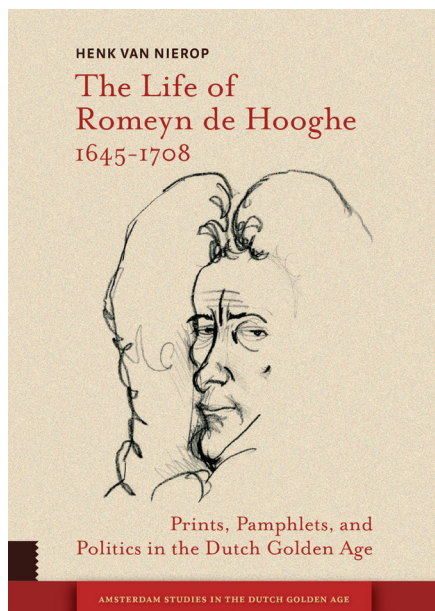


Review

Henk van Nierop, *The Life of Romeyn de Hooghe 1645-1708. Prints, Pamphlets, and Politics in the Dutch Golden Age*, Amsterdam, Amsterdam University Press, 2018, 452 pp. ISBN 9789462981386.



The Life of Romeyn de Hooghe is the first book-length biography of printmaker Romeyn de Hooghe, one of the most important artists working in the late seventeenth-century Netherlands. It brings together research on which Henk van Nierop has been engaged since 2008, when he edited (together with Ellen Grabowsky, Anouk Janssen, Huigen Leeftang, and Garrelt Verhoeven) a volume of essays, *Romeyn de Hooghe. De verbeelding van de late Gouden Eeuw*, accompanying an exhibition of de Hooghe's prints at the Allard Pierson Museum in Amsterdam. The 2008 volume contained contributions from nineteen different authors on various aspects of De Hooghe's life and his large oeuvre, from book illustrations and political satires to designs for stained-glass windows and paintings. Two essays in that volume, those by Anna de Haas and Inger Leemans, considered De Hooghe's biography, as have

earlier studies such as those by Jeanine Otten (1988) and William Harry Wilson (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1974). Van Nierop's study, however, is the first comprehensive examination of De Hooghe's life. It is a substantial history that is also eminently readable.

The book is divided into fourteen chapters which guide the reader through De Hooghe's life from his baptism in Amsterdam's Zuiderkerk on 10 September 1645 to his burial in Haarlem's St Bavo's Church on 15 June 1708. Each chapter is helpfully subdivided, which serves to highlight the most important events in each phase of De Hooghe's life and allows for easy reference. As one might expect, Van Nierop tackles his subject chronologically, beginning in chapter one with a discussion of the printmaker's family. These relationships, both historical and contemporary, are usefully organised in family trees and tables, and the author demonstrates their significance in his analysis both of De Hooghe's personal

fortunes and the artist's crafting of his own 'persona'. Chapter two charts De Hooghe's emergence as a printmaker and discusses some of his earliest works, among them news sheets such as *The Peace Negotiations at Breda* (1667) and book illustrations including his annual frontispieces for *Hollandse Mercurius*, first issued in 1670. Here the author fleshes out the little-known circumstances surrounding De Hooghe's trip to Paris in 1668 and provides important new information on his contacts at the French court. Chapter three is devoted to De Hooghe's significant output during the *rampjaar* of 1672 and the establishment of his studio as one of the most important in the contemporary print market. Chapter four introduces the first of a series of scandals in which De Hooghe would become embroiled over the years. This discussion revolves around the 1681 publication of a novel, *Het wonderlijk Leeven van't Boulonnois hondtje* (The Curious Life of the Bolognese Dog), in which the printmaker was accused of theft, fraud, and sexual deviance. In chapters five and six Van Nierop charts De Hooghe's move to Haarlem, his establishment of a drawing school, and his prints on the subject of the Glorious Revolution. Chapters seven and eight are devoted to the political satires, and in chapters nine, ten, and eleven, Van Nierop returns to the question of scandal with his thorough and enlightening discussion of the so-called Pamphlet War of 1690. Chapters twelve and thirteen examine De Hooghe's later life, from his various positions in Haarlem government and running of a spy network to his work for William III as an artist and as the director of the Lingen Quarries. De Hooghe's final years are considered in chapter fourteen. This is the period after William III's death in 1702, when the printmaker turned his hand to writing, producing the political and legal treatise *Spiegel van Staat* (1706-1707) and *Hieroglyphica* (1708), a study that purported to be an instruction manual on the use of ancient emblems, but which Van Nierop sees as a medium through which De Hooghe expressed his 'mature thinking on religion'. Van Nierop also resolves a range of long-standing questions in the literature, for example the question of whether De Hooghe studied with the radical philosopher Franciscus van den Enden (Van Nierop determines that he did not); and his purported ennoblement by the Polish king (he was not ennobled but was given the rank of *servitor*, which was commonly bestowed upon court artists).

Van Nierop makes clear that his goal with this study was not to produce a *catalogue raisonné*. He writes: 'This biography does not follow the typical "The-Man-And-His-Work" path. [...] In focusing on De Hooghe's life, I have discussed his art only when it seems to bear direct relevance to his biography' (28). There are, without question, a plethora of difficulties to sort out in providing a narrative account of De Hooghe's life, but for the art-historian, the discussion of his work – which is, after all, De Hooghe's chief claim to our attention – may seem thin and rather patchy. The author's primary interest is emphatically in the *life* of the artist and his thesis begins to take shape in the discussion of De Hooghe's early years in which he asserts that much of the artist's activity, both personal and professional, extended from a desire to 'improve his lot [...], to overcome the confined conditions of his childhood and achieve the cultural, social, and financial level of his well-off De Hooghe relatives and his former class-mates at the Latin School' (48-49). In this sense, Van Nierop strays from the strictly 'what' of De Hooghe's biography into the 'why', the rather more speculative arena of psychobiography which entails the exploration of the subjective origins of an individual's public actions. With De Hooghe, there is much

to recommend this approach and Van Nierop devotes four chapters (4, 9, 10, and 11) to the events that provide the most potential insight to the printmaker's 'inner experience'. Indeed, Van Nierop manages the mass of relevant material constituting the Pamphlet War beautifully, not only incisively conveying the complex content of the individual pamphlets, but also creating a coherent narrative of the unfolding dispute between De Hooghe and Amsterdam, which was played out in the public arena and to which De Hooghe made infamous contributions.

Van Nierop is not only concerned with elucidating the nature and circumstances of the conflict between Romeyn de Hooghe and certain of the Amsterdam regents, he is also intent on determining the veracity of the claims against De Hooghe. Indeed, in the book's conclusion, he analyses the evidence for and against the various accusations. He dismisses the more outlandish allegations made in the libels and pamphlets as 'fake news' and 'an early version of infotainment' but argues that the attestations published in *Memorie van Rechten* (Memorandum of Rights) must be taken more seriously (414). For those behaviours he deems to be possible or even probable (such as theft), he seeks to identify De Hooghe's motives. For example, with respect to the 'motives behind his cheating', Van Nierop asks: 'Was it pure greed and lust for money, as contemporaries believed? Was it part of his life project of escaping the straightened circumstances of his youth? Or did he suffer from kleptomania, a clinical affliction? Was he in it for the money, or for the excitement of the act of stealing, followed by relief if he was successful? Was it a combination of these motives?' (415) Van Nierop's conclusion is that 'the verdict of the historian must therefore be that most of the accusations against Romeyn were based on truth' (416). While Van Nierop provides a firm conclusion with respect to the nature of the printmaker's life, how this information informs an analysis of his work is less clear.

Indeed, making sense of the relationship between De Hooghe's life and his work is one of the goals of this study which is expressed in the book's introduction and conclusion: 'In spite of De Hooghe's astonishing and wide-ranging talents, his life was not an unqualified success. There was an unbalanced and roguish streak to his character that drove him to take vast and unwarranted risks, threatening to destroy his career time and again' (27); and 'in striking contrast to his fame as an artist, he was to remain an example of immorality until long after his death' (411). As an art historian, I would argue that the life and the work require no particular connection, especially in the intensely market-driven world of printmaking and publishing in the late seventeenth-century Dutch Republic. However, for a life as complex and contradictory as that of Romeyn de Hooghe, one could find no better guide than Van Nierop, a major scholar in the field of seventeenth-century Dutch studies for over thirty years.

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