



Fashioning Masculinity: National Identity and Language in the Eighteenth Century

Dr Michele Cohen, Michele Cohen

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The fashioning of English gentlemen in the eighteenth century was modelled on French practices of sociability and conversation. Michele Cohen shows how at the same time, the English constructed their cultural relations with the French as relations of seduction and desire. She argues that this produced anxiety on the part of the English over the effect of French practices on English masculinity and the virtue of English women.

By the end of the century, representing the French as an effeminate other was integral to the forging of English, masculine national identity. Michele Cohen examines the derogation of women and the French which accompanied the emergent 'masculine' English identity. While taciturnity became emblematic of the English gentleman's depth of mind and masculinity, sprightly conversation was seen as representing the shallow and inferior intellect of English women and the French of both sexes.

Michele Cohen also demonstrates how visible evidence of girls' verbal and language learning skills served only to construe the female mind as inferior. She argues that this perception still has currency today.

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