
ANGELS

— of —

AMSTERDAM



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You can be very wild and still be very wise.
(Yoko Ono)

ANGELS OF AMSTERDAM

It seemed they didn't have a snowball's chance in hell. Four young women who had left behind all they knew and had boarded ship in Dutch Brazil or Jutland, or had spent days trudging up from a tiny village in Noord-Brabant just to try their luck in booming Amsterdam. They were unfamiliar with the way money works and in their dealings with hustlers, landlords and whoremongers they had a great disadvantage.

On arrival they soon discovered they were not the only ones looking for food and a place to lay their heads. Amsterdam had a huge surplus of women: about half the women in the lowest social strata, were without a male breadwinner beside them. Some had been widowed at a young age while others had their husband out at sea for years on end. If they failed to get a job for themselves, whoremongers often jumped in to lure them into prostitution by first offering them a place to sleep and lending them money to buy satin dresses and beautiful jewelry and then forcing them to sell their bodies as repayment. Prostitution was a form of debt slavery.

Although prostitution was illegal, it was condoned as a remedy against decent burgher wives and daughters being harassed by the thousands of pawing sailors who would flood the town when their ships entered port. These boat people were 'six week gents', for as long as they were ashore. And some would spend consecutive days and nights in a playhouse and squander all they had earned.

Anyone causing trouble would be sent to a correctional institution. Men were made to grate timber for the manufacturing of paints while female prisoners would be forced into spinning and sewing textiles. These spinning mills often doubled as a sort of human zoo: an attraction for tourists who would pay two Guilders to be amused by watching ragged and quarreling prisoners.

Poor unemployed young men had a different prospect, although it was no less perilous: they could try to survive on the fringes of society or they could enlist as a sailor, for a monthslong journey which would see just one in three returning safely. Press gangs would pick men up from the bars and street, feed and house them and then force them to buying a seaman's chest so expensive as to require a year and a half's work at sea, plunging them into debts. Then they would be enlisted in the East or West India Company. The employment contracts were more like debt notes: they recorded exactly who was to receive which wages and booty-shares as reimbursement for expenses of food, lodging and equipment.

Sailors and prostitutes generally got the worst bargains.



MARITGEN JANS

Wearing men's clothes made life easier – or so she explained. Child of Muilkerk, a small Brabant village and born in 1611, Marike Jans changed gender twice.

She was by no means unique in the seventeenth century. And also in those days it sparked imagination. Especially in sailors' songs, there were numerous references to cross-dressing. There were also many bad jokes on the subject, such as the joke noted by dropped-out bar-rister Aernout van Overbeke. I imagine him in a noisy tavern, lips greasy from the roast and clutching a beaker of sweet white wine. His eyes glinting, he would open his *Diary of Jests*: 'Two aldermen come to see the newlywed couple. The woman has complained about her husband being a cross-dressed woman. After a thorough inspection the one says to the other: My dear fellow, I have seen a thousand of them in my life, and I assure you, this is a cunt.' Not funny. Even though Van Overbeke was in stitches about this joke.

Happily, in Maritgen's case, there was also friendship and compassion from an unexpected angle.

As a child, Maritgen Jans had lost both her parents and was put up with an older sister. This went awry – things happened there that kept her fearful of her family for the rest of her life. At the age of fourteen she had been engaged to a coachman. To escape her approaching wedlock, she fled to Amsterdam. There, she found two jobs: but even toiling as a maid and a silkyarn twiner at the same time, she could not earn enough to make a living.

Maritgen decides on a transformation. Hiding behind a church, she dons men's clothes. She cuts off her long hair, finds a hat to wear and calls herself David Jansz. He sells the women's clothing.

This was a move that made economical sense: for the same work a boy earned double of what a girl could earn. The new identity however, could still not protect him from unwanted advances. The fifteen year old boy was seen by his widowed and enamoured landlady as a perfect new husband. And again he flees. Soon, he runs into a strong young man who will become his best friend: Gijsbert de Leeuw. During their quest for jobs, they often share bedsteads, half naked – and it never occurs to Gijsbert to have any doubts about David's gender.

After the fiasco with his landlady, David chooses for a life in an enclosed male community. Together with Gijsbert, he enlists as a soldier in the West Indies Company in 1628. The WIC had been founded just seven years previously for privateering and conquest of territories. And to trade in gold, ivory, sugar, salt, bearskins, tobacco, copper and enslaved Africans. The latter soon became a major part in the trade and eventually even became the prime activity of WIC.

Together with five others, David and Gijsbert board the merchant ship *De Cameel* which is



bound for the Dutch headquarters on the Gold Coast –now called Ghana- Fort Nassau. After just four days they are attacked by pirates at Dunkirk and the soldiers fight them off with their muskets. With bullets whistling around them, David leads the battle.

On board, the men live in close quarters. They all work, eat, sleep and sing together – and of course there would be the occasional fight too. And then Gijsbert takes care of David. It makes you wonder how no one discovered that David was no ordinary boy.

We don't know the details, but after a few years of friendship, Gijsbert starts to cotton on and a darker side of himself appears. The moment he realizes there is no penis, but a vulva between David's legs, he wants to have sex. David however, would rather die. Gijs threatens to reveal David's secret who offers him fifteen guilders bribe. The crisis seems to be averted.

Living in Fort Nassau, David is 'one of the guys'. They practice gun firing, drink wine and visit African women. He secretly visits a beautiful black woman too but only by himself, and so is challenged about his honorability by the others. This is a noteworthy detail in his story as it seems to be the only instance of David embarking on a sexual activity by his own free will.

After two months David develops a serious fever – a worrying predicament as Dutchmen in Africa were very likely to succumb to malaria or jaundice. His shirt is drenched with sweat and his mates decide to give him a change of clothes. And then, to their great surprise they see David has the breasts of a seventeen year old girl.

For the moment she is still sick, but once recovered, the situation could explode: a young girl amidst all these sex-starved men. The solution was for her to get married quickly. A hat is passed round in the fort to buy her gifts so she can make herself pretty: a gold necklace (there was plenty of gold on the Gold Coast) and a new dress. The local public prosecutor soon showed up.

To him it is a gift of God, that suddenly there is a woman. He doesn't mind her having been a man before. Their wedding feast lasts three days and nights.

Sadly however, her husband – whose name was Le Fièvre, a prophetic name – dies after just six weeks. The men put Maritgen on a ship to Amsterdam, heavily laden with 1.050 pound of African gold and 116.000 pounds of ivory.

Her story is recorded in 1629, the year she returned, by the Amsterdam surgeon and chronicler, Nicolaes van Wassenaer. Following history this closely implies it is likely that Van Wassenaer will have heard about her exploits first hand, either from Maritgen Jansz herself or from someone in his worldwide correspondence network.

Historisch Verhael aller ghedenckwaerdigher

Iunius.
1629.

hy verscheyden reysen hadde moeten plock-haren / doch viel ghemeynlyck te swack / maer hadde een stercke maet / niet delwelcke hy in Hollandt verkieert hadde / ghenaemt Gijsbert Cornelisz de Leeu, van Wtrecht / die nam d' Oorlogh altemet voor hem aen / ende gaf sijn parthye dapper wat.

Comt op
de Cust.

Na dat het Schip (als gheseydt is) op de Cust van Guinea was gearriveert / is David Janisz met andere Soldaten den 19. Julij aen landt op 't Fort gegaen / hem wel daer composterende / tochten ende wachten na behooren waernemende. De Sergeant leerdede hem de Musquet wel handelen / doch hem wat te swaer vallende / wierdt hem een Roer bestelt / dat hem wel ter handt stont / als mede 't Geweer op sijn zijde / soo trots als een oudt Soldaet / dies hy onder de Soldaten aldaer wel ghesien was / om dat hy eenighe Houschanden voor haer maecte / ende altemet haer hemdden repareerde / dat hem beter aenviel als de ordinarische Snijder die op 't Fort is.

Ghedient
figheyt.

Hy was de siecken bysonder behulpigh / die ordinarie om de quade constitutie des lichts aldaer vele zijn ; liet oock niet na om alle suspitie van haer persoon t'ontgaen / altemet een pot Wijn te drincken / of een mope Swartinne te sien / ginck oock wel by haer in 'theymelijck / dat het sommige die het wisten / quade suspitie gaf / van pets te doen dat d' eerbaerheyt niet en betaemde / 'twierdt hem oock opghestreden / ende liet hem dat (om rebenen) aengaen.

Geffent
ghen.

Hy ginck over al upt / soo binnen als buuten / daer het hem beliefsde / of soo verre als het een Soldaet gheoorloft was / altemet ginck hy met de Soldaten in 't Kiekerken baden / doch alsoo hy seyde niet te comen swemmen / hielt hy altydt sijn hemt ende rockjen aen / ende liep niet verder dan tot sijn knyen in 't water.

> **Sieckte.**

Na dat hy twee Maenden aen Landt hadde gheweest / creech hy / als ghemeynlyck ghebeurt / de Landt-sieckte / hadde groot behulp van sijn Cameraet Gijsbert de Leeu, die seer wel op hem pastede / dagelijcks siecker werdende / wierde upt sijn slaep-plaets op de Sieckkamer ghebracht by d' andere kranken.

> **Ontdeekinghe.**

Door de langhdurpigh sieckte wierdt haer hemt vuyl / waerom sy veel daghen leyde om een schoon hemt over 't Hoofd te schieten / dat het niemant mocht merken / maer 'twilde niet ghelucken / om de menichte van 't Doelch / ende datmender 'snachts licht brandede / hy rechte hem 'snachts wel drie of viermael op / als andere siecken verhalen / om 'themt over te brengen / maer 'twilde om de swackheyt niet ghelucken / altoos achter overvallende : sdaechs daerna een upze of twee voor den avondt eenighe Soldaten in de Camera comende / om haer siecke maets te besoecken / saghen dat Davids hemt te vuyl was / ende seyden / onbehoorlyck te zijn / datmen hem so soude laten legghen / eyscheden van sijn Cameraet een schoon hemt / dat voor den dach ghebracht wiert / ende d' ander uytghetrocken zijnde /

her

CHRONICLE OF MARITGEN JANS / DAVID JANSZ

Historical account of the most remarkable recordings
(Historisch verhael alder ghedenck-weerdichste geschiedenisse),
Nicolaes Jansz van Wassenaer, 1629, page 59
Collection Library Arnhem, Rozet, 300 55 D 20.

DISEASE

After having been ashore for two months, as so many before him, he caught the land disease, had enjoyed great assistances from his mate Gijsbert de Leeu, who kept a close eye on him, but becoming more feverish by the day, he was taken from his lodgings to sickbay and the other diseased.

DISCOVERY

The protracted sickbed soiled her shirt, which caused her many days of discomfort in need of slipping a clean shirt over the head, for no one was to notice, she could not succeed, for the multitude of patients and lights burning at night: at night he would sit up three or four times, as the other sick would confirm, to change the shirt, but weakness averting achievement, would recline again exhausted: when days later some two hours before sundown, a number of soldiers entered the room visiting their mate, and they were disgusted by the state of David's shirt and demanded a clean shirt from a comrade for it was indecent to leave him lying there in this way, and when the soiled shirt had been removed,

her breasts showed to them, astounding all present, to find unexpectedly a young maiden in their midst.

ORDER OF THE LORD GENERAL TO THIS CASE

Her state having thus been established, she fell in faint, and there were cries of wonder at the fortress, and the lord general Adriaen Cornelisz was informed of the fact that David Jansz had been found to be of female gender: Hearing such an unheard of tidings, the General, as an upholder of decency and well knowing what steps to be undertaken, let her be segregated from the men and be treated as a woman, and had her brought to a room on September 1st where the Authority found her, while she was in state of shame: when the Lord General informed about her state, she confessed with trepidation and prayed to not be resented, as she meant no harm, feared her friends and wanted only to earn a decent wage; her name was asked and she responded it be Maritgen Ians; and she was appointed a decent berth above the soldiers' huts, where one crosses from one tower to the other, where she was to be treated adequately.

CHANGE CAUSES NOVELTY

In the meanwhile, womens' dresses were ordered for her, which she accepted, but because of the sudden change, she was often foiled, wanting to take her hat off: so that many new things occurred. She fell sick with fever another two or three times, and was administered effective remedies so her health recovered slowly and her previous color returned, ruddy in the face; they graced her somewhat, so someone might desire and marry her, for she had no wish to return to Holland. And a young maiden, out there, all alone amongst so many men could not carry the General's approval. And so his Hon. and the Council decided to wed her to an apt person who would bid for her hand.

vertoondeben haer hare Borsten / daer over een peder verwondert stondt / vindende een Jonghe-Dochter buyten alle gissinghe in haer gheselschap.

Junius.
1629.

Haer staet alsoo ontdeckt zijnde / viel sy in flaeute / ende daer was een wonder gheroep op 't Fort / ende twierdt de Heer Generael Adriaen Cornelisz aenghedient / dat David Iansz bevonden was een Vrouw Persoon te zijn : de Generael sulchs verstaende verschickte de oock over alsulcke onghehoorde tijdinghe / ende sy een beminder van d'eerbaerheyt / wel wetende / wat hem in sulcken gheballete doen stondt / dede haer terstondt van de Mans personen afghesondert / als een Vrouwe tracteren / ende liet haer den 1. Septemb. op een Sael vraghen / daer d'Overicheyt haer vont / dies sy beschaemt was : De Heer Generael haer van haer staet vraghende / bekende sy het met vrees / ende badt / datmen haer het niet qualijck afnemen soude / also sy sulchs om besten wille hadde gedaen / de Wienden vreesende / en de cost beter willende winnen ; wiert haer naem gevraecht / ende seide / dat sy Maritgen Ians ghenaemt was : en wierdt haer een bequame slaep-plaets boven der Soldaten Hutten toeghestelt / ter plaetse daerinnen van d'eene Tozen tot d'ander gaet / ende wierdt aldaer na behoozen ghetracteert.

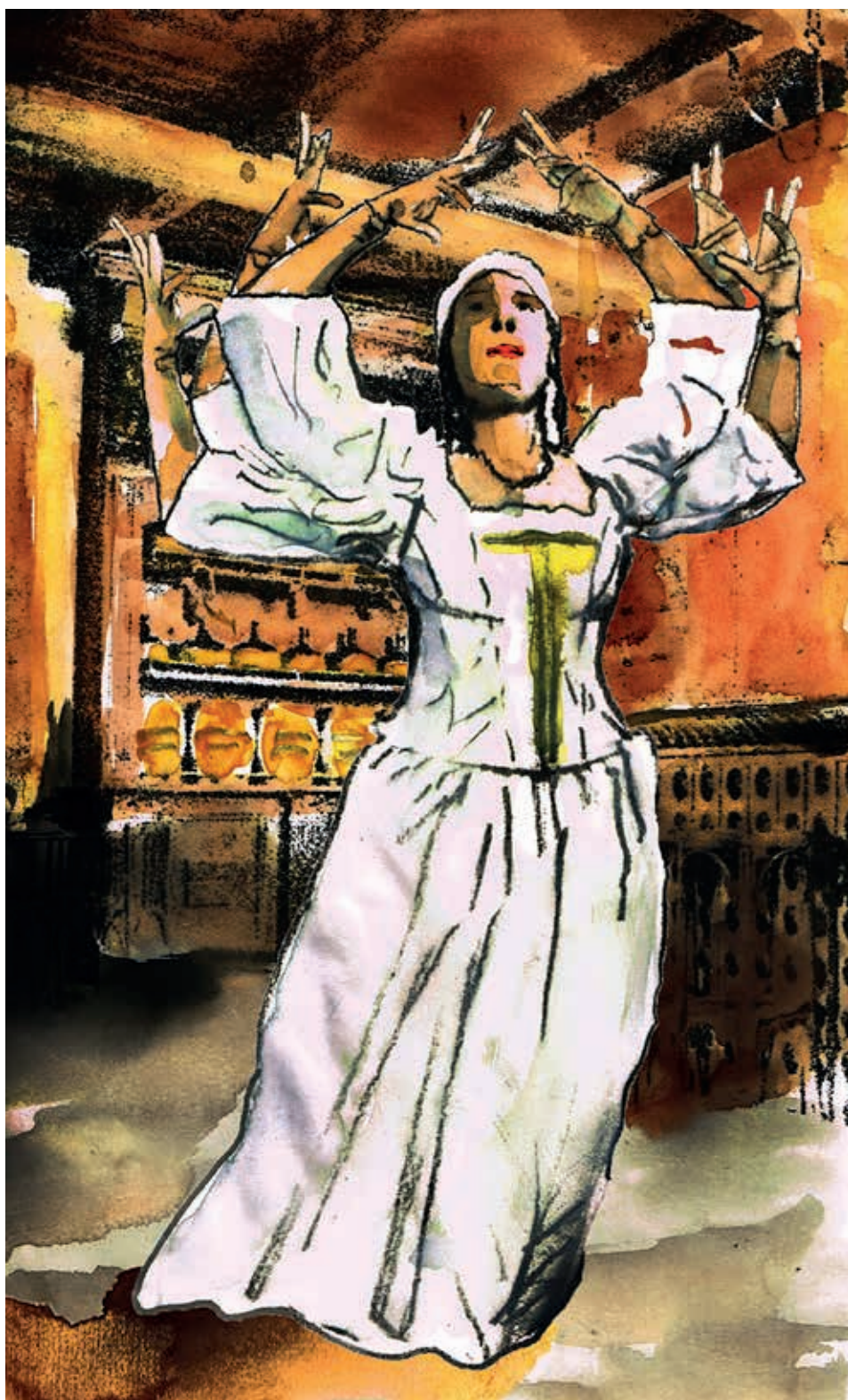
Orde van
de Heer
Generael
op dit
stuk,

Daerentusschen wierdt haer het Vrouwen hulsel bestelt / dat sy aen-nam / maer dooz de subite veranderinge verabuseerde sy haer dickmaels / willende den Hoet noch aflichten : Soo datter vele nieuwheden voozbielen. Middeler tijt wierde sy noch twee of driemaal van de Kortsse aengetroffen / ende heeftmen goede remedien daer toe aengheleydt / soo dat sy metter tijdt begost te beteren / ende haer vorige coleur te crighen / zijnde blosende van aenghesicht : men dede haer redelijcker wijze op-poncken / om datter pemant sinne in mocht crighen / ende daer trouwen / also sy niet gaerne weder na Hollandt wilde. Ende een Jonge-Dochter aldaer alleen / onder so veel mans personen / vondt de Heer Generael niet goet. Soo wierdt by sijn C. en de Raedt gebonden / haer aldaer te begeben aen een bequaem Persoon / die haer versoeken mocht.

Verander-
ringh cau-
seert nieu-
wigheyt.

De H. Generael ende de Raden vereerdeden haer eerst met een gouden keten / ende noch pets fraps / om dies te beter begeert te zijn : de Cammisen ende anderen schoncken haer oock pets / ende den H. Generael besteldede haer een schoon habijt / soo datter altemet eenighe Dypers upt quamen : twiert de Vroomsten toeghelaten terwyl sy noch half sieck was / vooz haer bedde te comen / ende eerlijck discourenen / ende te sien ofter wat liefde comen wilde / want sy schoon was / ende begaf een peder goet bescheet : Men ghedacht doens niet eens dat sy soo langhen tijdt onder dat rouw gheselschap gheleest hadde : Men ghedacht niet eens dat sy ghevepust hadde een Jongemans te zijn / daer sy een Dochter was.

Dijfwa-
gien.



JULIANA

Juliana's account reads like a complicated play depicting the unequal struggle between a man and a woman. It features two notaries and two dubious witnesses, both called Moses. Juliana's voice has been lost in the dialogues but by tracing the contours of other actors who have had their roles recorded in notarial deeds, I will try to sketch her outline.

The stage is set in the vicinity of the Amsterdam Breestraat, known today as the Jodenbree-straat. Many of the buildings there were owned by Sephardic Jews who had fled the Inquisition in Spain or Portugal. Some had made a stop-over in a Dutch colony or trading post. These immigrants had their own language and shops, their own houses of worship and their own cemetery.

Twenty-two year old servant Juliana arrived into this community in 1654, after a long voyage from Dutch Brazil. It had not been her first sea journey. As a ten year old girl she had been ripped from her life in a West African village we know nothing about and which she would never see again. Slogging on foot for weeks in a caravan, she and many others arrived in a fortress on the Ghanese or Angolan coast. There she was sold to the West-India Company (ruthless traders, who would exchange three teenagers for the price of two adult men), who sailed her and a hold full of fellow enslaved Africans to the sugar plantations in Dutch Brazil. In the capital town Recife, on the slave market, she was auctioned and fell into the hands of Portuguese sugar merchant Eliau Burgos, who paid 525 guilders for her.

She became his domestic servant. Probably, she was also expected to serve him in bed. Due to a great shortage of women, both among the white and black populations, mixed relations were not uncommon. Sources make no reference to a Mrs. Burgos and Burgos himself is noted to have said that 'she was always with him and he used her as a slave.'

When Portugal reconquered Recife, some twelve years later, Burgos fled with Juliana to the Dutch Republic which boasted freedom of religion. Moses and Moses, two of Burgos' friends, waved them off from the quayside. They would meet again in Amsterdam.

The contrast from the slavery-driven world of sugar plantations to the early capitalist city of Amsterdam was huge. Within the circle of merchants that Burgos frequented, Juliana never met anyone who looked like her. The cellars and alleys of the Jewish quarter however, were home to a small community of black men and women. Frequently serving as a sailor or soldier with West India Company, WIC, the Dutch East India Company, VOC, or the Admiralty these men would come to Amsterdam. After spending some shore-time in the city they would then depart on a new journey for many months. The women would stay behind and see to managing their lives somehow. The cellars they inhabited were dark, damp and overcrowded so they spent most of their time out on the streets. Undoubtedly that is where Juliana ran into them, on her way to the shop or the synagogue. Perhaps these were the people who inspired her to embrace freedom?

Two years on: 1656. Burgos had developed plans to emigrate to Barbados. With their knowledge and financial means, the Dutch were helping Brits to set up sugar plantations there. Juliana however did not envy a return to slave society. She refused to go and ran off.

Juliana had learned that slavery was illegal in Amsterdam. There was freedom for all. That sounded easier than it was as Burgos refused to let her go. Officially she could take him to court and have her freedom asserted. But she had no money, no job, no roof over her head. She made him a proposition. They would, on her initiative, go and see notary Baddel to register her offer. She would accompany Burgos to Barbados and serve him for another three years after which he would return her to freedom.

He turned out to be an even bigger rat than she had imagined though.

Without informing Juliana, Burgos took his two friends Moses and Moses to notary Lock, to declare that Juliana had come to Amsterdam on her own free will. Even worse: these witnesses would go on to state that Juliana had begged Burgos on her knees to take her with him, promising to serve him for the rest of her life. And they said, that although Burgos could easily have sold her in Brazil for five- or six hundred guilders, he took her along and even paid for her expensive transit fare.

Why would Juliana have begged Burgos to take her to Amsterdam? Was this an instance of *terror-binding avant-la-lettre*, which causes hostages to bond with their oppressors? Or was she terrified by what could happen to her, if Burgos sold her in Brazil? The prospect of working on a plantation, where Africans like her suffered abominable treatment perhaps was more daunting than going along with Burgos. She had, after all spent half her life with him in a household and had probably developed her own survival strategy.

The next scene in Juliana's life we know about, is Burgos' own statement at the notary. He started off by recounting almost literally what his two friends had recorded before. Clearly the statements had been well prepared. It must have been essential for Burgos to make the point that Juliana had come with him voluntarily without any form of coercion.

He stated asking her to accompany him to Barbados and said she consented on the condition that they had a deed drawn up promising to set her free after three years. And now Burgos had come to notary Adriaen Lock to disband this deed, behind Juliana's back, saying she had forced him into signing. He was aware of the fact that slavery was not allowed here, but he intended to exercise his full rights over her again when in Barbados.

And Juliana – was unaware of this treason.

I imagine she made her third long sea voyage with him, to Barbados this time. After three

years she would have presented Burgos with a copy of the deed they had Baddel draw up, claiming her contractually agreed freedom. And Burgos would have presented her with the deed he had Lock draw up, asserting that she was his and his alone.

Canalha!

NOTARY DEED CONCERNING JULIANA

Amsterdam City Archives, Notaries' records location Amsterdam, Access number 5075, Inventory number 2271, year 1656, page 764-766

On this first day of November 1656, before me, Adriaen Lock, personally, and at request of Eliau Burgers, appeared Moyses Marcudo, approximately 48 years of age, and Moyses Bueno Henricques, approximately 25 years of age, previously resident in Recife, Pernambuco and with present abode in this city, who having been first duly sworn, did depose that they lived some years in Recife, Pernambuco, until it passed unto the Portuguese, and that they (...)

Op den den Eersten Novemb^r 1676
 Compromis de Trouw myn adingh tot Koningh
 in presentie vande meeste der myn gen
 gheit wissende B: van Ruedig om omtrent
 een yfelyc ghescheyde en verordghe vande

(...) were acquainted with petitioner as well as the negress Juliana, and acknowledged knowing Juliana to be slave of petitioner and that when Recife became Portuguese petitioner was in position to sell her for 5 – 600 Guilders, which, because of her heartrending pleas and her promise to stay with him and serve him for as long as she would live, he did not do, and that petitioner invested great sums to extract her from Brazil and bring her here. Witnesses further attest to having visited petitioner's home in Recife frequently and noting Juliana's presence therein, as well having been present and having a clear knowledge and memory of petitioner and Juliana at embarkation for here in Recife. Sworn to subscribed in Amsterdam, in presence of Hendrick Gelehant and Jacobus Snel, acting as witnesses.

On this first day of November 1656, before me, Adriaen Lock, personally, and in presence of subscribed witnesses appeared Eliau Burgos, previously resident in Recife, Pernambuco and with present abode in this city. Affiant stated acquiring in 1643, in Recife, the then ten or eleven year old negress named Juliana for the sum of 525 Guilders, and that he always kept said negress with him and used her as slave until Recife passed unto the Portuguese, and that when Recife became Portuguese petitioner was in position to sell her for 5 – 600 Guilders, which he did not do, because of her begging and pursuance to remain with him and serve him for as long as she would live, but rather brought her here at great expense, and after being here for some time, as a consequence of inciting libel from others telling her she was free here and was no longer required to serve him, she eloped, despite her solemn promise expressed before, and as affiant in the near future intends to travel to and settle in Barbados, he requested her to accompany him there, which Juliana refused unless he promised to liberate her after three more years of service and would have a deed passed (...)

(...) confirming this promise, and so, since slaves are free here and he would not get Juliana to accompany him to Barbados without this promise and passing a deed, he assented and made her this promise and had a deed passed with notary Benedict Baddel and certain witnesses, and since he had this deed made up in distress and as if coerced by Juliana he approved to declare the above affidavit requisitioning nullification of mentioned agreed and confirmed deed between Juliana and him, or agreement, recorded by notary Benedict Baddel, and that he will maintain full legal rights of Juliana's purchase to continue as before, me, notary, as he should understand and acknowledge, requesting to bear knowledge and grant deed of this in due form. Sworn to subscribed in Amsterdam, in presence of Hendrick Gelehant and Jacobus Snel, acting as witnesses.



ELSJE CHRISTIAENS

Sailing from Jutland, Elsje Christiaens arrived in Amsterdam in the spring of 1664. At the age of 18 years and tired of poverty she came to this thriving city to try her luck. Nowadays she would be dubbed a fortune-seeker.

Two weeks after landing she was still short of a job but her landlady wanted to see the use of the hay-sack Elsje was sleeping on, reimbursed. Many landladies ran a brothel on the side and I can imagine that Elsje was fearful of what would ensue. The landlady smacked Elsje with a broomstick. In a flash, Elsje grabbed for an axe and returned the blows. The assailant tumbled into the basement. Dead. Attracted by the commotion, neighbors soon flocked in and demanded to hear from Elsje where all the blood on her hands had come from. 'A bloody nose', was all she could think of saying. In a state of panic, she ran out and jumped into the canal.

Elsje was soon arrested and incarcerated in the brand-new town-hall, which is now the Royal Palace on the Dam. She was interrogated there four times. At the end of the trial, which town-folk had been able to follow from behind a bronze grating, her death sentence was proclaimed. And with church bells loudly tolling she was strangled at a post. The wooden scaffold which was attached to the town-hall, had been hastily erected so the amassed crowd could watch her clambering from the balcony to her imminent death.

And, after she had exhaled her final breath, all of Amsterdam looked on to see the hangman deal her head a number of blows with the axe Elsje had used on her landlady.

With the axe suspended beside her head, her body was left hanging on the gallows of Volewijck for years as an example for all to see. Soon after she had been suspended there, Rembrandt made two drawings of her. Depicted with her little round face, she looks a mere child, turned out in her best red dress.

Anthonie van Borssom painted an image of the gallows just weeks after her death. The painting shows four other corpses, besides Elsje's. There was one, with a pistol suspended over his head, who had been sat on a wheel for over a month. Another, which was more like a skeleton, had been hanging there for four years. There was an iron spade attached to his post. Exhibiting murder weapons in this way, was apparently the custom. And all this occurred directly underneath the Eye Filmmuseum outdoor terrace: an unexpected meeting between the seventeenth- and twenty-first century spectacle societies.

Elsje Christiaens' confession is kept in the Amsterdam City Archives. It's a dismaying document which literally confers Elsje's version of the massacre. You can see her standing there, all by herself, hardly beyond girlhood, facing a handful of grim, black-dressed men she can barely understand. You can hear her excitedly defending herself, fibbing about the number of blows she dealt, taking a deep breath and finally admitting that after the fight with her landlady, she had also opened the trunks of two other guests and helped herself to their clothes and linen.

Why did she do it? Emotional, confused about her predicament and volatile in her reactions. She was a fury, who had tried to avert her fate with violence.

CONFESSION ELSJE CHRISTIAENS

Amsterdam City Archives, Confession books, Archive number 5061, Inventory number 316, Period 1534-1811, page 82-85

Case 84 for jurats, April 28 – May 1 1664

Elsje Christiaanse from Sprouwen in Jutland, 18 years of age says to have been here in town not more than 14 days and to have come here in search of a tenement, confesses to have with an axe, split the skull of the woman in whose house she slept, says the woman required reimbursement of bed-lease and that she would hold her goods in ransom, that the detainee had no money but had to make it first by working and that this caused the matter, says the woman thrashed her with a stick, and confesses to have hacked her skull with blooded axe displayed in court, says she found the axe there on a chair, says she clipped her head twice but does not know whether she also hit arm or hand, (...)

Janij hantgemidd syn gewond ende is Reet
van Lirck met al med doot getooveren
ontrent hantmaal. Segt dat Lirck
gien te wienig onthout. marry bruyf segt
het in faciaf dat sy Lirck gearimeert heeft
dat sy hem en tieg hienig sin en dat sy
onsaack want ongeluck is, en inledig dert-
slager is weeg gebelugt.

Act. 8 præs uts.

> Si 84 8

Elsje Christiaanse van Spronwen in Jutlant
ont is jaren segt hier niet meer als 14
dagen in de Stadt geweest te zijn en hier
gevoornig te zijn om een hman te soeken, bekent
de vrouw dat sy te hman geslapen heeft met
een byl de oop in geslaagd te gheen, segt dat
de vrouw een daelder den slagen gelt wile gheen
ende dat sy hat goet dat vrou soe lang wile
goud, en dat sy geluigende geen gelt en had de
mae jst tere met overich mo te Dienon
en dat dat over de quet hie is gevoorn, segt
dat de vrouw hat vert met een stoek soek
bekent de vrouw met de byl in jndio stoek
in de oop geslaagd te gheen, segt dat sy de
byl dat ^{oep een hant} ~~goud~~ wout leggen, segt dat sy 2
haken naer de vrouns goet geslaagd heeft
doeg niet te weten of sy had den arm of hand

over geest geraacht, segt dat de vrouwe
 de besenstoch in de handt hadde doen sy had
 niet de byl quetse, segt dat de vrouwe
 in de Rector Rector vloegte des sy geken-
 gende had 2 hachz in de coy had gebruyt
 segt had niet gebolyt te hebbe in de Rector
 ook dat niet nagesien te hebbe of sy le-
 vending of doodt was. segt dat de vrouwe
 gesingendeint geest selx dat geest de binnij
 goorden, en dat sy gebruynde doen voor
 de dier geest gebruynde, en dat de binnij
 had bruynde geest sy soo bebloet quam aan had
 handt wady sy seide dat had niet hadde
 gebleet, en dat sy doen deden ~~aan geest~~
~~tuysschen~~ want sy fract is gelycke en
 datter een deel volck had volgede wadent
 sy door dier heijt mit water sprong.
 segt dat sy dit seijt gedan geest dede
 oeghter de kluck ontrent geest acht.
 segt dat de vrouwe had mit de foek over 11
 geest en over de rug geslagen hadt. segt
 dat de quetse eygentlyke apnam om dat
 de vrouwe had mit lange is wilde brynde
 segt dat sy dier halve gicheit abent ook
 quetse geest deden. segt dat de man
 van de vrouwe is afgeluyt 14 dagj geleden.

Actum 22 april 1664 presentibus
 D. Groot, Groot, Buis, Blau,
 Van Loon, capelle, Spidgel &
 Bronghorst & Geyssman.

(...) says the woman held the broom stick when she clobbered her with the axe, says the women fled into a small cellar after receiving two clips to the head, says she did not pursue her into said cellar and did not ascertain whether she be dead or alive. Says that the woman wailed so loud that the neighbors heard, and that she, the detainee answered the door and that the neighbors requested explanation for the blood on her hands and she said her nose had bled, and that she then reclosed the door and, because some of the crowd followed her, she jumped into the water of fright. Says it occurred this very morning around half seven.

Says the woman used the stick to thrash her over the head and back. Says the matter in fact arose because the woman no longer wished to warrant her. Says this matter was also debated the night before.

Says the woman's husband has left her 14 days ago.

[April 28 1664]

Questioned Elsje Christiaens anew and queried her statement about her striking the woman over the head twice as examination has revealed the woman to have received 6 blows to the head and one to the hand; and further after shewing the corpse and indicating mutilations, she confesses to have been so aroused in anger by the woman hitting her with the stick, that she is not perfectly aware of the number of blows she dealt her, although maintains denying dragging her to the lower cellar, but says the woman fell into that cellar by herself as the door was open and they were struggling by the jamb.

Questioned Elsje Christiaens anew and read out above confession to her which she upholds. Asked whether she has taken the silver clip from the murdered woman's head & coins from her purse, she denies.

[April 29 1664]

> Elke eghit haer de novo gelyoort en gelyoort
 of sy de vron niet meer als 2 gelyoort gelyoort
 gelyoort daer nochtans blykt dat sy 6 gelyoort
 in de roge en 12 op de gelyoort gelyoort, en
 vanderes het doede mit gelyoortde lichaem stroom
 ende d' quersing aengewysse synde, daer so
 getruen gelyoortde gelyoort te sye door gelyoort-
 tigeit om dat sy haer niet de ^{uiter} fack ge-
 secht had, dat sy niet en wylt god veel gelyoort
 sy haer gelyoortde gelyoort, onthout als nu
 de vron in d' ander de keder gelyoortde de
 gelyoort, maar segt dat de vron in de selve
 keder gelyoortde is alsoe de d' d' d' d' d' d'
 en sy te sijn vrye daer voor foudij

Act. & præs nfr.

> Elke eghit haer de novo gelyoort ende haer
 de bovont haerde gelyoortde vron gelyoortde
 synde gelyoort daer by gelyoortde gelyoort
 of sy de vron de sy d' d' d' d' d' d' d' d'
 gelyoortde vron gelyoortde gelyoortde gelyoortde
 nyl haer fact? onthout het selve.

Act. 29 April 1664 præs den
 heeren Schout d' d' d' d' d' d' d' d'
 en melaas peneras Schepenen.

cond on scaffold
strangulated at stake
until death do follow
and using same
axe as the one
used to slay
the woman, headsman
dealt some
blows to her
head
her body taken
to Volewyck and
lashed to stake
with axe above
her head to be
consumed by
the air and fowl
with confiscation
of goods.

Questioned Elsje Christiaens anew,
said that on the morning after killing
the woman she prised open a chest
or case with a hammer to take some
goods therefrom, leaving them on the
bed, and took from another open trunk
a cloak, owned by other tenant, and
stashed this in her own trunk, which
was confiscated by the law who duly
returned cloak to owner, persists in
her previous confession and in response
to plea is condemned by Magistrate as
described in margin.

[May 1 1664]







PUSSY SWEET

(SOETE CUT)

Her arrest won't have surprised her much. It had happened to her twice before. Catalijn Laurens ran a small-time whore-house with two prostitutes. She now had to vacate her house within a fortnight.

I don't know what happened to her after that, where she went or how she earned her keep. With her fifty years of age, she was probably too old for prostitution. And her alias suggests a hard working career.

Most prostitutes had nick-names. Nordic Kate was from up North. Cut up Femme had such a loud mouth that someone had used his dagger to give her a 'red ribbon' from the corner of her mouth. Mothy Anna, Cross-eyed Dirkje, Teethy Susan and Kee Labberkot evoke instant images. But why did Catalijn Laurens call herself Pussy Sweet?

Perhaps she had led a sad and lonely life: starting off as a street prostitute, using her sweetness to lure sailors, small time traders or country folk under canal bridges to ease their urges. Or perhaps she worked in a whorehouse or playhouse, consuming immense quantities of sweet white wine with her clients before retreating with them to her parlor?

Seventeenth century sex was straight-forward: flat on the bed, mostly dressed; man on top, woman below. Anything else was considered sinful. One can read about this in judicial documents: the accused won't deny having sex in the rooms above the taverns, but will emphasize that there was no 'seed squandered' or other 'filthiness'. Christian girls were not allowed to take Jews to bed. So Jewish customers were received on the floor only. That was okay.

Did Catalijn have any children to take care of? One would imagine prostitutes being permanently pregnant in those days but complications arising from venereal diseases prevented this. An average of one in twenty was with child.

When the price for the use of her body declined in the course of years, Catalijn started renting out young girls: Anna Maria from Bergen and Metje Albers from Bremen, 26 and 20 years of age respectively. They were arrested all together during the police-raid on the quarter around Haarlemmerdijk on June 10th 1672. Together with five other prostitutes and a dagger waving sailor who had, screaming and bawling, gone berserk in the street.

I have a good hope however that Pussy Sweet will have given her 'whoredom' a strong and personal substance. That she chose her alias because she was proud of her pussy, that it was good and sweet. That she was a prostitute who traded places: not the man's, but her own pleasure was the object. That together with the two girls who worked with her, she could ridicule their own predicament. That they were assertive and independent and, standing shoulder to shoulder they could make fun of their customers unabashedly. And that, after their conviction, they will have raised their skirts in unison to slap their buttocks in contempt. Holding hands skipping out through the city gate, towards a better future.

Amflogge
 in gedenken *and 25 jeds* bidhnt mit mid p dls fegip
ordinant 10 jeds van jeds ondel outfangs te gddij den
 frick xoochroldes j ds xot 13 otdr
 Act jeds n

195
 Anzoni jans van d j Bofz felders
 and 25 jeds wedd bdf gindigt ds mid
 ydr oetien te gddij j p p d feldern bdrda n
 fddij, dog onthout ges
 Act jeds n

10 jeds jeds gddm
 and *E. G. m* *Elfrid Corndis vj Coppdrjager* *10 jeds*
 d d d jeds nozmabl ydrang j ds fad ds
 jeds onstijp ^{alt hie jeds 107} j m otdr jnfactid ydrang
 Act jeds n
 Marni jeds d d novo gldzors
 Act 11 10 n

Pin Papululo
10 jeds
 fatalij Larent van Montne alias Soelo Cut
 out 50 jeds deds worden in Boordjen much
 twee maal gebangen en laet opden 5 maart 1662
 gelast binnen 14 dagen vsthaet myt le bruden
 als R. f. 103: Lyde om twee dederen thase
 myt gerdend
 Act 10 jeds 1662 d d d d
 Schout Bealem. d d d d d d
 L. huf

REGISTRATION SOETE CUT

**Amsterdam City Archives, Confession books, Archive number 5061,
Inventory number 320, Period 1534-1811, page 94**

Marretie Remmerts of Meppen
25 years of age, confesses to taking from
her parents' meppeler barge a
side of smoked meat and a jar of butter

Anthoni Janse of Den Bosch soldier
23 years of age, accused of drawing dagger
and causing great disturbance, yet denies

Elsie Cornelis of Copenhagen imprisoned
here on fifth of this month and banned from city for a year,
see before on page 87, arrested for breaking parole

Marri Jacobs heard anew

Catalijn Laurens of Monrue alias Pussy Sweet
50 years of age, brothel keeper, arrested twice
previously, last arrest on March 5th 1665
ordered to vacate her house within 14 days
as R. page 83: Having found two whores in her house

June 10th 1672

COLOPHON

This publication was developed in concert with the virtual-reality-experience *Angels of Amsterdam*, which takes visitors around a seventeenth century Amsterdam playhouse so they can share key episodes in the lives of four young women. They meet Maritgen Jans, Juliana, Elsje Christiaens and Pussy Sweet: four truculent angels who were not getting their fair share of the Golden Age's gold. They all, in their own way, took their destiny in their own hands.

Seventeenth century sources constitute the core of my research for the *Angels of Amsterdam*. I sought to find the dark side of the wealth and liberty which is generally associated with the port- and trading city of Amsterdam. The development of relational hierarchy between rich and poor, as well as between men and women in that young capitalist society also concerns us. Details from these stories now may seem odd, but the essence effortlessly transcends time frames. They are stories which have brought us to where we are now.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank four historians whose researches have led me to the sources of both the virtual-reality-experience and this publication.

Based on archival research, historians Rudolf Dekker and Lotte van der Pol described 153 life stories of soldiers and sailors who hid their female bodies inside uniforms (*Vrouwen in mannenkleren: de geschiedenis van een tegendraadse traditie: Europa 1500-1800*, 1989). One of their sources was the chronicle which Nicolaes van Wassenaar wrote on Maritgen Jans. Rudolf Dekker was also the one who discovered Aernout van Overbeke's *Diary of Jests*.

Amsterdam's seventeenth century black community was mapped by Mark Ponte, historian and researcher at Amsterdam City Archives. Between the more than forty thousand archival documents he unearthed Burgos' notary deeds, which form the reconstruction basis for Juliana's history.

Elsje Christiaans' history was extensively researched and described by Isabella van Eeghen, a former Amsterdam City Archives specialist. Her research has inspired various historians and novelists.

Historian Lotte van der Pol wrote the groundbreaking dissertation *Het Amsterdams Hoerdom. Prostitutie in de zeventiende en achttiende eeuw* (1996) after sifting through all relevant and available judicial archives and reading these sources from a feminist perspective. This is where I ran into Pussy Sweet (Soete Cut).

Angels of Amsterdam

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