

Herman Roodenburg: The Eloquence of the Body. Perspectives on gesture in the Dutch Republic, Zwolle: Waanders Uitgevers 2004, 208 S., 100 Farb-, 100 s/w-Abb., ISBN 90-400-9474-8, EUR 45,00

Rezensiert von:

Martha Hollander

Hofstra University, Hempstead, NY

This striking book opens with a question: "Are the rich different from other people?" In the seventeenth century, as Herman Roodenburg goes on to show, they evidently were. What made them different, the *je ne sais quoi* (a term, we learn, at least as old as the eighteenth century) of their grace and refinement, is his subject. This was not an innate quality but rather involved years of careful cultivation, centering on the new late Renaissance concept of civility. Roodenburg's book focuses on how this universally recognized code of manners, developed among the European elite during the late sixteenth century in Italy, France and Spain, was adopted by the nobles and commoners alike of the Dutch Republic.

The two seminal texts that gave birth to manners manuals and the concept of civility were Castiglione's *Il libro del cortegiano* of 1528 and Erasmus' *De civilitate morum puerilium* of 1530. Roodenburg shows how Castiglione's art of pleasing and Erasmus' educational child-based agenda merged in seventeenth-century practical application. (All the later etiquette books invoke both models.) Good manners came to be construed as a mode of pleasing self-presentation, combining "representation" with "accommodation" in relating outward behavior to the inner self. In other words, they manifested a new psychological approach to social relations, "in which other genres would flourish as well, including manuals on physiognomy, on how to grasp the passions of others by deciphering their outward manifestations." (28-29).

Accordingly, Roodenburg examines not so much the particular manners books themselves (though he offers some close, nuanced readings of Castiglione), but how they were used. His clever strategy is to focus on a single family: the poet, courtier, diplomat Constantijn Huygens and his two sons, Constantijn and Christiaan. The Huygenses are, he claims, "a natural choice, for they operated precisely where the court and the city intersected and they left behind one of the finest collections of family documents in Dutch history." (29). Family memoirs, letters, personal libraries, Huygens' two Latin autobiographies, and above all, his unique diary about the upbringing of his children, form the backbone of the book. As Roodenburg points out, the family texts involve the grooming of young men, since Huygens' daughter Susanna was groomed for marriage and, typically for daughters, her education never extended as far as that of her brothers. The book willy-nilly becomes an account of the construction of

refined manhood, the assumption of masculine power and authority through the achievement of grace.

Surveying the last three decades' worth of work on manners manuals, Roodenburg rejects the semiotically based practice of social history of the past two decades for its emphasis on the body as a carrier of meaning. Rather, he focuses on the actual body, an agent of feeling and action, using the approach of performance studies. He invokes the terms used by Diana Taylor, who distinguishes between a culture's "archive" - written texts, pictures, objects- and its "repertoire" - talking, dancing, singing, performance and gestures. This emphasis on experience addresses the essential paradox which appears in all the manners books: if civility is something someone already has, then why are there books on how to cultivate it? Roodenburg invokes Bourdieu's concepts of "habitus" and "hexis" to refer to movements through which the socially coded body becomes naturalized. His idea of "bodily memory," also understood in the seventeenth century, suggests that learned habits become automatic, hence the actual effect of effortlessness or *sprezzatura* to which Castiglione's readers were taught to aspire.

The second chapter concerns the reception of Italian and French civility concepts in the Netherlands, despite the general Dutch resistance to foreign influence. The most well known civility texts were not published in Dutch until halfway through the seventeenth century and in smaller numbers than elsewhere in Europe. (The first Dutch-language original appeared in the 18th century.) Nonetheless, Roodenburg's study of libraries reveals that long before there were Dutch translations, many members of the elite, including lawyers, professors, doctors, nobles as well as regents, owned civility texts-along with manuals on letter-writing, conversation etc. -in several languages. Nonetheless, he reminds us that the books were "mnemonic devices" (18). The actual instruction received by the Huygens boys in dancing, fencing, riding, languages, plus the finishing touch of conversation in social circles in France and elsewhere, offered the real opportunities for self-fashioning. Roodenburg goes on to survey the Dutch interpretation-largely through the Huygens family-of Castiglione's recommendations : the *honnête homme* (Nicolas Faret's universally adopted phrase) was supposed to be skilled at a number of pursuits in his *otium* (leisure): art, science, and conversation on the one hand, and weaponry, music-making, dancing and riding on the other.

Using the training of the Huygens boys, Roodenburg discusses with the latter activities prescribed for young men: in Bourdieu's phrase, the "immense preliminary labor" of inculcation and embodiment. Dancing, fencing, riding, were considered particularly important in molding the bodies and postures of young men. The instruction manuals for these activities have much in common, all focusing on upright postures, elegance and agility.

This similarity among the discourses of dancing and fencing is extended in the next two chapters to include painting, acting, and rhetoric. Here

Roodenburg departs from the training of the Huygens boys to consider the representation, rather than the embodiment of appropriate speaking and gesturing. Both painting and acting depict characters' types, poses and expressions based on social status. Further, we are reminded of the well-known connection between acting and painting in Dutch theoretical discourse: actors were taught to look at pictures for reference, while painters were encouraged to think like actors. Illustrations from treatises by Gerard de Lairese, Willem Goeree and others reveal taxonomies of gestures, poses and facial expressions. Lairese urged painters to watch well-behaved people to guide their portrayals, and thus to "mirror" their audience, creating ideal forms of deportment for ambitious viewers. (Roodenburg refers to painting as "visual orthopedics."). The final chapter, on the art of rhetoric, shows how the hidebound clergy, despite their avoidance of vanity, were compelled to adopt the new fashion of civility in their preaching styles. As with the connected discourses of painting and acting, similar principles applied to modes of public speaking.

Quite aside from the striking connections he makes among these discourses of civility, the art and rhetoric, Roodenburg's great contribution is to refute certain assumptions made by social historians about the progress of etiquette in the Dutch Republic. In particular, he rethinks the popular historical concept of "aristocratization" of the Dutch middle class urban elite. He points out that it is misleading to speak of commoners adopting the values and lifestyle of aristocracy. After all, they rejected some essential features of aristocratic life: endogamy, blood, honor, and titles. Rather, he suggests the term "in its general sense of leaning towards a certain stylishness or grandness that we tend to identify with the aristocracy." (40).

In fact, the cultivation of this grace, stylishness, *honnêteté*, *sprezzatura*, by any name, was, for the Huygens family at least, a form of survival. Roodenburg shows how Huygens' tireless fashioning of his sons was intended to increase the family's cultural and social capital. "Which no less than the family's economic resources would guarantee the family's continuance, in other words maintain the family honor. [...] Perhaps *honnêteté* was first of all a model to socially ambitious individuals and families." (72-73).

How fitting that this book about the physical experience of culture is a pleasure to hold and look at. It is beautifully produced, with lavish illustrations, an airy, elegant design, and a modest size. Roodenburg has chosen a relaxed conversational style, exploiting the Huygens family's experiences to create a dramatic narrative woven through the discussion of early modern manners. It is a particular shame, then, that the prose suffers from occasional awkward or peculiar phrasing. There are minor inconsistencies: for example, a painting by Jacques de Gheyn is referred to as an engraving; several fascinating illustrations are referred to without sufficient commentary. The organization is somewhat confusing; why, for example, is the discussion of music and conversation included in the chapter on Dutch attitudes towards civility, instead of being treated

separately, like the discussion of dancing and fencing? The final two chapters, which depart from the experiences of Huygens and his sons, treat important material but make the book rather lopsided. Consequently, there is a great deal of repetition. A number of important sources are missing from the bibliography. Nonetheless, despite its stylistic and structural lapses, this revisionist account of manners is an important, and enjoyable, contribution to art history, social history and other areas of early modern studies.

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