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Arianne Baggerman and Rudolf Dekker, *Child of the Enlightenment: Revolutionary Europe Reflected in a Boyhood Diary*. Transl. by Diane Webb. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2009. xii + 553 pp. Notes, illustrations, index. \$158 U.S. (cl). ISBN 978-90-04-17269-2.

Review by John Cornell, Butler University.

We all care about—and sometimes wonder about—our children’s experience: what are their lives like? This caring and marveling have their counterpart in writing history: how did children live in the past? In *Child of the Enlightenment*, Arianne Baggerman and Rudolf Dekker offer a probing, masterfully researched, and elegant portrait of Otto van Eck, a boy from the Hague/Delft region in the 1790s.

The centerpiece of this fine study is Otto’s diary, which he wrote between the ages of ten and seventeen from 1790 to 1797. Baggerman and Dekker are determined to let Otto set their research agenda through his diary. They strive to make Otto’s perspective their own, to reconstruct the world as he saw it. In this promising first volume of the *Egdocuments and History Series* (which they edit, together with Michael Mascuch), they aim for the scholarly equivalent of what educators from Rousseau to the present day have advocated: follow the child.

They succeed. The opening chapters of *Child of the Enlightenment* explore Otto’s education in the Van Eck household. His parents, Lambert and Charlotte, were on the cutting edge of progressive eighteenth-century pedagogy. They believed in liberty, equality, and the capacity of “science” (not yet so named) to improve the lot of humankind. Like many parents in the late eighteenth century, they took Rousseau’s call for a new kind of education seriously. What was it like to grow up in a generation of parents inspired by *Emile*? As an account of Otto’s upbringing, this book is first and foremost a history of the Enlightenment, not as a sequence of rational propositions or key writers, but as something people lived. Otto’s childhood was, like all childhoods, a constructed experience in a specific historical setting. It was the Van Ecks’ own homespun version of the Enlightenment (p. 332).

The family’s summer estate outside Delft provided the nest of rural domesticity for this project. In his diary, Otto writes with unfeigned enthusiasm about visiting the barn every day, taking care of his goats, drinking milk warm from the cow, riding his horse, fishing, taking his books to read outdoors, and so on. In this regard, Rousseau could not have drawn it up any better. Otto’s was an upper-class childhood filled with the sights and smells and outdoor freedom recommended by Rousseau, filled with sensory experience and safe from the “corruptions” of civilization (chapter four).

But this was the case only to a point. Following their own pedagogical instincts, the Van Ecks designed an education for Otto that was more regulated and bookish than Rousseau provided for in *Emile* (chapter three). His days were filled with reading assignments (e.g., religious works every morning with his father), lessons (including the “modern” subjects of English and German), tutors (who were often accomplished scholars in their own right), deadlines and, yes, the diary (pp. 243-253). Baggerman and Dekker negotiate their central source brilliantly, recognizing that the diary was more his parents’ project than Otto’s own. They read it regularly and commented on his entries, setting up a cat-and-mouse game between Otto and his parents. Baggerman and Dekker are masterful at teasing out the voices reflected in the diary: Otto trying to be dutiful, Otto trying to get something he wants, Otto speaking unguardedly to himself (chapter two). Despite the fact that most entries are largely about his assignments, “[t]he reader of the diary cannot help feeling that Otto would have preferred to grow up without books” (p. 164).

The Van Ecks' goal was conscience, the development of "the little man within" (p. 77). Baggerman and Dekker find plenty of evidence that Otto—for all his outbursts, for all his playfulness, for all his dilatoriness—was indeed achieving this modern maturity. That maturity did not come without a cost. Otto seems constantly beset by the need to manage his time, to work hard, and to engage in self-reflection. A particular strength of the book is the authors' exploration of the many contemporary sources contributing to this aspect of the Van Ecks' educational design. Principal among these were the philanthropists, German pedagogues who were promoting and institutionalizing "Enlightened" education. It turns out that when the philanthropists put Rousseau into practice, they surrounded the core value of "freedom" with thick layers of responsibility, industriousness, and self-control (chapter one). Enlightened childhood, the authors conclude, often did not feel free (p. 79).

Baggerman and Dekker adduce the recent invention of "merit tables" as part of the philanthropist emphasis on the observation and management of childhood (pp. 70-77). These new progress reports (or "grades") are but one example of the authors' constant employment of primary sources beyond the diary to extend our understanding of Otto's world. Gardening guides, medical treatises, travel journals, utopian novels, newspapers, cemetery designs, geography books, the family *album amicorum*—Baggerman and Dekker inventively explore every possible source to amplify the diary. By appealing to these additional sources, they seek to give voice to things Otto does not even know how to say because they are such a natural part of his environment (like measuring distances by how long it takes to walk somewhere). Nor do they limit themselves to textual sources. Every third page contains a black-and-white reproduction of a contemporary print illustrating the topic under discussion. With this impressive array of sources, the authors devote most of the middle and final chapters of the book to the basic structures of life and experience in the Van Eck household. They explore Otto's sense of social relationships (chapter five), physical space (chapter six), time (chapter seven), the body, religion, and death (chapters eleven and twelve). In this way, *Child of the Enlightenment* goes beyond being a "small" educational biography to a "big" social history.

Otto, for example, lived in a household which spoke the new language of equality, but in which the servants (who must have been ever-present) seem virtually invisible. His parents cautioned him not to get too familiar with the help (p. 238). "Otto's upbringing was based on ... egalitarian ideas, but he himself still inhabited a very elitist world" (p. 253). There was a lively, growing public sphere of associations like freemasonry which brought people together in new ways ("the new sociability," [pp. 253-258]). But Otto lived in an environment—a dense "genealogical forest" of prominent families (p. 234)—where kinship and friendship still largely coincided. The Netherlands in the 1790s were rife with sectarian squabbles, yet Baggerman and Dekker spot the Van Eck family carriage occasionally parked outside a "rival" denomination (p. 430), suggesting a practical toleration that exceeded current discourse. The Van Ecks "believed" in the advances of medical science, but struggled with the decision to risk inoculating their vulnerable infant daughter (they didn't and she died). What stands out is a new moral responsibility which Otto's parents accepted for making the future (pp. 337-343). "Progress," for all its false starts and failures, was part of the air which the Van Eck household breathed. These observations can only begin to suggest the import of *Child of the Enlightenment* as social history. The authors take us back to a specific historical moment—the Netherlands of the 1790s—where Otto and his parents were figuring out in their daily lives how to enact equality and *perfectibilité*.

This brings us to *Child of the Enlightenment* as political history (chapters nine and ten). Otto lived during interesting times, years in which the Netherlands had their own "Batavian" version of the French Revolution. Lambert Van Eck and Pieter Paulus, Otto's maternal uncle, were prominent and influential Patriots, having traveled together to Paris in 1788 to seek French support for a republican uprising (where they met, among other notables, Lafayette). They followed events in France closely, initially supporting the revolutionary cause, but condemning the violence of the Terror. When the French entry into the Netherlands in 1795 sparked a "velvet" revolution, Otto's father and uncle were in the thick of things (p. 351). Uncle Pieter helped draft the Dutch "Declaration of the rights of man and of the citizen"

and was elected the first chairman of the National Assembly (p. 357). Lambert was later elected chairman of the National Assembly, and played a central role in the fractious debates over the Republic's first constitution. This last quarter of the book reads like a political thriller. Lambert Van Eck, who had openly pleaded for moderation, compromise, and "fraternity" among the increasingly polarized republican factions, was arrested in 1797 in a short-lived coup which attempted to settle the mounting political divisions by political force. This wave of arrests was no Terror, but it did expose fundamental tendencies or dangers of any democracy: demagoguery, the vilification of opponents, fear-mongering, the abandonment of reason and civility in public debate, the abuse of power in the name of the public good (p. 394).

So much for Lambert, who understandably gets much attention from the authors in this political section of the book. But what about Otto? The diary affords us the invaluable opportunity to observe the Revolution from a young person's perspective. Otto was not a participant, but with such an active family, he was definitely a bystander. He was not old enough or sufficiently self-aware politically to experience Wordsworthian "bliss"—quite the opposite. He mentions (as the good son of a revolutionary father) not being able to buy an English top because that would not support local workers and the Dutch economy (p. 367). On the day French troops occupy the town, he notes that the whole day is wasted because he can't go outside and have fun (p. 413). Otto experienced the intense political involvement of his father even before Lambert's arrest largely as an absence: his father was under pressure and seldom home (p. 367). Add to this the sudden, unexpected death of Uncle Paulus, which was not only a personal loss for Otto, but meant even more political responsibilities for his father. To young Otto, "revolution" could easily be counted in terms of things one had to give up.

But Otto had attended the "school of the Enlightenment" (p. 398). From early on and in countless ways, he had imbibed the language, logic and values of his parents, the new ways of thinking that made a republic possible. It is not any specific position that defines Otto's politics, but the general stance that people make the future through their own agency and institutions. By sampling contemporary schoolbooks, festivals, and other forms of political "schooling," Baggerman and Dekker suggest that Otto shared this experience with other "children of the future" (chapter ten). They conclude their account of politics in the Netherlands with words that reflect wisely on the relationship between revolution and enlightenment, particularly with regard to Lambert's imprisonment: "Reason and persuasion would [according to a close associate of Lambert] bring about 'true freedom', and even if he and Lambert were not to profit from it, future generations—who by virtue of their enlightened educations would be deserving of, and equal to, that true freedom—would reap its benefits" (p. 395). "Future generations," of course, means Otto...and us.

Sadly, we do not get the opportunity to follow Otto into manhood. The diary tails off just a few months before Otto's death of tuberculosis at age seventeen in the winter of 1798 (chapter twelve and epilogue). Fittingly, he was buried in a new extra-urban cemetery, itself an Enlightenment project (pp. 453-457). We do not get to see how this child of the Enlightenment matured as a thinker, developed in his social relations, and set his own political course. There are other disappointments specifically related to this book. A small one is the absence of a subject index to help identify specific topics. More substantive is that we learn so little about Charlotte van Eck, Otto's mother. This is presumably from a paucity of sources—itself a telling clue—but a fuller account, however speculative, of Charlotte's role in Otto's education—her Enlightenment as well as Lambert's—would have been brought the issue of gender into sharper focus in the book.

Another major disappointment is that we learn relatively little about Otto's sexuality. We cannot expect Otto's diary to yield anything in this regard (his parents read it, after all), but the authors did less than they might have to probe other sources for what it was like to "grow up" in the 1790s. They offer a short discussion of masturbation (not approved), linking it to the central enlightenment virtue of "self control" (pp. 61-63). But otherwise, Otto's sexuality gets short shrift. One detail is particularly

intriguing from the final weeks of Otto's life. Baggerman and Dekker cite a letter from Lambert (still in prison for his political "crimes") to Charlotte in which he notes with approval—indeed, "infinite pleasure"—that the ailing Otto has visited "the maternal medicine cabinet", i.e., received breast milk from his mother in an attempt to treat his illness (p. 473). Having done so much to provide a social/historical context throughout the book, the authors could have probed this matter-of-fact allusion to a mother breast-feeding her seventeen-year-old son more deeply. In short, in this book we see Otto the child, never Otto the young man.

Child of the Enlightenment is a wonderful, fascinating book, a valuable and complex achievement at the intersection of a number of different historical fields. It contributes to our understanding of the Enlightenment as an intellectual movement which "real" people embodied and enacted—a "hybrid" Enlightenment full of diversity, complications, and ironies (p. 332). It is a social history of Europe in a period of profound transformation, exploring the structures of daily life and thought in a progressive, propertied family. And it is a gripping political history of the first tumultuous years of revolution in the Netherlands in the 1790s, all from the initial perspective a child—and moving far beyond.

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