

Haidt, Rebecca. *Women, Work and Clothing in Eighteenth-Century Spain*. Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, University of Oxford, 2011. 346 pp. ISBN 978-0-7294-1022-9.

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Rebecca Haidt's outstanding opera prima, *Embodying Enlightenment* (1998), investigated the cultural construction of bodies and particularly of male bodies by incorporating ancient epistemologies derived from medical treatises, poetry, visual imageries, literature, etc. In her most recent book, she directs her attention towards women and their clothing. It is not a "study within any one field" or "an investigation of eighteenth-century Spanish clothing, nor is it a study on women's textile and clothing work, nor does it address cloth markets, composition or fabrication of clothing" (42, 43). According to her, it is an attempt to "refer audiences to the interrelatedness of fashion, mobility, poverty, work, clothing and community in the eighteenth-century Spanish capital's complex of cultures" (43). What is most appealing to me is the way in which Haidt manages to do just that by reacquainting the reader with *majas* and *petimetras* as she maneuvers through Madrid's popular theatrical writings of the period, namely the *sainetes* and *tonadillas*, and guides us on a visual journey of illustrations with a clear focus on what the characters wear and desire.

From Aileen Ribeiro's *Dress in Eighteenth-Century Europe* (1985) Haidt quotes that: 'Dress has always been one of the most sensitive barometers testing the feeling of a period' (9). However, given that 'feeling' is not easily quantifiable Haidt resorts to, explores, and interprets the representations of *petimetras*, seamstresses, maids, *majas*, ragpickers, and other common stock characters as 'ripples' (following in the example of the sensational trial of corpse thieves in Sara Wise's *The Italian Boy*, 2005). Besides constituting some of the best 'ripples' registering cultural tensions and social relationships, these stock characters highlight the importance of "key semantic clusters; ... in particular, those registering ideas around decency and indecency, emotion and desire, and *vecindad* and community belonging" (11).

Each of the nine chapters is well researched, documented and written. The first three chapters following the introduction are devoted to *petimetría*, *petimetras*, women's work, the economics of desire, seamstresses, *criadas* and the value of clothing related housework. In chapter 2, Haidt addresses the debates around women's idleness, the value of work at home, luxury, production, profit and desire. These terms and the debates regarding industriousness (*aplicación*) and desire (*emoción*) reveal the ambivalence

of the age. On the one hand, while the wealth of the nation depended on industriousness to lead to ‘la abundancia de las cosas de cualquier modo útiles, producidas por trabajadores ocupados en oficios y ocupaciones concretos’ (63), on the other hand, the workers were driven by desire and self love because they wanted more things and ever greater pleasures for themselves. Therefore, at least “theoretically, both men and women were subjects of the causal link between industriousness and desire” (64). The problem, however, was that “the business of *petimetría* employs no workers, generates no wages... produces only one thing – waste” (69). Moreover, as *sainetes* and *tonadillas* reveal, what the *petimetra* desires is in essence a fetish, an illusion of an object with no basis on quality or workmanship. “It is *el capricho*, desire fed by ungoverned imagination, that moves commodities in this shadow economy of *petimetría*, in which consumers imagine not the attractions of desired goods, but only the connotations brought to mind by the names of marketable things” (77).

Chapters 3 and 4 examine theatrical representations of the connections between *petimetas* and the production of clothing by *modistas*, and the relationships between *petimetas* and *criadas* as they interact across spheres of clothing, respectively. In sum, both chapters offer example after example of “connections among *petimetas*, clothing entrepreneurs such as *modistas*, impoverished garment workers such as seamstresses, and clothing caretakers such as *criadas* and *lavanderas* [that] indicate the complex ways in which Spanish women of all classes...struggled to manipulate clothing’s function in marking social hierarchies and in creating – or frustrating - economic opportunities in the eighteenth-century capital” (88). An excellent example of this manipulation and circulation of clothes can be seen in the illustrations which show the multiple uses of the capes and cloaks: as a layer for warmth, as a blanket, as a wrapping for bundles, or as a means of hiding the ‘indecentcy’ of an impoverished appearance (125).

Chapter 5 discusses the migrations of women, work and goods, and relies on Patricia Fumerton’s research on the unsettled and the working poor (*Unsettled: The Culture of Mobility and the Working Poor in Early Modern England*, 2006) to establish a parallel between the unsettledness of clothing and people. “Not everything was traceable and measureable, much as the way not everyone entering, leaving or moving through the eighteenth-century city would be noticed by police, registered by prisons or hospitals, licensed by authorities or recorded in parish registers as born, married or deceased” (159).

Chapters 6, 7 and 8 explore the *majas* as “depictions of one of the most important groups linked to issues of immigration, clothing circulation and ‘decency’ in the eighteenth-century capital” (196). Haidt questions the somewhat simplified yet extended notion that *majas* (their demeanor, clothing, speech, movement) embody Spanishness while the *petimetas*’ preference for “foreignness” create a clear cut opposition/tension between *castizo* and foreign. I agree with her that the opposition is deeper than just native versus foreign, and that these tensions can signal, instead, an opposition between urban assimilation and identity.

“Theatrical depictions pitting *majas* against *petimetras* and *usías*, and opposing *lo castizo* to that which is imported, adopted or pretentious, represent eighteenth-century Spanish ideas and debates around work, identity and community, and vividly explore the particularly *madriüeñan* experiences of unsettled populations in the eighteenth-century Spanish capital” (203). Time after time, theatrical representations of *majos* confront them not necessarily against other urban characters, but against the ignorant and unrefined rural folks because, as Haidt affirms, “a crucial aspect of *majo* typology is the active performance of an identity of urban belonging” (203). Unlike the *payo* who arrives at the court and is awestruck by what he sees, *majos* “represent immigrants not from the countryside around Madrid, and not from rural areas, but rather from towns and cities” (203). The struggle is then an urban struggle to meet urban expectations. And so while the *petimetra* is associated with an ostentatious display of imported things, the garments worn by *majas* and working persons were provincial in origin but not easily identifiable therefore reflecting “the flourishing role played by clothing circulation networks” (259), i.e. second-hand vendors, pawnbrokers, and ragpickers .

My assessment of *Women, Work and Clothing in Eighteenth-Century Spain* is that it is a must read for all who want a better understanding of women, work, clothing, migration, theatrical representations, illustrations, Madrid, fashion, textile production and consumption, and second hand clothing economy in the eighteenth century. Though focused on Madrid, many of the scenarios and depictions can be extracted from and extrapolated to practically any large European city with an “unsettled” population. Haidt makes use of and cites more than 80 *sainetes*, *tonadillas*, plays, memorandums, letters, official documents, etc. and 35 illustrations displaying a varied assortment of clothing and accessories in this wonderfully weaved book. I do agree, however, that it is not a study within any one field; it is in fact more, much more.