

Lotte van de Pol. *The Burgher and the Whore: Prostitution in Early Modern Amsterdam*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011. 269 p. + 11 illus. \$55.00. Review by LAURA CRUZ, WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY.

The historiography of women in early modern Europe often exhibits a curious vacillation between depicting women through some form of proto-feminist lens to showing them as simply minor characters, a phenomenon often derisively referred to as “add women and stir.” One of the most remarkable elements of Lotte van de Pol’s slender volume is that it does neither of these, while still displaying a kind of empathy for her subjects that is not over- or under-shadowed by the social position of women and/or prostitutes in this century. In her introduction, Van de Pol acknowledges that prostitution enjoys a special legal protection in the present-day Netherlands but otherwise sets aside modern judgments in favor of a rich appreciation of a historical subculture that bears little, if any, relationship to the heavily toured red light district of Amsterdam today.

Subculture is an appropriate word for, as the title suggests, van de Pol embeds her history of the (mostly) women who practiced the oldest profession deeply within the context of early modern Dutch society. In other words, she does not contrast the prostitutes of the past with the prostitutes of today, but she does compare their situation to their contemporaries such as the image of the upstanding Dutch burgher. The world of prostitution was an integral part of urban life in the early modern Netherlands, though the authorities were often uneasy with its public face. As van de Pol demonstrates, the local officials often vacillated between implicit tolerance and repression over the two hundred year period she examines. On one hand, the famous music houses were popular and drew a considerable number of tourists, from whose accounts van der Pol draws upon extensively. On the other hand, they created public nuisances in the form of noise, fighting, and, particularly in the eyes of the Calvinist church, immoral temptation. These sorts of transgressions often landed prostitutes and brothel-keepers in trouble with the law, and van der Pol also draws heavily on legal documents, especially Confession Books, to reconstruct conflicts between the worlds of the burgher and the

whore. As a side note, if convicted, prostitutes were often sentenced to spend time in the *Spinhuis*, a redemptive work house for women, that, somewhat ironically, also served as a popular tourist attraction.

Criminal records in the early modern period are notoriously difficult sources with which to work, and the portrayal here is, as the author herself acknowledges, incomplete and weighted towards the eighteenth century when source material is more abundant. For example, higher-end prostitutes who, in today's terms, might be described as courtesans or kept women appear rarely in the records and the focus of the study is on more public types of prostitutes, such as streetwalkers or those associated with brothels and music houses, who were more likely to appear in criminal records. Van de Pol fills the gaps by examining the semiotics of early modern prostitution through literary and artistic sources, including several popular pamphlets bearing such colorful titles (translated) as *The London Jilt: or, the Politick Whore* and *The Outspoken Damsel, or Hypocrisy Unmasked*. The contrast between the values of those who inhabited the world of prostitution and the upright citizen come through most clearly in these moral fables and scandalous stories, even in those that on the surface appear to be sympathetic or first-hand accounts.

The world she so thickly describes is indeed fascinating, as the music halls and brothels are replete with distinctive rituals, such as showing bare bottoms or "slicing of the chops"; language, colorful names for whorehouses such as *The Godless Church* and *The Porcelain Cellar*; customs, such as 'going halves' (splitting the cost of room and board with a bawd, or brother keeper) and values, including clear concepts of honor and dishonor. The latter may seem surprising, given the choice of profession. Various terms for prostitute, such as poxy whore or beast of lightning, were considered slanderous terms and neighbors fought to keep brothels out of their community, but within the confines of the subculture, an honor system prevailed. For example, prostitutes prided themselves on not stealing from clients, and brothel-keepers considered it an insult when accused of duping unsuspecting women into the trade. Like the burghers above them in the social hierarchy, those involved in prostitution believed in the importance of upholding financial obligations and contracts.

Speaking of such agreements, van der Pol also describes the business of prostitution, including not only the costs for services rendered, but also the distribution of profits, bribes, wages, and fines. In many cases, the working women were close to indentured servants, paying off large debts to *bawds* or brothel keepers for the fine clothing, food, and wine that contributed to the experience for visitors. The average prostitute in early modern Amsterdam did not become rich from her trade, though she might be able to do well relative to other opportunities for women at the bottom of the social ladder. Indeed, the profits from the trade as a whole were sufficiently large to keep a significant number of people employed and, in several cases highlighted in the book, to inspire corruption on the part of local officials.

It is tempting to say that this book is not new, as an earlier version (based on a dissertation) was published in Dutch in 1996. That being said, in many ways it is a new work because the author chose not simply to translate the original text, but rather to transform it into a more streamlined narrative, presumably to increase its appeal to a broader trans-Atlantic audience. The transformation was indeed successful and the tighter narrative should make the historical world of these prostitutes more accessible to a larger audience, including non-academics, without sacrificing rigor or relevance in the scholarly world. The translation work, by Liz Waters, is exceptionally fluid as she is able to capture the author's voice in a manner that reads as both authentic and engaging. The author uses that voice not simply to speak for these women who are so often elusive in historical sources, but also for the role of historian as voyeur (in the sense of observer) rather than judge.

J. L. Price. *Dutch Culture in the Golden Age*. London: Reaktion Press, 2011. 286 pp. + 32 illus. \$39.95. Review by LAURA CRUZ, WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY.

In 1974, J.L. Price published the now seminal work, *Culture and Society in the Dutch Republic during the Seventeenth Century*, which provided an interpretation of the art of the Dutch golden age through the lens of social history. By bridging the gaps between art history and