



Benjamin B. Roberts, ***Sex and Drugs before Rock 'n' Roll: Youth Culture and Masculinity during Holland's Golden Age*** (Amsterdam Studies in the Dutch Golden Age; Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012, 318 pp., ISBN 978 90 8964 402 2).

The indeterminate 'golden age' in the book's title is quickly specified. Benjamin Roberts wants to write about the males of one specific generation, young in the 1620s and 1630s. He further specifies this generation as men born between 1595 and 1615, which means that they were aged from five to twenty-five at the beginning of the period studied and from twenty-five to forty-five at the end. The reason for this focused orientation is explained at the beginning of the prologue. For the twentieth century, historians and demographers identify a number of specific generations that were all distinct in outlook, habits and life experiences. No one would assume that the children of the Great Depression were similar to those who grew up with computer games. Nevertheless, many scholars implicitly assume a single youth culture for the seventeenth century or even the entire early modern period. By contrast, Roberts wishes to show what is specific about the male youth culture of his interest. Surely, its representatives had distinct life experiences. They grew up in a period of economic growth, cultural efflorescence and the resumption of the war against Spain. Roberts' point of departure presents any reviewer with two obvious tasks: to trace 1) to what extent the author deals indeed with the generation of the 1620s and 1630s only and 2) to what extent he is able to substantiate the claim that this period witnessed a male youth culture that was in many respects unique.

Before addressing these questions, let me situate this study in its proper historiographical context. In fact, the book under review lies at the crossroads of two venerable historiographical traditions. One is the history of crime and justice, because the book pays ample attention to more or less clandestine behavior in general and violence in particular. The other tradition is that of family history in the broadest sense, including sexuality and stages of life. Of course the theme of masculinity also belongs to gender history, but male cultures are often studied within the context already mentioned, that of violence and honor. As far as phases of life are concerned, the author's remark that adolescence and young adulthood get much less attention from historians than childhood is well taken.

Moreover, to the extent that youth does get attention, this is often within an agrarian setting (such as in the work of Norbert Schindler, to whom Roberts refers several times), although there are also studies of the culture of urban apprentices and journeymen. Hence, Roberts' focus on youth culture in the cities of the province of Holland forms a useful contribution to the literature. Further, he sensibly distinguishes between the culture of elite youths (from the middle classes and higher, including painters) and that of lower-class youths. The former, however, receive the bulk of his attention. Thus, the records of university courts form a prominent body of evidence, whereas a rich source such as the Amsterdam confession books is left aside. Admittedly, the latter have been studied already by a number of scholars including myself, but precisely for the first half of the seventeenth century this has hardly been the case.

To what extent has Roberts succeeded in his mission? The prologue and chapter one introduce the subject in a general fashion. Thereafter, the focus on the generation of the 1620s and 1630s is most rigorously and consistently maintained in chapter two, dealing with appearance and clothing. Roberts convincingly demonstrates that the young men of this generation initiated a complete shift in fashion, many elements of which later spread to all age groups. Young men of the 1620s discarded the stiff black garments of the older generation, for example, going for a variety of bright colors. Wearing metallic-like jackets, they favored a military look, which Roberts attributes to the increased prestige of the army following the resumption of the war with Spain. For the males of this generation, soldiers served as role models. Although there are over thirty illustrations (many of them repeated in better quality at the end, which I did not discover until finishing my reading), in this chapter we still long for more pictures. I would not be surprised if even native speakers of English have difficulties in imagining what cuffs, jerkins and ruffles look like. The most lasting innovation of the young men of this generation consisted of wearing their hair long – in imitation, despite the relative absence of a court culture in Holland, of two French kings. Not surprisingly, preachers and moralists opposed the new fashion. The more they aged, the more they found themselves tilting against windmills, as even young ministers preferred long hair. This fashion lasted, albeit in the form of wigs, until the French Revolution, which made the youths under study decidedly more successful than my generation of the sixties.

However, in my view the other chapters, fail to a greater or lesser extent either to maintain the focus on the generation of the 1620s and 1630s or to convince the reader that this period witnessed a specific youth culture quite different from that of the young men before and after. The resulting lack of focus undermines the *raison d'être* of the book, since it contains much – on sexuality, violence, alcohol consumption and the like – that is already well-known to students of early modern culture. Space does not permit me to make my point in detail for each chapter concerned. Let me concentrate on the chapter about violence. It opens with a claim: 'During the 1620s and 1630s there was a visible shift from lethal to non-lethal violence in Dutch cities' (103). I was much interested, since I did not know this. Amsterdam homicide rates, for example, are unavailable for the

period in question. The rest of the chapter fails to substantiate the author's claim. A discussion of youth companies and charivari ostensibly serves to illustrate the culture that immigrants to Dutch cities left behind. The section on lower-class violence concentrates on the troubles of the 1610s, which is like illustrating an argument about hippies with *nozems*. The other pages mainly discuss student violence, with court cases conveniently selected for the decades under study.

Minor reservations concern style of writing and editing. It is perhaps foolish for a non-native speaker to comment on the writing of an American-born author, but the style often looks inelegant to me. My Webster's defines the often-used 'tomfoolery' as 'silly behavior', whereas Roberts uses it as the English equivalent of *kattenkwaad* [mischief]. The book is also repetitive. Udemans' critique of long hair, extensively discussed in chapter two, is subsequently mentioned several times as if it were a new fact; Jan Jansz Starter's composition of a poem for the wedding of Manuel Colyn and Catharina Cloppenburg is mentioned no less than four times. Finally, there are recurrent errors that could have been prevented by more careful copy-editing.

In sum: Some chapters, in particular the one about fashion, constitute a novel contribution to the study of youth cultures and masculinity, while non-expert readers may find details in other chapters also interesting. However, the book fails in substantiating its primary claim: the existence of a distinct youth culture in the cities of Holland in the 1620s and 1630s.

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