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**Goldstein, Claudia. Pieter Bruegel and the Culture of the Early Modern Dinner Party**

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sexual therapies, pharmaceuticals, and academic publications on the subject. Thus Gonzaga's "relentless searches" reflect an empirical mindset inspired by the discovery of the New World and thus interested in the exotic. As Finucci explains, Gonzaga's "apothecary," Evangelista Marcobruno, in suggesting various courses of treatment for the duke's "problem in the bedroom," must have consulted "many other books in circulation, [...] such as Juan Fragoso's text on aromatic medicaments or José de Acosta's encyclopedic *Historia natural y mortal de las Indias* (1590), which contained information on geography, climate, plants, animals, and exotica from both Mexico and Peru" (137).

The book's significance—as the unifying epilogue shows—is in elucidating how the human body in a social context is both signifier and signified of a culture's preoccupations, prejudices, epistemological mindset, and aesthetic sensibilities. Valeria Finucci's book reveals a cultural-historical continuity with our culture's aesthetic-medical preoccupation in celebrating images of young-looking bodies and in pursuing medical solutions to aesthetic and physical preoccupations with the body.

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**Goldstein, Claudia.**

***Pieter Bruegel and the Culture of the Early Modern Dinner Party.***

Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2013. Pp. xiii, 173 + 70 ill. ISBN 978-0-7546-6732-2 (hardcover) \$99.95.

In this book, art history professor Claudia Goldstein examines some Bruegel paintings that once hung in an Antwerp dining room in order to provide "a brief glimpse of the complex intersection between visual and material culture and social life during the period of Antwerp's greatest prosperity" (9). The dining room belonged to Jan Noiroot, master of the Antwerp Mint; the paintings were among fifty works he owned that appear in an inventory made of his house in August of 1572. Acquired at the apex of Noiroot's wealth and social cachet, the paintings were dispersed, along with all of his other goods, shortly after he declared bankruptcy and fled his home and family. Other luxury items were also in this *eetkameren*, or small dining room: crystal

glasses, family portraits, a crystal mirror, a gilded water pitcher; the kinds of status symbols that are brought out to impress company. Stimulated by this inventory, Goldstein examines Noirot's Bruegel paintings in the larger context of the material culture surrounding late-sixteenth-century dinner parties. There's no doubt that Noirot and other upwardly mobile urban functionaries, as well as members of the newly-moneyed merchant class, expressed their aspirations through the accumulation and display of luxury goods. It's equally unsurprising that there would be a concentration of such objects in the public venue of a dining room, since this was the primary locus for sustained social exchange. Select guests would presumably spend a long time lingering over a meal, and would therefore be especially attuned, through this prolonged exposure, to their immediate surroundings and to the parade of silver salvers used to present and display the meal. It's the same reason my own mother used to reserve the "good" dishes and linen for company: so they could be deployed when the time was right, to cement inclusion in an exclusive social club, and just to plain show off.

Paintings were part of this cultivated entertainment. Jerome de Busleyden famously entertained contemporaries like Guillaume Budé and Pieter Gillis, chief registrar of the Town Hall in Antwerp (who, in turn, was an associate of Erasmus and Sir Thomas More), in his *stoove*, or large dining hall, decorated with erudite classical frescoes on "iconographic themes of ancient heroism and hubris" (21). Some of these related, in abstract ways, to dining—Tantalus, the Feast of Balthazar—while others depicted the Fall of Phaeton, Mucius Scaevola, figures of the Muses, and other classical themes. Such subjects presumably served as catalysts for erudite humanist discussion on elevated philosophical themes, according to the exemplar of Plutarch's dinner parties. By contrast, Noirot's small dining room, which was presumably a focal point for entertaining his peers from the Antwerp Mint, was decorated with easel paintings by Bruegel, including a *Peasant Wedding* (possibly the 1567 version now in Vienna), a *Peasant Kermis*, a second *Peasant Wedding*, and a *Winter Scene*. For Goldstein, the presence of these Bruegels signifies "the centrality of the dinner party in establishing and maintaining one's elite reputation in Antwerp" (38). In this context, Bruegel's peasants were part of the dinner-party "performance," visual indexes corresponding to the performance of dinner plays, or *tafelspelen*, that often featured the slightly bawdy adventures of peasants. Peasants figure prominently in Dutch art of the sixteenth century in general, and in Bruegel's

art in particular. According to Goldstein, Bruegel's dining room peasants were part of "the temporal moment of the dinner party" which "activated the space of the dining room [...] and challenged distinctions between class, between performer and audience, and between art and social life" (77). This allowed the "urban elite to explore socio-economic difference and the experience of the other" (77). Why they would have been interested in probing class limits and liminalities in the context of a dinner party is less clear to me. It seems more likely that the paintings spoke to amusement, revelry, and consumption, and that those themes prompted guests to enjoy themselves without having to think about their formal responsibilities or their relative social hierarchy outside the dining room.

Money changes everything; in sixteenth-century Antwerp it produced new cultural consumers anxious to display their wealth to one another. The best way to do this was through patterns of socialization embodied in display and performance. As objects, the Bruegel paintings performed a dual role as participants in, and representations of, these social enactments. That themes of consumption appealed to a class of newly-rich Antwerp consumers—in Noiro's case, a group that literally made money at the Antwerp Mint—is certainly interesting, but perhaps not particularly remarkable. As Goldstein notes in the final chapter, themes of entertainment and indulgence found in suburban houses surrounding Antwerp were rooted in the pleasures of the Italian villa. Alberti recommended that such villas contain decoration depicting "the life of the simple farmer," as well as leafy landscapes or country sports (138). Bruegel's peasant scenes embody these recommended principals of leisure, as did later works by Joachim Beuckelaer and the paintings Vincenzo Campi made for Hans Fugger's dining room at Schloss Kirchheim, Bavaria. Campi's works are more visceral and literal, with their baskets of fruit and vegetables, dead animals, and frankly sexualized peasants—all symbols of appetite and satiation—but they are rooted in the same presumption of simple pleasures that could stimulate successful social intercourse by breaking down any inhibitions guests brought to the table.

There is much good research here, particularly in relation to sixteenth-century material culture and dining rooms, and some tantalizing possibilities for further examining the social life of objects beyond the merely visual. Knowing that paintings interacted meaningfully with viewers and objects in

order to activate a social space, instead of merely mirroring or representing social events staged in that space, certainly offers ample food for future thought.

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**Heale, Martin, ed.**

***The Prelate in England and Europe 1300–1560.***

York: York Medieval Press, 2014. Pp. xiii, 321. ISBN 978-1-903153-58-1 (hardcover) \$99.

Martin Heale has assembled a useful volume of twelve essays on the acts, culture, and perception of the prelate from 1300–1560, which emerged from a conference entitled “The Prelate in Late Medieval and Reformation England” and held at the University of Liverpool in 2011. This collection explores the prelacy, which was defined traditionally as including abbots, bishops, archbishops, cardinals, and (periodically) abbesses and prioresses. All twelve essays, as well as Heale’s introduction, are presented in a deep historiographical frame, grounded in contemporary sources, and often incorporate material culture in order to portray prelates as tangible figures whose actions and effects can still be witnessed within and beyond the textual record.

Both the conference and this volume examine what Heale calls “a golden age of prelacy” in Europe, a period that stretched from the early-fourteenth to the mid-sixteenth century. At the same time that prelates achieved extraordinary renown through public roles and political influence, the period witnessed an emerging critique of prelacy. In order to contextualize the common support for this critique, Heale and his contributors investigate the practice of the prelate’s dignity and the contemporary responses elicited. Focusing mainly on English prelates, with a few Continental discussions to provide some external context, this volume will benefit anyone who wants to understand the broader common practices and concerns of elite ecclesiastics in the late medieval and early modern periods.

The collection is divided into four parts, allowing readers to think clearly about the various scholarly discussions within which prelates appear. “Part I: Prelates and Power” examines the most elite prelates and their roles