 'labour to deprive us of the political learning of antiquity, and of [the ancients'] collective wisdom and experience.'[67] 'Without experience for their foundations', he continued, 'or learning for their guide, without principles of judgment and without reasoning at all, the leaders of this faction usurp the claim to superior knowledge, and are the school-masters in politics to instruct the rising age.'[68] This discourse was especially strong in relation to the American rebels, who, as colonial subjects of the British, were seen in quite a literal sense as 'petulant and rebellious children' recklessly throwing off parental authority.[69]

In another central aspect of late eighteenth-century elite male education, namely the Grand Tour, Michèle Cohen has identified a significant shift away from spending time in France in favour of alternative destinations, especially in Britain, or a rejection of touring altogether.[70] At the universities, and among the literary elite, more generally, we witness a comparable shift, a vocal campaign, to disassociate classical learning, which formed the heart of the university curriculum from republican and revolutionary ideology, with which it appeared increasingly linked through the appropriation of classical iconography and language by French revolutionaries.[71] A representative example of rhetoric designed to stress the manliness, Englishness and fundamental conservatism of classical learning appears in Edmund Burke's famous *Reflections* published in 1793. As one of Burke's most recent editors has written: 'In Burke's pages...Lucan mocked the unashamed lawlessness of the French legislature and warned of the unaccountable anonymity of the multitude; Martial condemned the inhumanity of the new French constitution and Tacitus spoke against the collapse of ancient loyalty in the French army.'[72]

The revamped classical curriculum launched at Oxford in 1800, which was for the first time, made compulsory for all undergraduates to study and undergo public

examination in, shared similar aims. In the preamble of the Statute which introduced the changes, its founders denied any other motive than the abolition of obsolete practices in Oxford's antiquated examination system; however, as the new system's greatest defender, Edward Copleston, made clear in his spirited defence of the new curriculum against the accusations of the *Edinburgh Review* in 1810, its primary aim had been to secure and reinforce traditional classical learning at Oxford for the production of politically obedient, conservative, 'manly' Englishmen. Aristotle, whose works had been made the focus and centrepiece of the new uniform syllabus and examination system, was referred to by Copleston as the 'manly' philosopher *par excellence*[73] and he went on to offer himself as an example of the kind of 'manly reasoner'[74] produced by the university's traditional classical syllabus. Copleston argued that Aristotle's syllogistic logic developed students' minds more successfully than any other subject. It is 'the grammar of reasoning by means of words', he wrote, and 'the necessary foundation on which every solid intellectual fabric must be raised'.[75] Moreover, he argued, Aristotle taught undergraduates the importance of moderation, through his notion of virtue lying in the mean between two vicious extremes. His *Ethics* and *Rhetoric* were 'best calculated perhaps of any single works for bringing into play all the energies of the intellect', unrivalled, as they were, in 'the precision of the language, the close connection of the reasoning, the enlarged philosophical views, and the immense store of principles and maxims which they contain'.[76] Copleston argued that Oxford's classical curriculum provided the perfect training of students' mind and moral sense for the challenges of manhood. 'Without directly qualifying a man for any of the employments of life', he wrote, 'it enriches and ennobles all'; it is 'a main ingredient in that complete and generous education, which fits a man "to perform justly, skilfully, and

magnanimously, all the offices, both private and public, of peace and war."'[77] It avoids the limits of specialization, 'expands and enlarges the mind, excites its faculties, and calls those limbs and muscles into freer exercise, which, by too constant use in one direction, not only acquire an illiberal air, but are also apt to lose somewhat of their native play and energy'.[78] The texts he went on to list in detail as those most frequently chosen by tutors for their students to read under the new system were precisely those which had been deliberately preferred in college curricula from the middle years of the eighteenth century in an attempt to prevent undergraduates being exposed to dangerous ideas.[79]

At the same time, and using precisely the same metaphor as Burke, Copleston contrasted this manly version of English classics, which, it might be argued, constituted no less than the 'new ideology of elite masculinity' which Karen Harvey has referred to in this period,[80] with the rigid, unthinking and effeminate education system of Republican France. 'We want not men who are clipped and espaliered into any form which the whim of the gardener may dictate', declared Copleston, 'or the narrow limits of his parterre require. Let our saplings take their full spread, and send forth their vigorous shoots in all the boldness and variety of nature.'[81]

Once again, we see the merging of the two meanings of manliness as both masculine and mature. On the one hand, the products of Oxford's new examinations system were praised in contrast with the 'clipped' and 'espaliered' effeminate graduates of French higher education; at the same time, they were praised for their maturity and wise judgement. The new syllabus and examination system, were, one commentator recalled, designed to appeal 'to the more mature part of the student' and to function as an 'unrivalled inducement to self-discipline.'[82] When proposing the institution of similar reforms to the

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public examinations at Cambridge in the late eighteenth century, James Lambert, Regius Professor of Greek, explained, 'We have...found that we cannot govern our Youth here *now*, as *Youth...were wont* to be governed. And we have so far accommodated to the times, as to relax of our boyish discipline' and 'to substitute more suitable discipline in its stead'. Taking the form of '*laws* more fitted for the man' than the boy, he wrote, the university had 'endeavoured, by every *possible incentive* to study' to make students '*ambitious* of acquiring *every manly attainment*'.[83]

One of the chief aims of this article has been to bring Oxford and Cambridge back into the debate about elite masculine socialization in eighteenth-century England. The ancient universities are too often dismissed as bastions of moral stability and successful inculcators of traditional masculinity. It has presented a rather different interpretation of the role of the universities in shaping the identities of young men in the eighteenth century, one complicated considerably by rising student ages, generational tension and the emergence of complex student subcultures in which undergraduates celebrated metropolitan fashion and adopted the figure of the fop as a form of generational rebellion. We examined key characteristics of the lifestyle of undergraduate fops, what they read, how they dressed, where they ate and drank, and, above all, how they sought to fashion themselves as men - in opposition to, and often in deliberate violation of, the traditional ideal of the humble and hard-working scholar enshrined in the university statutes. Along the way, sharp divisions, along both class and generational lines, emerged within the university communities as did their importance in the construction of masculine identities, both among the student body and university officers who administered, or sought to administer discipline.

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Moreover, the article suggested reasons why the complex and often contradictory nature of the universities as spaces of masculine socialization has not been given more attention by historians. In particular, it highlighted the growing tendency in recent years to focus upon urban settings within the history of eighteenth-century England and upon an ideal of gender complementarity. Such a focus tends to underplay or ignore the role of ostensibly single-sex institutions such as public schools and universities which are often assumed to be free of gender anxieties. Increasingly, interpretations of the Enlightenment as a cultural movement, based primarily in metropolitan, often continental settings, have also shifted attention away from the ancient universities and similar spaces, located, as they frequently were, in small towns or semi-rural locations.

In the final section, it was suggested that, far from being exceptions to the general rule, developments at Oxford and Cambridge may reasonably be seen as fitting into broader patterns in late eighteenth-century masculinity observed in other areas of cultural life, in particular, a significant shift away from French culture, viewed increasingly as effeminate and dangerous, against the background of the French Revolution. Comparable to a reimagining of the Grand Tour as effeminate and foppish, traced by Michèle Cohen, we observed a growing tendency at Oxford and Cambridge to dismiss continental (in particular, French) learning in favour of a renewed emphasis upon a traditional classical syllabus recently rebranded as manly and patriotic. The authors and texts included were, of course, also carefully selected, and only those felt to promote socially and politically conservative values were given special emphasis.

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NOTES

[1] Philip Carter, 'An 'Effeminate' or 'Efficient' Nation? Masculinity and Eighteenth-Century Social Documentary', *Textual Practice* 11:3 (1997), 429-443.

[2] See, for example, Graham Midgely, *University Life in Eighteenth-Century Oxford* (London, 1996).

[3] Alexandra Shepard, 'Student Masculinity in Early Modern Cambridge, 1560-1640.' In: Krug-Richter, B. and Mohrmann, R.E. (eds.) *Frühneuzeitliche Universitätskulturen: Kulturhistorische Perspektiven auf die Hochschulen in Europa* (Böhlau, Köln, 2009), p. 69.

[4] Carolyn D. Williams, *Pope, Homer and Manliness: Some Aspects of Eighteenth-Century Classical Learning* (London, 1993), p. 38.

[5] Ibid., 15.

[6] Ibid., 38.

[7] Ibid., 40.

[8] Anthony Fletcher, *Gender, Sex and Subordination in England, 1500-1800* (London, 1995), p. 298.

[9] Ibid., 303.

[10] Henry French and Mark Rothery, 'Upon Your Entry into the World': Masculine Values and the Threshold of Adulthood Among Landed Elites in England 1680–1800', *Social History* 33:4 (2008), 409-410.

[11] Shepard, 'Student Masculinity in Early Modern Cambridge, 1560-1640', p. 54.

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[12] Dena Goodman, *The Republic of Letters: A Cultural History of the French Enlightenment* (Ithaca, NY., 1994), p. 3.

[13] See, for example, Joanne Bailey, ''A very sensible man': Imagining Fatherhood in England, c. 1750-1830, *History* 95:319 (2010), 267-292; Jane Rendell, *The Pursuit of Pleasure: Gender, Space & Architecture in Regency London* (London: Continuum, 2002); Robert Shoemaker, 'Male honour and the decline of public violence in eighteenth-century London', *Social History* 26:2 (2001), 190-208; Philip Carter, 'Men About Town: Representations of Foppery and Masculinity in Early Eighteenth-Century Urban Society' in Elaine Chalus and Hannah Barker eds., *Gender in Eighteenth-Century England: Roles, Representations and Responsibilities* (Longman, 1997), pp. 31-57; What was Masculine about the Public Sphere? Gender and the Coffeehouse Milieu in post-Restoration England', *History Workshop Journal* 51 (Spring 2001), 127-157.

[14] Harvey stressed the need to pay more attention to all-male environments as well as to non-urban contexts. See K. Harvey, 'The History of Masculinity, c. 1650-1800', *Journal of British Studies* 44:2 (April 2005), 306, 309.

[15] Shepard, 'Student Masculinity in Early Modern Cambridge', p. 53.

[16] Alexandra Shepard, 'Student Violence in Early Modern Cambridge' in Laurence Brockliss and Nicola Sheldon (eds.) Childhood and Violence in the Western Tradition (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2010), p. 234.

[17] Shepard, 'Student Masculinity in Early Modern Cambridge, 1560-1640', p. 56.

[18] Lawrence Stone, 'The Size and Composition of the Oxford Student Body 1580-1909' in Stone, L., (ed.), *The University in Society* Vol. I (Princeton, 1974), pp. 3-110.

[19] George Colman, *Random Records* Vol. I (1830), p. 266.

[20] Shepard, 'Student Masculinity in Early Modern Cambridge, 1560-1640', p. 56; other analyses of the importance of generational relations at Oxford and Cambridge for later periods can be found in Heather Ellis, *Generational Conflict and University Reform: Oxford in the Age of Revolution* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2012) and Paul Deslandes, *Oxbridge Men: British Masculinity and the Undergraduate Experience, 1850-1920* (Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 2005), pp. 48-120.

[21] Rothery and French, 'Upon Your Entry into the World', 410.

[22] John Gascoigne, 'Maths and Meritocracy: The Emergence of the Cambridge Mathematical Tripos', *Social Studies of Science* 14 (1984), 562-3.

[23] [Nicholas Amhurst], *Terrae-Filius, or the Secret History of the University of Oxford* (London, 1726), Vol. II, 2nd edition, p. 67.

[24] Edward Gibbon, *Miscellaneous Works of Edward Gibbon* (Dublin, 1796), Vol. I, p. 41.

[25] Shepard, 'Student Masculinity in Early Modern Cambridge', p. 74.

[26] Jonathan Swift, *The Intelligencer* No. IX, 85-86.

[27] [Amhurst], *Terrae-Filius*, Vol. II, 2nd edition, p. 169.

[28] Arthur Hamilton Gibbs, *Rowlandson's Oxford* (Oxford, 1911), p. 35.

[29] James Harris, 1st Earl of Malmesbury, *Diaries and Correspondence* (1844), p. ix.

[30] Peter Borsay, *The English Urban Renaissance: Culture and Society in the Provincial Town 1660-1770* (Oxford, 1989).

[31] Colman, *Random Records* Vol. I, p. 264.

[32] [Amhurst], *Terrae Filius*, Vol. II, 2ns edition, p. 254-255.

[33] Ibid., p. 255.

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[34] See, for example, Stone, 'The Size and Composition of the Oxford Student Body 1580-1909', pp. 3-110; Kristine Haugen, 'Imagined Universities: Public Insult and the Terrae Filius in Early Modern Oxford', *History of Universities* 16:2 (2000), 22.

[35] Nicholas Amhurst, *Strephon's Revenge: A Satire on the Oxford Toasts* (London, 1718), p. ii.

[36] [Ambrose Philips], *The Free Thinker* No. 37 (1718) (London, 1722-23), p. 265.

[37] Amhurst, *Strephon's Revenge*, p. iii.

[38] Ibid., vi.

[39] Carter, 'An 'Effeminate' or 'Efficient' Nation?', 432-433.

[40] William R. Ward, *Georgian Oxford: University Politics in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 1958), p. 170; see also Paget Toynbee, 'Horace Walpole's *Delenda est Oxonia*', *English Historical Review* 42:165 (January 1927), 95-108.

[41] W.R. Ward, *Georgian Oxford. University Politics in the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 1958), p. 170. Social distinctions arguably played a more significant role in defining generational tensions within the universities in the eighteenth century than in later periods such as the nineteenth century when separate student status groups such as gentleman and fellow commoner were abolished, all students were subject to the same disciplinary and examination procedures, and the student body was dominated, no longer by the wealth and display of the gentry and nobility, but by the growing professional middle classes.

[42] Richard Scrope, *A letter ... occasioned by a late misrepresentation of the circumstances of a prosecution commenced A.D. 1763, by the proctors of the University of Oxford, against W.C- [Craven]: with brief reflections upon academical discipline* (Salisbury, 1773), p. 4.

[43] Ibid., pp. 5-6.

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[44] Ibid., p. 16-17.

[45] Ibid., p. 20.

[46] Ibid., p. 21.

[47] [James Austen], *The Loiterer* Vol. II (Oxford, 1790), p. 11.

[48] See, for example, John Tosh, 'Gentlemanly Politeness and Manly Simplicity in Victorian England', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 12 (2002), 455-72.

[49] Tosh, 'Gentlemanly Politeness and Manly Simplicity', 456.

[50] Donelle R. Rowe, 'Benevolent Brothers and Supervising Mothers', *Children's Literature* 25 (1997), 87-115.

[51] Dror Wahrman, 'Percy's Prologue: From Gender Play to Gender Panic in Eighteenth-Century England', *Past and Present* 159 (May 1998), 113-160.

[52] See, for example, Gerald Newman, *The Rise of English Nationalism: A Cultural History 1740-1830* (New York, 1997), pp. 128-55; Michèle Cohen, 'Manliness, Effeminacy and the French: Gender and the Construction of National Character in Eighteenth-Century England', in Tim Hitchcock and Michèle Cohen eds., *English Masculinities, 1660-1800* (London, 1999), pp. 44-61.

[53] Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (London, 1990).

[54] Matthew McCormack, *The Independent Man: Citizenship and Gender Politics in Georgian England* (Manchester, 2005).

[55] Wahrman, 'Percy's Prologue'; Anna Clark, 'The Chevalier D'Eon and Wilkes: Masculinity and Politics in the Eighteenth Century', *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 32:1, Nationalism (Fall, 1998), 29-30.

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[56] Rowe, 'Benevolent Brothers and Supervising Mothers'.

[57] Philip Hicks, 'Catharine Macaulay's Civil War: Gender, History and Republicanism in Georgian Britain', *Journal of British Studies* 41:2 (April 2002), 170-198.

[58] See, for example, Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (Chicago, 1987); John Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (London, 1999).

[59] Tosh, 'Gentlemanly Politeness and Manly Simplicity', 470.

[60] McCormack, *The Independent Man*, pp. 140-151.

[61] Vicesimus Knox, *Liberal Education* (London, 1795), p. 72.

[62] Vicesimus Knox, *Winter Evenings: or, Lucubrations on Life and Letters* (1800), Vol. I, p. 342.

[63] Charles James Fox, *The Life of the Right Honourable Charles James Fox…* (Albion Press, 1807), p. 18.

[64] Charles E. Mallet, *A History of the University of Oxford* Vol. III (London, 1927), p. 174; Christopher Hollis, *The Oxford Union* (London, 1965), p. 12.

[65] Clement Carlyon, *Early Years and Late Reflections*, Vol. III (London, 1856), pp. 50-51.

[66] On the stark shift in attitudes towards French politeness and gentility in the latter part of the century, see Cohen, 'Manliness, Effeminacy and the French', pp. 44-61; Clark, 'The Chevalier D'Eon and Wilkes: Masculinity and Politics in the Eighteenth Century', 19-48; Hicks, 'Catharine Macaulay's Civil War: Gender, History and Republicanism in Georgian Britain', 170-198.

[67] Edward Tatham, *A Sermon Preached Before the University of Oxford on the 5th of November 1791* (London, 1791), pp. 32, 38.

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68 Tatham, *A Sermon Preached Before the University of Oxford on the 5th of November 1791*, p. 30.

69 For the involvement of college students in the American Revolution, see David W. Robson, *Educating Republicans: The College in the Era of the American Revolution 1750-1800* (London: Greenwood, 1985); Jurgen Herbst, *From Crisis to Crisis: American College Government, 1636-1819* (Cambridge, Mass., 1982).

70 Michèle Cohen, 'The Grand Tour: Language, National Identity and Masculinity', *Changing English: Studies in Reading and Culture*, 8, 2 (2001), 129-141.

71 See, for example, Mortimer N.S. Sellers, 'Classical Influences on the Law and Politics of the French Revolution' in Anthony Grafton, Glenn Most, Salvatore Settis, eds., *The Classical Tradition* (Harvard, 2009).

72 Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France: A Critical Edition* ed. J.C.D. Clark (Stanford, CA., 2001), p. 94.

73 [Edward Copleston], *A Reply to the Calumnies of the Edinburgh Review Against Oxford: Containing an Account of Studies Pursued in that University* (Oxford, 1810), p. 29.

74 Ibid., 2.

75 [Edward Copleston], *A Second Reply to the Edinburgh Review* (Oxford, 1810), p. 9.

76 [Copleston], *A Reply*, pp. 140-1.

77 Ibid., 112.

78 Ibid., 111-112.

79 For more on this, see Ellis, *Generational Conflict and University Reform*, pp. 32-63.

80 Harvey, 'The History of Masculinity, c. 1650-1800', 299.

[81] [Copleston], *A Reply*, p. 157. Cf. the use of a very similar metaphor in Burke, *Reflections* ed. Clark, p. 345.

[82] 'The Universities [Oxford and Cambridge]', *Fraser's Magazine* 38 (November 1848), 585.

[83] James Lambert, *A Letter to the Author of an Observation on the on the Design of Establishing Annual Examinations at Cambridge* (Cambridge, [1774]), p. 21.