

poor moved through different phases of prosperity and poverty, yet found ways to participate in consumer markets at every stage.

At the same time, while Harley convincingly demonstrates that the poor actively shaped their domestic environments, his analysis remains primarily descriptive rather than deeply theoretical. A stronger engagement with concepts such as Pierre Bourdieu's notion of symbolic capital could have enriched the discussion by exploring whether certain possessions carried social significance beyond their economic value. Did poor individuals acquire certain goods not just for practical use, but rather to assert dignity or convey their status within their communities? While Harley vividly reconstructs the material world of the poor, a deeper exploration of the social meanings attached to these possessions would have added another interpretative layer to his findings.

Extending his main argument, Harley contends that the growing demand for consumer goods among the poor – a group long considered economically marginal – played a significant role in the Industrial Revolution. While he does not settle the enduring debate over whether demand or supply was the primary driver of industrialization, his analysis of the poor as active and expanding consumers adds a crucial piece to the puzzle. Ultimately, Harley challenges historians of material culture to take the poor and their consumer behavior more seriously, dismissing the notion that sources are lacking and highlighting their significance as participants in the consumer markets of the long eighteenth century.

Overall, *At Home with the Poor* is a landmark study based on an exceptional set of sources. It is essential reading for anyone interested in the daily life and material culture of the poor in Northwestern Europe before, during, and after the Industrial Revolution.

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Caroline Fowler, *Slavery and the Invention of Dutch Art* (Durham (NC): Duke University Press, 2025). 176 pp. ISBN 9781478031321.

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Absences are telling. This is the analytical thread running through *Slavery and the Invention of Dutch Art*. Caroline Fowler's central argument is that the "transubstantiation of personhood into property" (p. 2) – the

metaphysical, processual, abstract act of turning human beings into embodied, marketable, and value-holding commodities – induced a “crisis in figuration” (p. 109) in seventeenth-century Dutch visual culture. Fowler contends that traces of this crisis, rooted in the newly present yet never historically absent “transformation” (p. 4), surface in the “nondescript spaces” (p. 17) of painted seascapes and coastlines, built maritime monuments, printed ships, and illustrated flora and fauna. By placing the visual culture of the Dutch Golden Age in dialogue with the dense textual archive of slavery – comprising inventories, legal codes, inscriptions, and more – Fowler reveals the pervasive yet often invisible presence of the transatlantic slave trade in the substrata of Dutch art production.

Fowler structures the book around the concept of transubstantiation, defined as “the ability of one thing to become another, of one material world to denote the presence of another material world” (p. 7). She borrows this notion from theology – the Eucharist, where the wafer and wine embody the presence of Christ – and reframes it through economic theory and Black feminist thought. Across four chapters, plus an introduction and conclusion, readers are taken from the speculative (art) market in Amsterdam, through oceanic routes and vistas, to commemorative architecture in churches, and finally to botanical studies in the Atlantic world. Each chapter reinterprets works by canonical artists such as Rembrandt van Rijn, Hercules Segers, Frans Post, and Gesina ter Borch within the broader contexts of emerging nation-states, global economic expansion, the iconoclastic Reformation, debates over political tolerance and economic freedom, and natural philosophy.

Chapter 1 links the financial operations of the Amsterdam Bourse to the dynamics of the art market. Hercules Segers’s printed landscapes, Fowler argues, are “haunted” by maritime capital – visible in ghostlike ship contours left by a recycled copper plate – and his artistic self-marketing mirrored logics of speculation, limited production, and shifting consumer demand. Chapter 2 turns to Frans Post. After viewing his drawings of coastlines (strategically significant to the Dutch) alongside a co-pilot’s annotations attempting to measure sensory perception, Fowler considers his paintings of Brazilian landscapes. The painted flames of a sugar mill kiln, she contends, become legible when placed alongside an inventory sent by Johan Maurits to Louis XIV, which explicitly details the violence and harsh labor conditions endured by enslaved workers alluded to in the image.

Chapter 3 explores the ocean’s representations in legal theory, religious space, and visual culture, from Hugo Grotius’s *Mare Liberum*

to Jacob van Heemskerck's tomb in the Oude Kerk, as well as the seascapes of Willem van de Velde I and II. Fowler connects these to ideals of urban Dutch citizenship, showing how the commemoration and recoverability of (non-enslaved) citizens' bodies (especially naval heroes) contrasts starkly with the sea's imagined ahistorical fluidity. Chapter 4 deals with human reproduction and domesticity through cabinets of curiosity and Maria Sybilla Merian's botanical studies in Suriname. Merian's illustration and description of the peacock flower, used as an abortifacient by enslaved women, figures, according to Fowler, the violence surrounding reproduction in plantation households. The visually absent plantation interiors are contrasted by the contemporaneous Dutch genre paintings of women in domestic spaces (e.g., by Johannes Vermeer). The conclusion, drawing on Roland Barthes and Alois Riegl, reflects on how racialized notions (particularly those of "purity" and "whiteness") have shaped the historiography of early modern Dutch art.

The book's greatest strength lies in its lived interdisciplinarity. Fowler brings art history into conversation with economic, social, and legal history; natural science; and literary theory. Framed through the conceptual lens of *transubstantiation* and the methodological approach of *besideness* (Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick), she addresses the empirical frictions between disparate archives and the many epistemic absences that mark the historical record of slavery. Her intermedial approach and corpus, which resists anthropological centralization, offers compelling ways for working with and around archival silences. Fowler's book thus contributes meaningfully to the methodologies developed in critical archival studies by slavery scholars such as Saidiya Hartman, Marisa Fuentes, and Hannah Barker.

Fowler's use of relationality – medial, material, emotional, metaphorical – is particularly expressive in interpreting the rare depictions of colonial(ized) subjects. She exposes the artificially severed connection between the *Two Young African Children* drawn by ter Borch and the charged intimacy between *Two Men of African Descent* portrayed by Rembrandt. The latter, featured on the book's cover, embodies what Fowler calls the "forced visibility" of enslaved people who "do not need contemporary historical inquiry to determine the value of [their] existence" (p. 10). Her reflective self-positioning as a researcher navigating the moral economies of heritage institutions, the publishing market, and personal activism offers an ethically grounded foundation for engaging with the legacies of slavery.

The most significant limitation of Fowler’s otherwise rigorous study – apart from some minor redundancies and a conclusion that reads more like an additional chapter than a synthesis – is its lack of engagement with slavery in Dutch colonies beyond the Atlantic, particularly in the Indian Ocean world and the South African Cape Colony. Fowler justifies this omission “for reasons of scale” (p. 126), but the absence remains consequential. It undercuts the global entanglement of the Dutch West India Company (WIC) and the Dutch East India Company (VOC) – connections Fowler herself references repeatedly (e.g., pp. 23, 85). This *absence* becomes especially pronounced in the final chapter’s discussion of the historiography of racialized slavery; a field recently expanded by scholars working on Dutch slavery outside the Atlantic world, including Matthias van Rossum (and the members of the GLOBALISE project), Julia Holzmann, Eva Marie Lehner, Elise van Nederveen Meerkerk, and Marsely L. Kehoe. The visual archive of Dutch Batavia, for example, contains ample evidence of slavery’s *presence* in the plantation “interiors” and enslaved people’s *visibility* to Dutch citizens. Fowler briefly notes this presence (p. 137), though refrains from exploring these materials further – an inclusion that could have deepened and contextualized her central argument.

*Slavery and the Invention of Dutch Art* is a model of interdisciplinary scholarship. It invites us to read, see, and feel what lies beneath the surface of papers, canvas, and colours. Highly recommended for those seeking methodological innovation, critical engagement with the legacies of slavery, and empathy for those (historically) forced into the record by others.

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Elisabeth Heijmans and Sophie Rose (eds), *Diversity and Empires. Negotiating Plurality in European Imperial Projects from Early Modernity* (London and New York: Routledge, 2023). 243 pp. ISBN 9781032325859.

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In *Diversity and Empires. Negotiating Plurality in European Imperial Projects from Early Modernity*, editors Elisabeth Heijmans and Sophie Rose bring together scholars to examine the diversity of social groups as an inherent