

conscious identification of himself with *la patrie* made Michelet enormously popular.

After his death, however, it made him passé. Michelet was consigned to "literature," assigned to schoolchildren for his poetic power, while two generations of "scientific" historians ignored him. Yet, more recently, the trend has reversed: Historians following Lucian Febvre, Marc Bloch, and Jean Guehenno are again championing Michelet.

The literary critic Roland Barthes explained Michelet's current appeal when he observed that his subjectivity "was only the earliest form of that insistence on totality . . . It is because Michelet was a discredited historian (in the scientist sense of the term) that he turns out to have been at once a sociologist, an ethnologist, a psychoanalyst, a social historian." What seemed almost the accidents of Michelet's subjective, romantic method—his interest in popular mentalities, his use of oral testimony, his scrutiny of the historian's relationship to his subject—have become standard approaches in the last decades. Recently, the important journal *Annales*, once known for dismissing the significance of individuals in history, published an editorial statement that called for "new methods" that would carry on Michelet's concern for relating "the individual to the group and the society." Thus, Mitzman comments, "the circle completes, and the grandfather's soul appears indeed to be reborn in his grandchildren."



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RUDENESS AND CIVILITY: Manners in Nineteenth-Century Urban America. By John F. Kasson. Hill and Wang. 305 pp. \$22.95

In the late 1960s rebellious youth demanded to "do their own thing," little realizing that most Americans have long claimed some variant of that right. The 19th-century transcendentalists nurtured an individualism that many took as license to construct their own unique "social" selves. Kasson, a historian at the University of North Carolina, finds that these individualistic

claims have grossly distorted the way social life has operated in the United States. A study of manners, of the forms of civility and rudeness, reveals that personal behavior in America has always been circumscribed by convention.

Kasson concentrates on the 19th-century American urban-dwellers who tended implicitly to accept "the boundless market as the model for all exchange, social as well as economic." Here, in the new economic and social order of the metropolis, egalitarian ideals and marketplace realities came into serious conflict. The problem was how to allocate definitive rank without seeming to curb personal liberty. Americans, Tocqueville observed, had no use for restraints imposed by others, but needed such social distinctions if acquisitive behavior were to have meaning.

One instrument which reconciled "the requirements of a democratic polity and the demands for social distinction" was the 19th-century guidebooks on manners, which started appearing in the 1830s and came streaming off the presses after 1870. Kasson sees these etiquette guides both as instruction manuals for the insecure and as sources of authority in a land where every citizen can claim the correctness of his own opinion and way of life. Specifically, these manuals attempted to prevent "the agony of uncertainty" in a social order where role-playing had displaced feudal role-allocation. In his *Autobiography* (1771), Benjamin Franklin had earlier demonstrated how to adapt one's observable behavior to one's interest. Kasson argues that Franklin thus anticipates 19th-century etiquette, according to which appearances matter more than reality. Here, indeed, is a paradox: By instructing a person not to trust his innate impulses but to copy outward models, "the very rituals intended to fortify individual character undermined a sense of personal coherence." The guides gradually fostered a sense of inadequacy that could be compensated for only by consumption—by buying one's way into approved taste and propriety.

As for the etiquette itself, Kasson uncovers the lost arts of hat-tipping and of cutting and snubbing; of what constituted a proper smile and a proper walk, of how to dine instead of merely eating. These minute—and often comical—strictures on everyday conduct de-



manded, as the century wore on, even greater control of one's emotions. In effect, they set careful limits upon the possibilities of social interaction, and, by doing so, led to a more specialized and segmented civic order in America. Far from being quaint sources of arcane rituals, those 19th-century etiquette manuals, Kasson concludes, "powerfully reinforced class distinctions while transposing them to the plane of refinement."

Arts & Letters

REMBRANDT'S SELF PORTRAITS: A

Study in Seventeenth-Century Identity. By H. Perry Chapman. Princeton. 189 pp. \$39.50

The Dutch artist Rembrandt van Rijn (1606–1669) painted, etched, and drew his own likeness no fewer than 75 times, portraying himself as everything from a common beggar to the Apostle Paul. Why did he so often turn his canvas into a mirror? Most art critics agree that in grander images Rembrandt, the miller's son, was robing himself in the status to which he aspired or, in the later self-portraits, asserting the dignity of his profession. Critics have usually scoffed at the modern psychological notion that he was concerned with his inner life. Chapman, an art historian at the University of Delaware, differs. She argues that the self-portraits represented nothing less than "a necessary process of identity formation."

Rembrandt's obsession with self-portraiture makes him a true son of the 17th-century. During that century, a "growing faith in reason and

experience," Chapman writes, caused individuals to look "inside themselves for answers: hence Descartes's *cogito ergo sum*." Other developments encouraged this individualism. In the marketplace, guilds were increasingly displaced by privately owned enterprises. In the political realm, the idea of government by consent was gaining wider credence. In literature, autobiography was becoming a more popular form.

It is no great surprise, then, that the preoccupation with the self should find its way into the art world. "Especially in the Netherlands," says Chapman, "there was hardly an artist who did not paint his own features." What makes Rembrandt unique is not only the number of self-portraits but the way he used them "to label himself as an outcast or an outsider"—a true 17th-century individual.

His earliest self-portraits depict a "solitary melancholic," a fitting image at a time when people considered melancholia the "mandatory condition for creative genius." This guise soon gave way to more exotic, romantic poses, such as in *The Artist in Oriental Costume, with a Poodle at His Feet* (1631) or *Self-Portrait with Gorget and Helmet* (1634). These roles, outlandish though they seem to modern eyes, enhanced Rembrandt's reputation as a historical painter. They also aided him in his lifelong quest for an identity that would separate him from his fellow artists, most of whom portrayed themselves as wealthy gentlemen.

Following his *Self-Portrait at the Age of 34* (1640), which showed a confident-looking Rembrandt in elegant tunic, he ceased making self-portraits for nearly a decade. Chapman likens this period to a "conversion experience," during which Rembrandt directly confronted the question of his identity as an artist. When Rembrandt returned to self-portraiture in 1648, he had resolved to go his own way: "He discarded his Renaissance virtuosity for a more honest, more independent identity as an artist working with his tools." In his *Self-Portrait Drawing at a Window* (1648), Rembrandt depicted himself not in fancy garb but as a plain artist at work, without pretensions, staring straight at the viewer.

This independent impulse was not without its financial consequences, however, for Rembrandt refused to bow to his clients' wishes. In-