
H-France Review Vol. 15 (December 2015), No. 180

Colin Jones, *The Smile Revolution in Eighteenth-Century Paris*. Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2014. 231 p. Figures, notes, and index. \$39.95 US (hb). ISBN 978-0-19-871581-8.

Review by Jean-Jacques Courtine, University of Auckland.

In the fall of 1787, a painting exhibited at the Paris annual Salon held at the Louvre created quite a fuss. It did not present anything extravagant, simply a self-portrait by Elizabeth-Louise Vigée Le Brun, posing with her daughter in her arms. The reason for the scandal? In the portrait, Madame Vigée Le Brun was smiling. Worse, she was showing her teeth.

This anecdote opens Colin Jones' latest book *The Smile Revolution in XVIIIth Century Paris* and very appropriately introduces its object. Just before the French Revolution, another revolution occurred in France, but a silent, discreet, almost invisible one, and we certainly have to pay homage to Professor Jones' talent and sagacity as an historian for having been able to detect its presence among the myriads of fleeting expressions running through eighteenth-century Parisian faces ("In any human being, each instant has its own physiognomy, its own expression," Diderot would remark[1]). This is particularly the case since the literature on the matter is almost non-existent, unlike that dedicated to laughter which quite noisily resounds in most studies on popular culture in the Bakhtinian tradition.[2] It is one among the numerous paradoxes of the smile that this most elementary of all facial gestures, involving just that one muscle, the zygomatic major raising the corner of the mouth, offers a puzzling multiplicity of meanings and interpretations. And as one of the most ancient expression of emotions, which seems to predate the acquisition of language in the long history of the species—Charles Darwin saw in his 1872 *Expression of Emotions in Man and Animal* great apes, and even dogs, smile—it has become, according to Paul Ekman, "the most underrated facial expression," with no history to speak of.

Professor Jones has filled this gap in the history of the body as well as in that of emotions with an elegantly written and extremely learned book. Some of the numerous sources he carefully examines are to be expected in such research: portraits, writings on the expression of emotions such as Charles Le Brun's famous 1676 *Conférence sur l'expression générale et particulière*, treatises on physiognomy up to Lavater's 1775 *Physiognomische Fragmente*, books on civility and conversation, memoirs and correspondences, many of which have kept faint traces of the representations and practices of the smiles that enlightened faces in the French capital, more often than at court. But one of the book's most original contributions to the history of such an evanescent facial gesture is to root it firmly in the new developments occurring at the same time in dentistry, surgery, and medicine. In their absence, it would have proved impossible for Madame Vigée Le Brun to flash her white-toothed smile. This pleasing history of the smile is also the painful history of teeth.

"Teeth, Sire?" replied the old Cardinal d'Estrée to Louis XIV complaining of his dental distress. "Ah! Who has any?" A ruler, born with two teeth in his jaw had none left at forty years of age. Hyacinthe Rigaud's famous portrait of the king bears witness to his excavated cheeks and wrinkled mouth.[3] This is one of the natural laws of what Professor Jones rightly calls "The Old Regime of Teeth": there reigned, from the royal mouth to that of his humblest subjects, a strict democracy of toothlessness, bad breath, and random

spluttering. Dental care was not a high priority during *le Grand Siècle*, usually taken care of by tooth-pullers operating on fairgrounds. The legacy of the most famous of those, *Le Grand Thomas*, “The Terror of the Human Jaw,” who officiated on the *Pont-Neuf* among rope dancers, beggars and freaks, can still be felt in French today: *mentir comme un arracheur de dents*. . . . Dentists have done their best, since that time, to get rid of their bad reputation, with questionable success.

Dentists were not the only ones to be blamed for the closed mouths that constituted the ruling norm of seventeenth-century facial regime. The control of the expressions of the face, and even more so, of the mouth, had become a main requirement in the civilizing process, to be found in all treatises on civility, from Erasmus to Castiglione. Only the mad or the bad would openly laugh or even smile: ‘Les fols portent leur cœur en leur bouche, mais les sages leur bouche en leur cœur.’[4] And the tradition of rhetoric, physiognomy, and the innumerable arts of conversation that ruled over verbal and bodily composure in civil society all included a central commandment: in order to behave properly in public, one needs first of all to know how to keep one’s mouth shut.[5] Clamped-shut mouths and tight-lipped smiles were indeed the rule at Versailles, but keeping such straight faces became more problematic as the century grew older, which Le Père Dominique Bouhours managed to sum up in a nutshell: “En société, il faut avoir la bouche fermée et le visage ouvert.”[6]

Closed mouths but open faces: such paradoxes were to pave the way for changing conceptions of the expressions of emotions in public. A new cult of sensibility arose with the Regency mood among urban elites, and smiles first reappeared on the stage mixed with tears in “comédies larmoyantes.” By the 1760’s, Samuel Richardson’s and Rousseau’s heroines all spoke the new language of feelings, “smiles of the soul” painted on their faces. This emergence of a cult of sensibility in Enlightenment Paris was helped by the budding social infrastructures of salons and coffee-houses, favoring face-to-face conversation where smiling was *de rigueur*. Versailles frowned but Paris beamed, and smiling proved to be contagious, soon becoming a major marker of identity. But now this new “window of the soul” came with teeth, benefiting from the development of modern dentistry, fuelled by the fast expanding market generated by these up-to-date forms of sociability.

Le Grand Thomas and his carnivalesque theatricals were soon replaced by a cohort of new professionals offering all sorts of tooth care aiming at the preservation rather than the extraction of teeth, led by the pioneer of French dentistry, Pierre Fauchard. His *Le chirurgien-dentiste* coined the term in French and established dentistry as a branch of surgery.[7] If Budapest is said to be the tooth capital of Europe today, a favorite destination of dental tourism lured there by cheaper prostheses, eighteenth-century Paris was then the epicentre of dentistry, where Grand Tourists would stop on their way for a dental check-up on *rue Saint Honoré* or for buying the commodities provided by a thriving market, from the modest toothbrush to the invention of artificial porcelain white dentures by Nicolas Dubois de Crémant in 1788.

But history was on the march, and one year later “the Smile Revolution was to prove as slippery and transient as the smile itself.”[8] Revolutionary political culture discarded the white-toothed smile of sensibility. Serious faces were needed to build the Republic and fight its enemies, “vertu” became the passion of the hour and politicians’ faces tended to mirror the solemn severity of ancient stoicism: there would not be much smiling in Jacques-Louis David’s portraits. The Terror finished off the smile of the soul and swapped it with aggressive laughter, screams of violence, or rictuses of pain. Smiling became a counter-revolutionary gesture and, at the same time, the ultimate act of political resistance on the way to *la guillotine*. The collapse of professional dentistry after the Revolution concluded this twilight of the smile and marked its entry into a long hibernation that only ended when the American commodification of the face, dental obsessions, and movie culture much later promoted its second revolution, under the regime of which we still raise our zygomatic majors today.

This short but dense book represents the “histoire des mentalités” at its best, as Professor Jones has successfully managed to weave into a single fluid, coherent, and elegant narrative whole chapters of social

history, the history of medicine, of the body and emotions: the eighteenth-century rise of scientific dentistry, the emergence of the cult of sensibility, and the birth of new codes of urban sociability. At a time when the writing of history is sometimes mistaken for a simple projection of the present into the past, it is also the retrieval of a lost universe of evanescent objects, not unlike the type of work Alain Corbin once did on the history of the smell, or that of sounds: “The subject of this book is that smile that we have lost”.^[9] And this is undoubtedly a lingering effect of the reading of this book, once closed: when one contemplates again Madame Vigée Le Brun’s self-portrait on the cover, one cannot help imagining a lost world, hidden in the shadow of her smile.

NOTES

[1] Diderot, *Essais sur la peinture* (Paris, Hermann, 1984 [1795]), p. 371.

[2] A recent example of this trend is Vic Gatrell’s excellent *City of Laughter. Sex and Satire in the XVIIIth Century* (London, Atlantic Books, 2006).

[3] Colin Jones, “The King’s Two Teeth,” *History Workshop*, 65 (2008).

[4] Wulson de la Colombière, *Le Palais des curieux* (Paris, 1676), p. 179.

[5] See: Jean-Jacques Courtine and Claudine Haroche: « Silences du langage, langages du visage à l’âge classique », preface to Abbé Dinouart, *L’art de se taire* (J. Millon, Grenoble, 1985 [1771]) ; and also : « Se taire, se posséder : une archéologie du silence », Jean-Jacques Courtine & Claudine Haroche, *Histoire du visage. Exprimer & taire ses émotions, XVI-début XIXème siècle* (Paris, Payot, 2007 [1988]), p. 211-236.

[6] Dominique Bouhours, *Entretiens d’Ariste et Eugène* (Paris, 1671), p. 272.

[7] Pierre Fauchard, *Le chirurgien-dentiste, ou Traité des dents*, 2 vol. (Paris, 1728).

[8] *The Smile Revolution*, p. 13.

[9] *The Smile Revolution*, p. 15. See Alain Corbin, *The Foul and the Fragrant: Odor and the French Social Imagination* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986) and *Village Bells: Sound and Meaning in the Nineteenth-Century French Countryside* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

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