

Response by

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No overseas travel, no luxury goods purchased abroad in glamorous stores, constrained sociability and an enforced return to the domestic and familial. Such has been our time in Australia during COVID-19, where a ban on all overseas travel remains enforced, and seated restaurants, cafés, and most stores were shuttered for nearly three months. Hairdressers were closed for the first month and then limited to 30-minute sessions, prompting a right-wing television commentator to successfully lobby the Federal government that it was impossible to maintain one's hair within such strictures. As international borders and local businesses slowly reopen, can we compare our predicament with an earlier eighteenth-century episode, when travel was impossible due to warfare, yet young men strained to experience foreign life, tastes, and fashions?

A Liverpool earthenware ceramic tile, made about 250 years ago, seems to share something of the contemporary mood of risk and peril in travel today, as well as demands on our appearance at times of social change (Fig. 10). It cannot be dated precisely but is copied from *The Englishman in Paris*, a print drawn by James Caldwell, that had been published 10 May 1770 by J. Smith and Robert Sayer, London. The tile, possibly destined for a chimney piece or created as a novelty, depicts a Frenchified "friseur" or male hairdresser directing powder at the hair of an elderly gentlemen using a retractable wooden "powder carrot". The gentleman looks uncomfortable, but passive and obliging. On the floor lies an open book titled *A Six Weeks Tour to Paris*. The gentleman is either preparing for a visit there, or an imagined one, adopting a fashionable style on top of his head. The awkwardness of his pose and the provincial chair on which he sits are in contrast to the agile, balletic pose of the thin stylist, whose breeches have too much "room" in them as was often said of effeminate men at the time.



Figure 10.

Ceramic glazed tile depicting a hairdresser, Liverpool (manufacturer), after the etching and engraving by James Caldwell (printmaker), *The Englishman in Paris*, published 10 May 1770 by J. Smith and Robert Sayer, ca. 1775, earthenware, 0.08 x 12.5 x 12.5 cm. Collection of National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, presented by Mr and Mrs F. Hodgkin, 1939(4656.72-D3). Digital image courtesy of National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne (All rights reserved).

The tableau is inscribed within a rococo cartouche, re-emphasising its French charge and allusion. The print and tile are contemporary with the well-known macaroni of the 1760s–1770s, young men of cosmopolitan outlook primarily interested in luxury fashion and accessories, noted for their carousing, gambling, effeminate dress, and travel abroad. Their impact was amplified by the great expansion of printed satirical caricatures. Macaroni men embodied a tension in English society between native interests, manufactures, and prerogatives, and a cosmopolitan outlook that privileged travel, urbanity, and access to outside ideas.

Following the conclusion of the Seven Years War (1756–1763), many young well-to-do men rushed to France and Italy to see what was going on with the fashions they had so missed during wartime. Hairstyles were important and fashionable men in the late 1760s and 1770s ceased wearing the small

“scratch-wig” of the older generation, a prosthetic which supplemented natural hair. Instead, a very tall *toupée* rising in front and a thick club of hair behind required extensive dressing with pomade and white powder. These wigs became widespread and were copied by men “up from the country”—barbers and hairdressers were common even in rural areas of England and France. The new fashionable macaroni “queue” of hair was held in a large black satin wig-bag, often trimmed with a rosette, to protect the back of the jacket.

The wig-bag was requisite for attendance at court and therefore became striking when worn in the street and in everyday life; it also carried an added expense (account books indicate that wig-bags had to be replaced at least several times a year). The very high wig was commonly associated with continental affectation, much like the taking of snuff and the wearing of silk and velvet rather than good English broadcloth (woollens). Food also signified nationalism or contagion: satirical prints reiterating Hogarth depicted the robust Briton as consumer of hearty roast beef, whereas the French were scrawny beings who ate grilled cats, frogs, and pasta. Pasta—“macaroni”—did not require mastication and therefore was even more strongly marked as effeminate and unmanly.

Anxieties connecting luxury and foreignness, unease about cultural and racial difference, the rise of “common sense” in right-wing political discourse, these troubling developments in our own time can be glimpsed in this object. The exact function of its visual joke translated to a ceramic body is unclear, raising questions about how contemporary viewers reacted to such topical objects and social stereotypes. As many Australians hope and pray to visit continental Europe again—we are now told at least not until 2021 and possibly later—what luxury goods and experiences do we hope to sample there and how will we prepare for the journey? What objects may in future commemorate our anxieties around that travel, as well as our nationalisms and curiosities about other cultures, places and experiences?