



# **Troping the Body: Gender, Etiquette, and Performance (Women's Studies/Cultural Studies)**

*Gwendolyn Audrey Foster*

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*Troping the Body: Gender, Etiquette, and Performance* is an interdisciplinary study of etiquette texts, conduct literature, and advice books and films. Gwendolyn Audrey Foster analyzes the work of such women authors as Emily Post, Christine de Pizan, Hannah Webster Foster, Emily Brontë, Frances E. W. Harper, and Martha Stewart as well as such women filmmakers as Lois Weber and Kasi Lemmons.

“Specifically,” Foster notes, “I was interested in the possibility of locating power and agency in the voices of popular etiquette writers.” Her investigation led her to analyze etiquette and conduct literature from the Middle Ages to the present. Within this wide scope, she redefines the boundaries of conduct literature through a theoretical examination of the gendered body as it is positioned in conduct books, etiquette texts, poetry, fiction, and film.

Drawing on Bakhtin, Gates, Foucault, and the new school of performative feminism to develop an interdisciplinary approach to conduct literature—and literature as conduct—Foster brings a unique perspective to the analysis of ways in which the body has been gendered, raced, and constructed in terms of class and sexuality.

Even though women writers have been actively writing conduct and etiquette texts since the medieval period, few critical examinations of such literature exist in the fields of cultural studies and literary criticism. Thus, Foster’s study fills a gap and does so uniquely in the existing literature. In examining these voices of authority over the body, Foster identifies the dialogic in the texts of this discipline that both supports and disrupts the hegemonic discourse of a gendered social order.

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