

Domestic Domains: Understanding the Values and Virtues of the 17th Century Dutch Family
through Domestic Genre Paintings

by

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As if through a window, the view into the humble Dutch home depicted in Pieter de Hooch's (1629–1684) *Mother's Duty* (figure 1) is hushed and still. The walls are made of bare wood paneling, and the floors are of auburn tiles with small cracks from age and use. To the right, curtains pulled to the sides reveal a modest sized boxbed with clean, white pillows. A woman in a red sleeved jacket and navy skirt sits in a chair while a child, no older than six, kneels into her with their face in her lap. She has her hands in the child's hair, patiently and delicately checking for lice. On the other side of the room, a door hangs open, showing the way to a garden. Through the latticed window, morning light streams in and onto the floor. A small dog sits in the doorway, ears perked up and at attention, guarding the home from any would-be intruders into this intimate scene.

If one were able to peer through the window of an average Dutch home in the seventeenth century, they might well stumble upon a scene much like this: a mother delousing her child in a modest bedroom. In *Mother's Duty*, de Hooch provides ample room to look around. The minimal use of furniture and open windows lend to the sense of an open and unintimidating space. The mother and her child are tucked into the side of a private room. Such glimpses of these intimate scenes were characteristic of de Hooch and were also a popular subject for paintings during the Dutch Baroque.¹ Historical scenes and biblical allusions were not as common.² Instead, scenes of an ordinary life were admired, albeit with implied messages.

The family structure changed over the course of the century as result of the affluent

¹ Franits, *Pieter de Hooch*, 25.

² Ho, *Creating Distinctions in Dutch Genre Painting*, 129.

burgher classes' contribution to a new, urbanized society.³ A significant number of nuclear families arose in place of the declining number of extended families, and, as a result, the typical Dutch family in a single home decreased in size and increased in their intimacy.⁴ The immediate family was seen as a scaled-down version of the commonwealth, and Dutch families were regarded as "the cornerstone of society, historical and contemporary."⁵ Many Calvinist authors of the time wrote contemporary family literature, most notably Jacob Cats's (1577–1660) *Houwelyck*, which inclined to support this viewpoint through instructional verse and guidance in confronting the moral struggles of all stages in a woman's life, from childhood to widowhood.⁶ The reformed church, led by Protestant and Calvinist beliefs, undoubtedly bolstered the national spirit felt by the United Provinces during the seventeenth century. Additionally, the Protestant and Calvinist practices of home worship sought to instill social and domestic standards of values and virtues throughout the nation, and their ideas had an impact on Dutch perspectives on family life. These ideas and values became present in the art of everyday people. The genre painting, a style of painting that depicts ordinary events and actions, is characteristic of seventeenth-century Dutch art and style. Their purpose to both the painters and their intended viewers was to be thought-provoking and to present moral themes. The very nature of these images allows for a deep investigation into the philosophical and moral values of these peoples' intimate relationships. Genre paintings were developed during the Dutch seventeenth-century,⁷ and it is perhaps the first time that art is made with the intent of showing the intimacy of average people.

³ Durantini, *Child in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Painting*, 3.

⁴ Rasmussen, *Towns and Buildings*, 86.

⁵ Van der Woude, "Household in the United Provinces," 302.

⁶ Cats, *Houwelyck*, Tot Middelburgh, 1625.

⁷ Ho, *Creating Distinctions in Dutch Genre Painting*, 21.

Often, these genre scenes feel private, yet the artist encourages the viewer to gaze. The genre scene is a deliberate invitation to behold and ponder one's life.

This paper uses genre paintings of domestic subjects to identify the Dutch middle class family's core values, particularly of motherhood, domesticity, religious education, and family in order to understand the intimate dynamics and demeanors of the typical Dutch family and life. The first section examines the emergence of the Dutch culture, arguing that the Dutch Republic's independence is not the beginning of their cultural transition, but rather the point at which the culmination of shifting ideals is clearly recognized. The second section looks closer at the appearance and function of the homes of Dutch families and analyzes the rise of the middle class, the effects of capitalism, the structure of the Dutch family, and the market for art. Through the core values of motherhood, religion, and education, the third section of this paper revisits *Mother's Duty* and other examples of Dutch genre paintings. Their roles are analyzed as paintings used by their target audience, the middle class, and as works that embrace the values of the family.

Section 1: Economic Climate and the Development of the Dutch Culture

In order to understand the extent to which genre paintings reveal about Dutch culture, it first must be understood the complicated series of events in history that led to the culture's formation. A comparison of developed countries during the seventeenth century reveals a set of differences and patterns that can be used to unravel the complicated tapestry of Netherlandish society.

Dutch art in the seventeenth century was integrated with contemporary social and economic conditions. United by the Union of Utrecht in 1597, the independent seven regions of the Netherlands (Holland, Zeeland, Utrecht, Friesland, Gelderland, Overijssel and Groningen) became known as the United Provinces.⁸ During the early decades of the seventeenth century, the United Provinces showcased to the world astonishing advancements in urban industry, commerce, agriculture, and international trade. The Dutch Republic built a maritime empire in commerce and international trade, becoming the primary carriers of refined sugar among other popular goods like tobacco and even pelts from the Native American Mohawk tribe.⁹ By the mid-seventeenth century, a sizable portion of the burgher class, or middle class, had developed and began to endorse Johan de Witt (1625–1672), the provincial delegate for Holland, as the head of the Union for a more tranquil, democratic government. The burgher class grew increasingly powerful under De Witt's rule (1653–1722), and the seventeenth century saw the height of both economic expansion and the development of an open market that could not only afford art, but one where creative excellence became routine.

⁸ Zumthor and Taylor, *Daily Life in Rembrandt's Holland*, xvi.

⁹ Romney, "With & alongside His Housewife," 191.

Because the Dutch displayed significant cultural variation across their many provinces, scholarly use of the word *Holland* to denote the entire country is misrepresentative to the individual provinces that make up Netherlands. It is true that, despite its small size, the province of Holland was wealthy and strong enough to draw more international attention than all other provinces combined. Nonetheless, Dutch conventions have long condoned the use of the name *Netherland* for regions united by the Union of Utrecht.¹⁰ In this paper, these words shall be used in their correct sense: *Holland* for the individual province and *Netherlands* for the United Provinces.

The Netherlands struggled for autonomy under the oppression of the Spanish through many wars and battles which scholars now refer to as the Eighty Years' War (1568–1648) – a title that undermines the extent of their struggles.¹¹ The culture of the people of the Netherlands was one that came from more than a century of religious conflicts, rivalries over economic influence, and the struggle to develop a sense of individuality as an independent state.¹²

Under Phillip II (1527–1598), the Habsburgs ruled the Spanish Empire, which included the Netherlands and other territories. Under the Habsburgs, the provinces of the Netherlands each maintained their capacity for self-sufficiency in regard to being self-governing and having a prosperous economy.¹³ The Habsburg were Catholic, and, like many successful monarchies before them, they promoted a dynastic patriotism by means of *Hattsrnacht* (patrimonial rights) and emphasized *Kaisertreue* (loyalty to the emperor), both of which mirror a Catholic sense of loyalty under a single ruler.¹⁴ While other ruling monarchies and families were adjusting to

¹⁰ Zumthor and Taylor, *Daily Life in Rembrandt's Holland*, xviii.

¹¹ Blok, *History of the People of the Netherlands*, 488.

¹² Blok, *History of the People of the Netherlands*, 392.

¹³ Price, *Dutch Culture in the Golden Age*, 1.

¹⁴ Price, *Dutch Culture in the Golden Age*, 2.

various social and religious changes in the early modern world, the Habsburgs were steadfast in maintaining their Catholic identity which would disagree with the Protestant and Calvinist ethos in the Dutch provinces.¹⁵

In truth, the Eighty Years' War was a myriad of wars and battles between the Catholic Spanish Hapsburgs and the largely Protestant Netherlands, whose only joining factor was their lack of agreement about cultural differences.¹⁶ While Catholicism, partially due to the Habsburg influence, was still prevalent in the Netherlands well into the late seventeenth century, Calvinism and Protestantism had the greatest influence in Dutch society and politics during and after the Protestant Reformation (1517–1648) and the conclusion of the Eighty Years' War.

The revolt for Dutch independence was led by William the Silent (Prince of Orange, 1533–1584). Although his rule as *Stadtholder*, meaning “chief magistrate,” lasted only four years, William rebelled against Catholic rule and fought in several successful battles against the Spanish armies. William allied with the French Huguenots (fellow Protestants), following the end of the second Religious War in France (1567–1568).¹⁷ The Spanish army invaded the northern Netherlands in 1568, but the invasion failed almost as soon as it started. On May 23, 1568, the Dutch won the Battle of Heiligerlee, which scholars consider to be the battle that commenced the Eighty Years' War.¹⁸ William was a popular target, and, on July 10, 1584, he was assassinated by Balthazar Gérard, in response to Phillip II's generous bounty for William's death.¹⁹ A Protestant rebel from the start, William might have been the only reason the Dutch would have their lengthy war. Although he would never live to see the fruits of his labors, he is

¹⁵ Price, *Dutch Culture in the Golden Age*, 2.

¹⁶ Blok, *History of the People of the Netherlands*, 1.

¹⁷ Wedgwood, *William the Silent*, 104.

¹⁸ Wedgwood, *William the Silent*, 106.

¹⁹ Wedgwood, *William the Silent*, 259.

credited with spurring the rebellion against the Spanish and, in turn, the independence of the United Provinces.²⁰

An unbiased observer could have thought that the restoration of the Spanish king's authority over the entirety of the Netherlands was simply a matter of time. On the day of William's assassination, the fort of Liefkenshoek on the Scheldt, one of the outlying defenses of Antwerp, was taken by assault.²¹ From 1583 through 1584, the year of William's death, countless cities and towns continued to fall to Spanish rule.²²

At this point, the leaders of the rebelling provinces unanimously agreed that they would be unable to defeat Spain on their own.²³ Henry III of France (1551–1589) and Elizabeth I of England (1533–1603) were the only two viable contenders,²⁴ but both of them faced opposition from the Netherlandish sovereigns. Elizabeth declined to fully recognize the Dutch sovereignty, but as long as sufficient assurances were offered for the expenditure of the English's efforts, she did not object to the suggestion that she send military aid.²⁵ During the span of the war, Elizabeth sent spies to assess their political circumstances,²⁶ and eventually, much to William's relief, she sent an embassy in 1578.²⁷ In addition to helping to preserve and protect the provinces' long-standing rights and privileges, William was expected to work in tandem with the Council of State to bring about reform.²⁸ In the years following 1588, the real battle for independence would begin.

²⁰ Wedgwood, *William the Silent*, 252.

²¹ Fisher, *A History of Europe*, 597.

²² Fisher, *A History of Europe*, 592.

²³ Fisher, *A History of Europe*, 593.

²⁴ Fisher, *A History of Europe*, 593.

²⁵ Wedgwood, *William the Silent*, 190.

²⁶ Wedgwood, *William the Silent*, 185.

²⁷ Wedgwood, *William the Silent*, 190.

²⁸ Fisher, *A History of Europe*, 594.

At last, through the skill and persistence of Dutch ambassadors, negotiations for independence were brought to a successful end. The Treaty of Münster was signed on January 30, 1648,²⁹ and the eighty-year War of Independence came to a close. The most significant of the seventy-nine articles in the Münster Treaty (1648) were the following: the United Provinces were acknowledged as free and independent lands by the King of Spain; trading was allowed in both the East and West Indies; the House of Orange received the return of all its confiscated property; and, finally, a trade and navigation treaty was negotiated with Spain.³⁰

Economic Development and the Emergence of Capitalism

Despite the differences that led to their lengthy rebellion, the Dutch nation and identity was not born out of preexisting differences. According to the cultural analysis of J. L. Price, the Dutch culture was the result of the formation of the Dutch state. Their difference in religious preferences was only a precursor to the new identity that would form. This identity, which would take nearly two hundred years to form, and as such, to become a culture that is now recognizable by their visual art. The state that emerged from the Eighty Years' War was as unanticipated as it was unplanned. The Spanish military regained the South of the Habsburg Netherlands, meaning the Southern provinces remained Catholic, which left the provinces in the North on their own to struggle for independence and to assimilate into an international trade network.³¹ Yet, despite the circumstances against them, the patchwork group of allies had, by 1609, adequately formed a new state.³² Not only did they establish themselves as a nation with an effective political system,

²⁹ Fisher, *A History of Europe*, 632.

³⁰ Fisher, *A History of Europe*, 599.

³¹ Price, *Dutch Culture in the Golden Age*, 252.

³² Price, *Dutch Culture in the Golden Age*, 9.

but their economy flourished with a boom in capitalist successes.³³ The Netherlands became a ruler in international trade with incredible artistic craftsmanship.

The Eighty Years' War is often described as a civil war but can also be seen as a capitalist revolution. The roots of capitalism could be said to have formed in Holland at least by 1300³⁴ when an early form of loans and credit was utilized by the Dutch government. In 1345, Count William IV of Holland (1307–1345) persuaded the representatives of Dordrecht, Haarlem, Delft, Leiden, Middelburg, and Zierikzee to loan three-hundred pounds to an expensive war effort.³⁵ They all agreed and signed a pledge which also promised to assist one another in action to ensure they would receive their principle back.³⁶ More than a century and a half later, this new system resembling modern-day credit developed to the extent that Holland would be forced to burden their cities with debt that brought them nearly to bankruptcy.³⁷ However, this unintentionally created a system of collective responsibility, and strengthened their mutual relations and interests.³⁸ A market based on capital developed, which supported an equitable political economy, and the structure of Holland's economy continued to profoundly change. In 1350, 55–60% of regional income came from agriculture, the rest of which equally spanning in-between industry and services.³⁹ However, by 1514, the agricultural workforce shrunk to just a quarter of the population and less than 20% of profits came from agriculture, with 38% in industry and 22% in service.⁴⁰ The remainder of profits amounted to roughly 20% in fishing and peat cutting.⁴¹ This diminishment in agriculture reflects a sign of market efficiency that is

³³ Price, *Dutch Culture in the Golden Age*, 259.

³⁴ Prak, Maarten, and Zanden, *Pioneers of Capitalism*, 62.

³⁵ Prak, Maarten, and Zanden, *Pioneers of Capitalism*, 69.

³⁶ Prak, Maarten, and Zanden, *Pioneers of Capitalism*, 69.

³⁷ Price, *Dutch Culture in the Golden Age*, 70.

³⁸ Prak, Maarten, and Zanden, *Pioneers of Capitalism*, 69.

³⁹ Prak, Maarten, and Zanden, *Pioneers of Capitalism*, 70.

⁴⁰ Prak, Maarten, and Zanden, *Pioneers of Capitalism*, 70.

⁴¹ Prak, Maarten, and Zanden, *Pioneers of Capitalism*, 69–70.

relative to the expansion of the urban sector of the economy.⁴² By 1500, Holland was such a dynamic and successful center for economic progress that the average income level was estimated to be 30–50% higher than in the east and north of the Netherlands.⁴³ Despite his loans, which nearly ruined the Dutch economy, William prompted a period of growth that would change the economic landscape of the Netherlands and lead the provinces into what historians call the Golden Age.

The economic changes outlined above significantly impacted the Dutch burgher class, particularly in term of their access to visual art. In line with the Protestant rejection of a ruling upper class, and resulting from a successful open market, the burgher class became not just larger but also affluent. Previously, owning art was reserved for wealthy families and the Catholic Church.⁴⁴ The success of international trade and Dutch craftsmanship brought in wealth that needed to be spent. But how does a largely Protestant and Calvinist culture spend money on art, if art until this time was largely representative, that is, of biblical and mythological subjects? The Catholic traditions of art patronage were obsolete to Protestants. While the Catholic Habsburgs held a control over the art market and the subjects of art the Dutch created, the overwhelmingly Protestant economy had removed the stigma of using wealth for personal luxuries, including art.⁴⁵

In terms of the art world's contribution to the Dutch economy, perhaps the most influential change was the shift away from the patronage system, which dominated the European medieval and early modern periods, into an open market. Churches and wealthy religious patrons were no longer the major source of income for artists. Artists sold their paintings on the open

⁴² Prak, Maarten, and Zanden, *Pioneers of Capitalism*, 70.

⁴³ Hanus, "Affluence and Inequality," 106.

⁴⁴ Prak, Maarten, and Zanden, *Pioneers of Capitalism*, 7.

⁴⁵ Prak, Maarten, and Zanden, *Pioneers of Capitalism*, 11–115.

market at fairs, art personal storefronts, and through dealers, as opposed to working on commission.⁴⁶ Painters developed their unique styles and produce a greater quantity of paintings inside their signature niche.

Johannes Vermeer (1632–1675) exemplifies this personal branding. He employed a technique now called *doorzicht* (sometimes *doorkirkje*),⁴⁷ in most of his paintings.⁴⁸ By following a repeatable method, Vermeer would have been able to produce paintings at a faster rate. This technique also became a recognizable and marketable aspect to his works. Artists like Vermeer also had the freedom to seek a higher price for their paintings because of the meticulousness of their implementation and talent.

Five main genres of painting—history, portrait, everyday life, landscape, and still life—rose to prominence as a result of this free market. Because they did not have the financial certainty of commissions, many artists focused on painting solely landscapes or genre scenes.⁴⁶ The selected subject matters for paintings in the seventeenth century also reflect a widespread use of specialty or preference for painters. Table 1 indicates which types of paintings were most popular, based on inventories taken from Haarlem. At the beginning of the century, the religious or literary themes of history painting were favored, indicating a Catholic suppression of religious diversity.⁴⁹ But by 1650, "modern" interiors were decorated with larger numbers of portraits, landscapes, still lives, and genre scenes from daily life.

⁴⁶ Prak, Maarten, and Zanden, *Pioneers of Capitalism*, 31.

⁴⁷ Wheelock, *Johannes Vermeer*, 74.

⁴⁸ Vermeer, "The Love Letter," Rijksmuseum.

⁴⁹ Prak, Maarten, and Zanden, *Pioneers of Capitalism*, 105.

Table 1: Painting Subjects in Haarlem circa 1605–1650.

Subject Matter	1605–1624	1645–1650
Biblical scenes	42.2%	18%
Portraits	18%	18.3%
Landscapes	12.4%	21%
Still lives	8.5%	11.7%
Genre scenes	6.1%	12.9%
Other	12.8%	18.1%

Source: Goosens, Marion. “Schilders En de Markt: Haarlem 1605–1635.” Dissertation, Leiden University Press, 2001.

Although the Dutch’s economic success was relatively quick, harmony between Catholic and Protestant communities continued to struggle. According to Martin Luther (1483–1546), the foundation of the Reformation was the belief that each Christian possessed, or could possess, a distinctive, independent relationship with God.⁵⁰ Independent of the Church, this understanding of faith was reinforced by reading the Bible in one's own vernacular, which was common in the Low Countries due to the Modern Devotion movement and the comparatively high literacy rate.⁵¹ The most capitalist coastal regions were home to a huge concentration of craftsmen and laborers, a socioeconomic category that made Protestantism and Calvinism popular.⁵² However, the mercantile elite saw their rejection of religious authority as anarchism and a feasible alternative because it was understood to be too unstructured. John Calvin (1509–1564) was among the few reformers who had given the new Church's organizational requirements a lot of thought. Through Calvin’s influence, local congregations would collaborate within the larger

⁵⁰ Prak, Maarten, and Zanden, *Pioneers of Capitalism*, 112.

⁵¹ Prak, Maarten, and Zanden, *Pioneers of Capitalism*, 179.

⁵² Prak, Maarten, and Zanden, *Pioneers of Capitalism*, 179.

framework of the *classis*, which is an assembly of multiple local churches; these “classes” would then come together to create the synod, which were the Church's national body. Not everyone joined the Calvinists and their Reformed Church, even though Calvinism in the Republic was an ideal complement for the provinces' institutional frameworks.

The United Netherlands were primarily Protestant and Calvinist, but about a quarter of the population was still Catholic.⁵³ The Dutch Calvinists were resistant to embracing this capitalist vigor.⁵⁴ Their setting can be seen as an overlap between the old and new – traditional and capitalist. Inevitably, there was a lag between the changing economic climate and the general acceptance of its cultural implications.⁵⁵ While questions of Protestantism and Catholicism continued to enrapture religious discussion in the Netherlands, it rarely showed in the art that was produced.⁵⁶ In fact, the new United Provinces might have been among the first to form a culture where Catholicism and Protestantism had largely integrated into a single cultural life and consequently, a style of art which has an appreciation and balance in both.⁵⁷

⁵³ Prak, Maarten, and Zanden, *Pioneers of Capitalism*, 113.

⁵⁴ Price, *Dutch Culture in the Golden Age*, 51–52.

⁵⁵ Price, *Dutch Culture in the Golden Age*, 52.

⁵⁶ Kitson, “Amsterdam, Rijksmuseum Dutch History Painting,” 443–44.

⁵⁷ Oostindie, Gert, and Paasman, “Dutch Attitudes towards Colonial Empires,” 349–55.

Section 2: The Dutch Burgher Class

Contrary to its modern apperception, the word *baroque* is a derivative of the Portuguese *barroco*, a word used since the sixteenth century to describe irregularly shaped pearls.⁵⁸ In other contexts, it can be synonymous with the strange or bizarre.⁵⁹ Where the Italians were fashioning dramatic, and emotional portraits and sculptures, the Dutch were not concerned with displays of grandeur or exuberance. Or, at the very least, their interpretation of splendor was in their subject matter more than the drama and virtuosity of works. A common comparison between the traits of Dutch Baroque art and the wider European Baroque period is its emphasis on grandeur, richness, drama, movement, and the tension between painting subjects. Dutch seventeenth-century paintings, on the other hand, were characterized by moral undertones, secular subjects, and realism with a focus on light and the balance of space.⁶⁰ The range of genres, which were categorized into specialized areas including landscapes, still lives, and genre paintings, resulted from the Protestant sense of piety and an appreciation for a more modest way of living, born from the Protestant Reformation.

The term *baroque* is widely used to characterize the art and architecture of a variety of European cultures, which has had a lasting impression on our interpretation of the word. Much as Gothic art and architecture has little to do with the various Gothic tribes inhabiting early medieval Europe, *baroque* is a term that has many meanings and cannot be used universally to describe a period that is so full of variation. *Baroque*, in this paper, is used specifically in the Dutch context.

⁵⁸ Zirpolo, *Historical Dictionary of Baroque Art and Architecture*, 2.

⁵⁹ Stecho and Wolfgang, "Definitions of the Baroque in the Visual Arts," 109–15.

⁶⁰ "Baroque," The Getty Art and Architecture Thesaurus.

The thirteenth century marked a period of change for the Netherlands, when cities like Haarlem and Leiden became landmarks of importance.⁶¹ By the fifteenth century, Holland was primarily urban, with trade being their most important source of income.⁶² Seafaring trade, to no surprise given the restricted land and water barriers of the Netherlands, became the primary mode of trading. They had the best managed marine merchant system, and they economized and engineered their ships to be the best quality, the cheapest to build, and functional for various jobs.⁶³ Efficiency was key to their economic success, and all types of craftspeople recognized this, including painters.⁶⁴ For this reason, it would obscure the complex processes that artists and other craftspeople negotiated to categorize their works into simply either “market” and “patronage”. Instead, the Dutch art market traded in various methods. The preferences of consumers, the trends and demand of novelties in subject or style shaped the kind of works that painters created. Jan Steen (1626–1679) is well-known for his highly narrative scenes full of people engaging with one another (see *The Merry Family*, figure 2). De Hooch was known for quiet, meditative scenes of domestic bliss.⁶⁵ Vermeer and countless others all had their “brand” that made their works recognizable and attractive.

It is amazing that the early forms of the Dutch Republic emerged during the turbulent years of 1584 to 1588, even if this left them with an unstable foundation. Less than a century after its founding, Dutch society was enlivened by the heroic exploits of international traders and the capitalist efforts of illustrious citizens, including statesmen, artists, sailors, poets, philosophers,

⁶¹ Prak, Maarten, and Zanden, *Pioneers of Capitalism*, 161.

⁶² Huizinga et al., *Dutch Civilisation*, 17.

⁶³ Clark, *The Seventeenth Century*, 14.

⁶⁴ Prak, Maarten, and Zanden, *Pioneers of Capitalism*, 32.

⁶⁵ De Hooch, *Woman with Children in an Interior*, 1658–1660, Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco.

and scholars. One cannot think of another country that achieved its cultural zenith so quickly after its founding.

The Single Family Home

While the single-family home was by no means invented by the Dutch, it was used almost exclusively and was the standard of the Dutch Republic. Prior to the Baroque and Renaissance periods, well-populated towns in Europe utilized multi-family houses that were rented rather than owned.⁶⁶ The Dutch towns, made in sectioned plots of land, were portioned for the size of one immediate family, and houses were built in the same way.⁶⁷ Houses were typically two to three stories, and usually would include a fenced garden behind the house,⁶⁸ which are idyllically rendered in many of de Hooch's paintings.

The home of the Dutch family presents a uniquely esoteric sensation that is difficult to articulate. Even scenes like *Interior of a Dutch House* (figure 3), have a simplistic air about them. The walls of Dutch homes were seldom papered or covered, but were ornamented with paintings, mirrors, and maps (figure 3). These chambers were highly human and were intended for private usage rather than entertainment or socialization. They clearly intended to raise children within the close family. The Dutch home displayed an intimacy and appreciation for the simple and serene.

The Dutch, in congruence with their new Republic, their new market, and the dominating middle class, the house started to become a home. The Dutch borrowed from the Anglo-Saxons and used the word *hejm* to mean "home."⁶⁹ This wonderful word denotes a specific place, but

⁶⁶ Rasmussen, *Towns and Buildings*, 103.

⁶⁷ Rasmussen, *Towns and Buildings*, 86.

⁶⁸ Rasmussen, *Towns and Buildings*, 93.

⁶⁹ Stratmann, *Middle-English Dictionary*, 322.

also an abstract sense of a state of being that is not found in any Latin or Slavic words. *Hejm*, or the home, is unique to the Romantic languages and cultures.⁷⁰ This transition was the result of many Republic-related developments. The Burgher class now dominated, and not only were people able to afford the luxury of having a separate workplace and house, but they could afford to own both.⁷¹ The “big houses” of England and France were replaced with a space that was smaller and lent to a more private and sedentary existence. We see this in evidence of how the European home changed inside.

While the rest of Europe was still humoring rented spaces in houses and close quarters, the Dutch were taking advantage of their economic successes and were constantly making infrastructural improvements.⁷² By 1650, most main roads were paved, and houses were made of brick rather than wood.⁷³ Not only were houses being made of better materials, distinct catering was being made to the effort of home privacy.⁷⁴ Houses began being wider than they were tall (unlike the Parisian big houses), and thus Dutch homes felt less cramped.⁷⁵

It can be thought that the Dutch Republic were the founders of this differentiation and had a special appreciation for individual independence. Since the medieval period, housing was not owned by individuals, and the house was not separated from work.⁷⁶ Big houses lodged everything from sleeping and dining to business matters. Even into the mid 1600’s in Paris, a single “big house” would house up to twenty-five people.⁷⁷ Anywhere else in the world, privacy was not known.

⁷⁰ Rybczynski, *Home*, 61.

⁷¹ Zumthor and Taylor, *Daily Life in Rembrandt’s Holland*, 4.

⁷² Rasmussen, *Towns and buildings*, 173.

⁷³ Zumthor and Taylor, *Daily Life in Rembrandt’s Holland*, 2.

⁷⁴ Rasmussen, *Towns and Buildings*, 80.

⁷⁵ Rasmussen, *Towns and Buildings*, 4.

⁷⁶ Rybczynski, *Home*, 25.

⁷⁷ Rybczynski, *Home*, 59.

Improvements to housing construction allowed for more windows without enervating the constitution of the walls. Glass, which would become another successful craft in the Netherlands, used to be so expensive that glass paned windows were only put in the top half, and the bottom half would have had shutters. The use of glass meant that the amount of light was able to be controlled, and the quality of the light increased.⁷⁸

Dutch Characteristics of Art

The Dutch painters had their own artistic motives, shared by no others. These moralizing and aesthetically pleasing canvases showed to the people the beauty of their daily surroundings. So valuable was this peculiarity that, while the French were still making their art of biblical and mythical themes, the Dutch adorned their walls with scenes representing their own daily lives. Vermeer was able to vary the lighting and color of the rear wall of his studio by adjusting the window shutters or hanging curtains. In this fashion, he was able to paint endless variants of daylight, which were always cold and clear in his chamber since direct sunlight did not enter.⁷⁹ His subject matter is modest compared to that of his contemporaneous French artists. Yet Vermeer arguably produced the richest tones and controlled the illusion of light masterfully. His artistic values were based on proportions and the relationships between form and space, light and shadow, and tones of color.

The monarchs in Europe were more concerned than the Dutch in allocating time and effort to building grand palaces to display their wealth and accomplishments.⁸⁰ The palaces of Versailles of France and the Royal Palace of Caserta in Italy are well-known examples

⁷⁸ Rasmussen, *Towns and Buildings*, 83.

⁷⁹ Rasmussen, *Towns and Buildings*, 85.

⁸⁰ Rasmussen, *Towns and Buildings*, 80.

presenting this ambition for grandeur. Consider the iconic monuments and buildings of some acclaimed cities around the world that appear to provide hints to their departed society: Paris's Eiffel Tower and Notre Dame Cathedral, Rome's Flavian Amphitheater, and New York's Statue of Liberty. Today, people do not flock to the Netherlands to see such monuments. However, in the affluent city of Amsterdam, seventeenth-century burghers were successful in establishing a magnificent city rather than an elegant palace. While it lacked a single dominant body, each building was part of a harmonious whole, with the entire city became one comprehensive entity. Dutch towns had a pleasing regularity due to the widespread transition from wood to brick, and a style of architecture that was imitative of Venetian lace-like stonework.⁸¹ Over the course of the century, a unique Dutch architectural style would emerge.

In lieu of this stylistic simplicity, Dutch decor was modest in comparison to its European equivalents. Whereas the French interior was packed and hectic with numerous pieces of furniture, Dutch furniture was meant to be utilized as well as appreciated, and it was never so cluttered as to detract from the sense of space created by the room and its lighting.⁸² Notice this difference in two family portraits: *Everhard Jabach and his Family* (figure 4) by French painter Charles le Brun (1619–1690), and *Portrait of a Family Playing Music* by de Hooch (figure 5). Everhard Jabach, like the Dutch burghers, was a lover of art and an avid collector. Even in his family portrait, there is a clear interest in filling the available space. Despite his large family of seven (if you include their dog) taking up the breadth of the canvas, the foreground, background and every nook and cranny is occupied by objects. The identity of the Dutch family depicted in de Hooch's portrait is unknown, but the marble floor and mantelpiece, the rug on the table, and their silk garments all indicate the family's substantial wealth. They also have a collection,

⁸¹ Rasmussen, *Towns and buildings*, 82.

⁸² Rybczynski, *Home*, 63.

indicated by the Japanese lacquered boxes and Chinese vases.⁸³ This family, like the Jabachs, is wealthy. However, notice the ample amount of space unoccupied. The high ceiling and wide room alongside the hallway create an airy freedom in the uncongested space, even with eight family members.

The Burgher Class and Capitalism

As a middle-class society with a market-oriented, capitalist economy,⁸⁴ the Netherlands faced a type of paradox which can be seen in successful capitalist economies. Between 1500 and 1800, despite a growing economy and rising middle class, economic inequality increased.⁸⁵ In other words, the growing distance between inequality is an indicator of a strong growth of the middle class. Their economic system was stable though, and was improved by efforts to restrain capitalists' motives, such as putting limits on bread prices and expanding the guild system.⁸⁶ In truth, the burgher class was rising in power during the Renaissance before the start of the Eighty Years' War,⁸⁷ but was held back by the absolutist control of the Spanish Habsburgs.

In his seminal essay *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, German sociologist Max Weber (1864–1920) argues that religious affiliation is not the cause for a state's economic climate, but instead proves to be the result of their economic circumstances.⁸⁸ In the case of the seventeenth-century Netherlands, it is a perfect application of his theory. The argument about the truth of predestination dominated the early stages of the discussion in the Netherlands. The intention behind this notion was to inspire Protestants (and subsequently

⁸³ De Hooch, "Portrait of a Family Playing Music," Cleveland Museum of Art.

⁸⁴ Huizinga et al., *Dutch Civilisation*, 207.

⁸⁵ Huizinga et al., *Dutch Civilisation*, 204.

⁸⁶ Huizinga et al., *Dutch Civilisation*, 204.

⁸⁷ Huizinga et al., *Dutch Civilisation*, 204.

⁸⁸ Weber, *The Protestant Ethic*, 3.

Calvinists) to go above and beyond in their occupational pursuits, as they would view financial prosperity as a symbol of divine favor. Just as Weber noticed the occupational statistics of countries with a composition of mixed religions,⁸⁹ the Netherlands reflects Weber's notion that "business leaders and owners of capital...skilled labor...commercially trained personnel...are overwhelmingly Protestant."⁹⁰ Indeed, the Protestant Dutch Baroque serves to be an exemplary model of Weber's theory. Religious freedom was a symptom of their preference for Protestantism rather than a result.

The sudden success of burgher craftspeople, including painters, are proof of Weber's theory that capitalism is the creation of Protestant affiliation. Once the Catholic rule over the Netherlands was released by the Treaty of Münster, Netherlandish capitalism, and thus the burgher class, flourished. The result of which provided the Netherlandish schools of painting a profit of burghers able to spend their excess wealth on art and similar luxuries.

Art was an affluent market that made up a considerable portion of the economy.⁹¹ Artists had the freedom to pursue a business model not unlike their fisher and craftspeople counterparts that would allow them to produce for burgher class citizens who often indulged in music, literature, poetry, and art.⁹² Dutch visual artists, however, were not held in the high regard that artists are held to today. Poetry was considered the highest form of art.⁹³ Consequently, painters usually came from middle-class origins and rarely exceeded the prestige of their class. They lived in and made art for the middle classes. Dutch paintings, for this reason, have some distinct

⁸⁹ Weber, *The Protestant Ethic*, 3.

⁹⁰ Weber, *The Protestant Ethic*, 3.

⁹¹ Prak, Maarten, and Zanden, *Pioneers of Capitalism*, 21–22.

⁹² Prak, Maarten, and Zanden, *Pioneers of Capitalism*, 22.

⁹³ Huizinga et al., *Dutch Civilisation*, 44.

characteristics. They are restricted to the dimensions of small wall spaces, and rarely show religious subjects. This response to the distinctive Dutch identity is found in the genre painting.

Protestantism in Art

With the lack of a constant stream of daily news, which so occupies society today, the seventeenth-century person could dedicate a greater proportion of their leisure time to the study of literature and other arts.⁹⁴ Hugo Grotius (1583–1645), a prominent writer in law and theology, wrote *The Truth of the Christian Religion* (1622) which was a popular literary work written in verse. It was intended for Dutch sailors who not only were the valued keepers of the affluent Dutch economy but were also wayfarers who seemed the messengers of God to their Christian neighbors.⁹⁵ The plight of Protestants aimed to put the theology (and the actual texts) of Christianity into simple terms and practices. And so, Grotius's works were also put in simple terms, and presented a structural homology to the unassuming social and religious practices of the Dutch Republic. Grotius presented himself as the ideal Protestant theologian. He was the emphatic mentor, the compassionate optimist and a peacemaker who believed in the worth of an honest argument, all in the spirit of harmony and tolerance among faiths. This spirit of Protestantism entered every corner of Dutch culture. In the painting market, unless a piece was commissioned for specific religious imagery, which is occasionally seen,⁹⁶ paintings were deliberately made with an all-inclusive reading. Catholic art did not see a resurgence after the

⁹⁴ Huizinga et al., *Dutch Civilisation*, 44.

⁹⁵ Huizinga et al., *Dutch Civilisation*, 74.

⁹⁶ Cornelisz, *The Holy Family*, 1562 – 1638, Yale University Art Gallery.

Spaniards lost control,⁹⁷ and genre scenes were indistinct enough to be appreciated and used by any Christian sect.⁹⁸

Compared to their European counterparts, the Dutch preferred painting over sculpture. Because the burgher class of the Netherlands was dominant, art could be found everywhere, from public offices to the average home.⁹⁹ Modern preconceptions might assume that this was to beautify the home. While the Dutch certainly did have an aesthetic motive for beautifying their living spaces, art of the Dutch Baroque was the direct consequence of an interest in studying one's values and virtues.¹⁰⁰ A particular type of paintings collector called the *liefhebber* had a particular love for things that indicated their inner virtue.¹⁰¹ Genre paintings, for this simple reason, saw a great increase in popularity. It is no coincidence then that the genre painting developed during the Dutch Baroque and is a hallmark of the Dutch Golden Age. The impression of the genre scene depicts an everyday scene, such as the mother of de Hooch's *Mother's Duty* checking her child for lice (figure 1). But the genre painting is not a still-life, nor is it a portrait. Even if it seems that a painting depicts a superficial matter, it is not that the painter cares above all else for the outward appearance of the scene, but that they know the beauty of a scene can hold implications of moral significance. The genre painting's subject is not the scene itself, but a sympathetic and masked narration of virtue. Consequently, genre paintings were the choice of storytellers. Through the careful and intentional manipulation of a scene, genre scenes evoke

⁹⁷ Huizinga et al., *Dutch Civilisation*, 81.

⁹⁸ Huizinga et al., *Dutch Civilisation*, 81.

⁹⁹ Huizinga et al., *Dutch Civilisation*, 77.

¹⁰⁰ Ho, *Creating Distinctions in Dutch Genre Painting*, 40.

¹⁰¹ Ho, *Creating Distinctions in Dutch Genre Painting*, 40.

emotion and cling to sentiment. It is a communication of the paint and brush, a visual poetry that speaks to the virtues that are hidden in the acts of ordinary lives.

Women and Domesticity in the Genre Scene

Domesticity, that is, the making and keeping of the home, was a beloved theme in the seventeenth century. Domesticity in genre paintings do not, as is the case with all genre scenes, suggest a casual, objective glimpse into the Dutch family. Instead, painters like de Hooch and Steen created synthesized observances of reality with a repertoire of themes, motifs, and virtues. Despite their deceptive simplicity, genre paintings had more to say to their historical audiences than they do now.

Alongside the Protestant changes in the Dutch household during the seventeenth century, for the first time, business was no longer done in the home. Where business was previously done in the same building one ate and slept, seventeenth-century city planners made buildings specifically for businesses.¹⁰² Because men went out to their places of business elsewhere in the city, the domestic space became the domain of women.¹⁰³ It is because of this era of new international identity and movement that the Dutch would develop an appreciation and value of the house and home. Netherlanders usually considered women's physical participation in the establishment of homes to be critical to their oceangoing economy.¹⁰⁴ Women launched an ordered society and stable politics by connecting networks of families and businesses, which only women could construct with their inventive house-making and social prowess. The role of women was both to establish the home and to maintain the civility of the family in a modern and

¹⁰² Rasmussen, *Towns and buildings*, 19.

¹⁰³ Romney, "With & alongside His Housewife," 191.

¹⁰⁴ Romney, "With & alongside His Housewife," 191.

highly advanced society.¹⁰⁵ A look at this facet of the behaviors of the home provide a complex understanding of the Dutch Republic.

Educators in family theory like Jacob Cats wrote books to guide women in all stages of life on a virtuous path. The most popular among them was Cats's *Houwelyck*, which was addressed to women and explained how to keep their households and raise their families. The chapters are as follows: Maiden, Sweetheart, Bride, Housewife, Mother, and Widow.¹⁰⁶ One of *Houwelyck*'s main themes places the woman and housewife at the center of a web of familiar relationships.¹⁰⁷ According to Cats, if the house was not a home, the family's structure and success would fail.¹⁰⁸ In the same way, the Dutch saw the woman, wife, and mother as an essential and treasured asset to both the family and the success of the Republic. Genre scenes depicting these Dutch women, despite the calmness and simplicity of their actions and surroundings, reveal the societal value of the woman and home that sustains the family and Republic.

The social philosophy of the Netherlands ruled in a male dominated society.¹⁰⁹ Conventional tradition held that women were predetermined to fulfill the essential roles of housewife and mother. Depictions of children often stand for the virtues and skills (or a lack thereof) of their parents. Paintings by De Hooch and others, as well as sources on domesticity, both depict an idealized, yet suppositionally quintessential female who exceeds in maintaining the home and caring for her children.

¹⁰⁵ Frantis, *Pieter de Hooch*, 39.

¹⁰⁶ Cats, *Houwelyck*, Tot Middelburgh, 1625.

¹⁰⁷ Tilburg, "Becoming a Woman in the Dutch Republic," 266.

¹⁰⁸ Frantis, *Paragons of Virture*, 112.

¹⁰⁹ Frantis, *Pieter de Hooch*, 37.

In the investigation of the theme of children, it should be noted that children are not alone in their depictions. In fact, children were almost never painted without their mother in the same scene. Adults, especially the mother, play an important role in many of these works. A child, whether with other children or the family unit, poses some significance beyond a simple scene of everyday life. This fascination with children, which can be seen in Dutch art, reflects the artist's desire to record the features of their surroundings and utilize them to represent larger moral matters. Children's activities serve as platforms for addressing adult concerns. Their purpose is both to entertain and to edify. Their treatment, in both their moral exemplifications and naturalistic details, acknowledge an appreciation to the youthful and vivacious presence of children in the single-family home.

Dutch art shows children in a true-to-life light that has not been seen before in art. Children have gained a new independence and individuality in their depictions. Painters like Steen seem to understand the naivete and innocent playfulness of children. Scenes like *The Feast of Saint Nicholas* (figure 6) display, with a careful and knowing eye for the nature of children, a dynamic scene filled with celebration, gloating, and crushing dejection. While the seated mother gestures to her cheerful child with a basket full of gifts, the grandmother beckons the anguished son to look behind the curtain in the back, where an alternative to his shoe full of twigs waits. The key to understanding this work lies in the relationship between the children and their elders. Saint Nicholas Day, a Catholic holiday celebrated in the Netherlands for centuries in the same way, rewards good children with toys and sweets, whereas naughty children get "switches," or branches and twigs. Steen uses this to present a metaphor for the child-rearing traditions of the Dutch family, and seemingly also a criticism on negative multi-generational learned behaviors. The feast does not read, after some studying, as a joyous one. Rather, the girl teasing the boy

with his twig-filled shoe and the grandmother gesturing to the young girl's snide expression indicates a bias to the girl over the boy. The children are not a simple entity to include for the sake of a complete family. They have personality and life-like individuality by the hand of their painter.

Among these moral renderings of children and families are religious themes. The Dutch Republic founded their religious tolerance as a result the Eighty Years' War, where the need for the civil and religious independence of Protestants was appreciated and practiced by other religions residing in the Netherlands.¹¹⁰ As a result, the plight of the Protestants was pragmatized by other religious subgroups. The art market, too, utilized this tolerance. Unless a piece was commissioned with a distinct theme in mind, most genre scenes can be read with or without a religious undertone. This was a deliberate effort by the artist to reach many audiences and buyers. Consider the bilateral themes of de Hooch's *Mother Nursing her Child* (figure 7). The colors of her dress stand out among other Dutch paintings. The rich blue and red belie the undecorated interior in which she sits. De Hooch wanted this anonymous mother to resemble, if not to be recognized, as the Virgin Mary, signified by her holy colors. But unlike the depictions of the Virgin that we might be more familiar with, this mother is not accompanied by any iconography or other distinctions. A comparison of a typical Virgin and Child, like that of Gennari (figure 8), shows the same striking blue and red, and a similar rendition of the gentle expression of her downturned face. But this mother and child are not a genre scene. The child addresses the viewer in an unrealistic wisened manner, and the bible serves as an attribute of the Virgin. De Hooch saw the similarity of the Virgin's veil in the typical head coverings used by Dutch women and the quite sanctity of the Dutch mother's home.

¹¹⁰ Hertel, "The Legacy of Hegel's and Jean Paul's Aesthetics," 17.

Section 3: Domesticity and the Virtues of the Home

There are three things that the Dutch truly loved: their homes, their children, and their art. Each of these facets are representative of the identity of the Dutch family. A careful analysis of all the details and contributions that make up the physical domain of the Dutch seventeenth-century home, there remains one last and much less material aspect to explore. That is the virtues and values that reside in the family and home. This final section will look at how genre scene painters, through their virtuosic command of the brush, use the typical events of daily life to present an anecdotal representation of the beautiful and metaphorical realm of Dutch values.

Motherhood and Domesticity

Domesticity, embodied by the mother of the house, is in truth, a multi-faceted and complex virtue. With domesticity comes values in cleanliness, diligence, education, integrity, reliability, responsibility, and countless other traits. The role of the mother was, for this reason, not restricted to simply being “mom.” Despite the mother’s apparently passive position in the genre paintings of the seventeenth century, she was a valuable member in the function of the home, family, and society, and was held in high regard.¹¹¹

Comprehending how seventeenth-century audiences understood these Dutch paintings, and in turn, the role of women and mothers, begins with the notion of childhood. Family theory educator Jacob Cats advised women that children, who he describes as gifts from God, were highly impressionable and the fruit of their mother’s labors.¹¹² Be those impressions good or

¹¹¹ Frantis, *Paragons of Virtue*, 67–68.

¹¹² Cats, *Houwelyck*, Tot Middelburgh, 1625.

evil, Cats sums up the nurturing role of the mother when he wrote that, "in delicate minds [i.e., in those of children], nurture can overcome nature."¹¹³ Domestic genre scenes showing mothers provide a glimpse into the psyche of the people creating, buying, and using these domestic images for contemplation. Genre scenes, especially where mothers were the subject, were very popular during the seventeenth century, since the home was the realm of the woman and prospective mother.¹¹⁴ The mother not only acts as a caretaker of children, but her role as mother assumed various jobs that provide an image of the centrality of domestic life in Dutch society.¹¹⁵

Returning to Figure 1, *Mother's Duty* provides a textbook example of the burgher class Dutch home. During the seventeenth century, the box-bed was used mostly by the burgher class because of its minimalism and space-saving qualities. But, as can be seen in other painted examples of the home, Dutch burghers were also not opposed to whatever luxury they could afford; such wealth was seen as being in God's favor.¹¹⁶ Even burgher class families could have owned a more luxurious poster bed or other furniture of imported materials such as mahogany, ebony, marquetry, ivory, lacquerware, teak, or sandalwood.¹¹⁷

While the box-bed in *Mother's Duty* painting is a modest size, there are other indications of wealth. The bed is curtained with touches of thick yellow fabric and decorative fringe. Tiles, as seen on the wall next to the doorway, were commonplace in the Dutch home in places of housework, usually fireplaces and kitchens because they were durable and easy to maintain.¹¹⁸ Along with the rise and growth of the open market and artistic workshops, colored and painted tiles were more expensive than the traditional unglazed or monochrome tiles. The blue and white

¹¹³ Franits, *Pieter de Hooch*, 40.

¹¹⁴ Franits, *Paragons of Virtue*, 1.

¹¹⁵ Franits, *Paragons of Virtue*, 37.

¹¹⁶ Weber, *Protestant Ethic*, 84.

¹¹⁷ Singleton, *Dutch and Flemish Furniture*, 250.

¹¹⁸ Flor, *A Herança de Santos Simões*, 202.

tiles that originated in the city of Delft started being produced in the early seventeenth century.¹¹⁹ The blue and white tiles in this piece are peculiar because their placement seems to have no practical function. A paned window separates the room of the mother and child to the rest of the home, and the Delf tiles below it takes on a purely decorative function. They were not bought for a practical function, but to beatify the home with their presence. This house also has, from what can be seen, two paintings in these two rooms. The tile floors are uncolored and have numerous cracks and wear. Yet, the sunlight glistens on their surface despite their apparent age and weathering. This modest, enclosed space of the home is refreshingly minimal due to a lack of furniture and miscellany. The stylistic choices in the depicted home are so subtle that it takes a careful eye to recognize the signs of the associated woman's wealth. Albeit the decorative contributions to this space are small notions, there are numerous indications within this single room.

Because of her intimate caretaking of the child, the mother depicted in *Mother's Duty* appears to be the epitome of domesticity. Dutch women established an enhancement of societal power in the seventeenth century.¹²⁰ Paradoxical to modern connotations of feminism, the woman's increase in status was due in large to the emphasis placed on the family's home and on the mother as caretaker of the domestic realm.¹²¹ Cats encouraged women in the household book *Houwelyck* to carefully watch over the household, children, and servants, as well as to control domestic expenses.¹²² So too were women frequently entrusted with their husbands' businesses and associated expenses while the men were away from home.¹²³ The management of the family

¹¹⁹ Flor, *A Herança de Santos Simões*, 202.

¹²⁰ Prak, Maarten, and Zanden, *Pioneers of Capitalism*, 163.

¹²¹ Duratini, *The Child in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Painting*, 5.

¹²² Romney, "With & alongside His Housewife," 191.

¹²³ Peacock, "Female Perspective in 17th-Century Dutch Genre Imagery," 191.

between a husband and wife therefore reflected a value in loyalty and trust, and their relationship was deemed as analogous to that of society as a whole.¹²⁴ Therefore, the authority entrusted to women was abundant and the image of the woman embodying her domestic role in the home carried with it connotations of authority and leadership.

The mother and child relationship commonly represents larger moral themes in Dutch society. In *Mother's Duty*, the mother crouches over her kneeling child's head as she checks and cleans for lice, exhibiting one of the many intimate jobs of the mother. The training toilet to the right of the room also references maternal responsibility for maintaining cleanliness, whose association with purity goes back to biblical themes and ritual cleansings like baptism.¹²⁵ The act of cleaning the child therefore might be seen as a form of cleansing of the child's soul. In doing so, the mother is teaching her child the importance of ritual cleansing. In the same way that the mother is her child's first teacher, religious teachings were also among her many jobs.¹²⁶ Nothing extraneous is included in De Hooch's domestic scenes. Instead, he concentrates exclusively on the woman, her work, and the tools specific to the jobs of domesticity.

The metaphorical mother, is, of course, accompanied by images of her children. As a common Dutch symbol of the transience of childhood,¹²⁷ a child blowing bubbles is the subject of a painting by Frans van Mieris (figure 9). The aforementioned *doorzicht* technique creates an illusion of glimpsing into a private space, though undetected by the subjects. In *A Boy Blowing Bubbles*, the pudgy-fingered boy reaches beyond the sill of the stylized window, creating little soap bubbles in a shell. A woman, cradling a dog in a motherly fashion, watches with a gentle and content smile on her face. It is a seemingly simple enough scene, yet small indications

¹²⁴ Schama, "Wives and Wantons," 5–13.

¹²⁵ Wheelock, *Johannes Vermeer*, 146.

¹²⁶ Durantini, *The Child in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Painting*, 72.

¹²⁷ Netscher, "A Boy Blowing Bubbles," Mauritshuis, 1670.

through symbolism are placed throughout the piece. The most apparent in the contrast between the woman and child. The mother assumes a watchful but passive position. The holding of the dog shows that she is the boy's mother and asserts her older age. The boy is comparatively carefree, youthful, and without responsibility. In Dutch genre scenes, the mother could be said to personify Dutch virtues. In a verse from *Houwelyck*, Cats compares the bursting of a bubble as it reaches its highest and fullest point to a man overreaching in his ambition.¹²⁸ The bubbles seem to say that youth is fleeting and, just as the bubbles are a momentary joy, so too will the boy have to grow up and learn the responsibilities of adulthood. The bubbles, the boy, and his mother are flanked by various additional symbols. The vase of the sunflower and cornflower act as a still-life within the larger genre scene.¹²⁹ The sunflower turns its petals with the path of the sun, taking up every opportunity for sunlight. The cornflower is a symbol of innocence.¹³⁰ The innocent boy relishes in his carefree yet short childhood, and his mother is happy to watch him do so. Van Mieris presents the idea that one's youth and life has no substance beyond the wonderful little bubble that is destined to blow away in the wind and inevitably pop. In this genre scene, the bubble-blower creates a dichotomy between innocence and experience, perhaps as a reminder to both children and their parents that life and its joys are fleeting, and therefore also as a reminder to enjoy them.

The mother in Dutch society was not just a dedicated caretaker of children, but could also be a moral counselor, a businesswoman, an accountant, a maid, a gardener, and a patron of the arts. The mother, in all her duties and roles, was the manager of everything that came in and out of her house. The mothers in painted genre scenes are not portraits of any particular women, but

¹²⁸ Durantini, *The Child in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Painting*, 195.

¹²⁹ According to James Hall, flowers, especially in still-lives, symbolize the "evanescence of human life." Hall, *Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art*, 126.

¹³⁰ Pinke et al., "Iconic Arable Weeds," 23.

rather personifications of motherhood in the Dutch society. Certainly, the popularity of these mother-centric genre scenes was the result of the invaluable role she had in the whole of seventeenth-century Dutch culture.

Religion in the Everyday

Churches, while still prevalent in every major Netherlandish town,¹³¹ were not the primary place of worship during the seventeenth century.¹³² The Protestant Reformation brought about a change that followed humanist thought in considering the home to be the foundation of society, and as such, religious teaching and practices occurred primarily at home.¹³³ The following visual examples look at the domestic nature of religious practices and the intimacy that results in worship happening at home and in everyday life.

The image of the ailing woman is common in Dutch seventeenth-century paintings, and, with small variations, the paintings are remarkably similar.¹³⁴ They all focus on a woman, usually attractive and well dressed, who is either propped up in her chair or languishing in bed. Always she is pale and listless. Often, she stares into the distance vacantly while her maid, mother, physician, or all three, focus their frantic efforts to revive her.

The undertone of these paintings echoed an ideal lifestyle, defined proper societal roles, alluded to women's intellectual and physical limits, and accordingly, emphasized certain values

¹³¹ Rasmussen, *Towns and Buildings*, 86.

¹³² Duratini, *The Child in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Painting*, 72.

¹³³ Franits, *Pieter de Hooch*, 40.

¹³⁴ Steen, "The Lovesick Maiden," 1660, The Metropolitan Museum of Art and Metsu, "The Sick Woman," 1660, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin.

and morals, often with a religious undertone. A more quintessential representation of the aspirations and ideals of people in Dutch society could not be found in any other genre. That is to say, the mysterious illness of the woman is not the true subject of these images. Rather, in the fashion of all genre scenes, the painter wants the viewer to consider the spiritual cause of her ailment.

The Dropsical Woman by Gerrit Dou (1613–1675) is an example of this bilateral style of image rendering and interpretation (figure 10). The central woman lethargically reclines in her chair. The doctor, in a gesture reading as inquisitive and unauthentic, examines a sample of her urine. Two other women tend to her in proximity, their worried expressions creating a sense of urgency. Despite the chaos going on around her, the ill woman seems preoccupied on some contemplative matter. Reminiscent of many saintly portraits,¹³⁵ she gazes up at the latticed windows, the streams of light returning her gaze. She battles an ailment of water retention and impurity. During the seventeenth century, she would have been diagnosed with dropsy, which is the historic term for a swelling of the limbs due to excess water.¹³⁶ Today, it would be diagnosed as edema.¹³⁷ Her illness in itself shows her need for salvation. Her longing gaze meets the subtle cross drawn in the window, perhaps implying a stylized tondo or cross of the Resurrection.

The careful iconographic choices in this painting enable a more complete reading of the scene's moral message. A clock sits high up next to the window, representing the passage of time. A book lays open on a stand, most likely the Bible, signifying her religious education. The fireplace is lit, yet the chandelier holds no lit candles. The ailing woman's urine is juxtaposed with the forgotten basin of water in the corner of the room, closest to the viewer. All these

¹³⁵ Raphael, *Saint Cecilia with Saints Paul, John the Evangelist, Augustine, and Mary Magdalene*, 1514, Pinacoteca Nazionale and Reni, *Saint Sebastian*, after 1615–16, Musei Capitolini.

¹³⁶ Peitzman, *Dropsy, Dialysis, Transplant*, 1.

¹³⁷ Peitzman, *Dropsy, Dialysis, Transplant*, 1.

commonplace items act symbolically, describing a woman not only with a lack of water, but also lacking in purity and faith. Deriving from art of the Old and New Testaments, water is a symbol of purity.¹³⁸ Bible stories of miraculous cures or miracles accomplished with water supplied ecclesiastics and, by extension, artists, with a set of symbols to connect holy text to practice and ideology.¹³⁹

As iconographic queues, these objects also recall the religious practices and traditions that happened within the home. According to the Protestant mindset, religious practice should occur in the everyday, the mundane, and the ordinary. Domesticity in the seventeenth-century Dutch home included the practice of religion, and it permeated everyday life. This particular genre scene is a reminder of what awaits the woman that lacks the diligence of daily practice. She is also a mother in this scene, and her demise perhaps foreshadows the result of what her neglect of teaching will have on her daughter. It is a statement on how integral religious thought and practice was. The book on her stand is perhaps the clearest symbol of worship happening at home, but even more direct is her gaze towards the cross: stylized, yet apparent in her own home's window.

Meditative forms of daily practices were integral to the mother's duty of setting a good example of religious education to her children. Scenes like *The Dropsical Woman* could be described as warnings by showing the unfavorable outcome, in this case, the woman's negligence of religious practice and therefor faithlessness. Scenes of vice, like *The Dropsical Woman* were less popular than their counterpart, scenes of virtue. The dim room of *A Woman Preparing Bread and Butter for a Boy* by de Hooch (figure 11), a boy stands in a gesture of prayer with his hat respectfully removed beside his mother as she dutifully butters some bread.

¹³⁸ Jensen, *Living Water*, 35.

¹³⁹ Jensen, *Living Water*, 280.

This quiet scene of the most mundane of tasks relishes in the sanctified quality of daily routine. The darkness of the room is contrasted by the slim indication of bright daylight outside, effectuating the sacrosanct feeling of the room. De Hooch has allowed his viewer to glimpse into a sanctuary of the family and home where a hallowed morning ritual takes place. The space is almost immaculate. A lone spinning top rests before the doorway. Carefully secluded from the outside world, this painting exudes an air of domesticity, orderliness, and virtue.

Cats's verses on marriage and childrearing, by conjunction, dealt with matters of religious virtue and education, which were addressed specifically to women.¹⁴⁰ The guides written by Cats and other moralists were particular in their advice, so it is unlikely any of these works were followed judiciously.¹⁴¹ A more likely scenario is that women accepted the guidance in varying degrees. It is important to note that all these educational works presented an ideal conception of marriage and family life. The subjects of domestic genre scenes often paralleled the written expositions of Cats and other moralists. The fifth chapter of Cats's *Houwelyck* addresses children and motherhood.¹⁴²

The pedagogues of the Dutch Baroque believed that children were remarkably impressionable: that is, that children were malleable, the fruits of their parent's endeavors, and that they permanently retained their mother's instruction.¹⁴³ Education, then, began as the earliest possible age, and was necessary to foster proper behavior. These educational accounts were largely focused on the spiritual and religious aspects of thought and logic. Advice included, of course, taking their children to church.¹⁴⁴ But the only secular business mentioned was

¹⁴⁰ Franits, *Pieter de Hooch*, 39.

¹⁴¹ Frantis, *Pieter de Hooch*, 40.

¹⁴² Frantis, *Pieter de Hooch*, 40.

¹⁴³ Franits, *Paragons of Virtue*, 26.

¹⁴⁴ Franits, *Pieter de Hooch*, 44.

mealtime.¹⁴⁵ It is probably that, in coordination with the sanctity of food and nourishment in all sects of Christianity, mealtimes provided a regular and structured task in which children would participate alongside the family.¹⁴⁶

De Hooch incorporates various other references to consolidate the veracity and depth of the boy's virtuous upbringing. The façade of the building partially seen in the background reads *schole* (school).¹⁴⁷ Concealed in the darkness above the doorway sits a shelf holding a pile of books and a candlestick. The candle, a literal source of illumination, balances the knowledge of the books themselves. The candle references a type of "inner" illumination, or enlightenment.¹⁴⁸ Within the context of this painting, the light of a candle is associated with the enlightenment that is achieved from a proper and Protestant education.

Family and Education

A Woman Preparing Bread and Butter for a Boy (figure 11) serves as an excellent transition into the final value and virtue of this paper, the family relationship and the important of a moral education. Religion, through the Protestant practice of daily observances in everyday routines, were the method by which mothers trained their children. Daily habits became sanctified moments of reflection. Habits created conscientious routines. This mother and son, in their meditative morning ritual, are a paragon of Protestant virtue. The children of *The Merry Family* (figure 2) have not likely received the structure and good teaching of the mother that values education and her family. The boy in *A Woman Preparing Bread and Butter* is an exemplary result of his mother's dedicated training. The copious paintings of the Dutch

¹⁴⁵ Franits, *Pieter de Hooch*, 44.

¹⁴⁶ Franits, "The Family at Grace," 36–49.

¹⁴⁷ Franits, *Pieter de Hooch*, 53.

¹⁴⁸ Franits, *Pieter de Hooch*, 53.

seventeenth-century associated with themes of family are, by their nature, also imbued with notions of education.

The paintings discussed thus far underscore the role of the mother in the family and upbringing of children. That is not to say the father was not present, but simply that the popularity of the mother's symbolism in genre scenes was a more prevalent subject than fathers.¹⁴⁹ Domesticity in cooperation with religion were integral to the Dutch society. Expansion of the international market and economic success also meant that business was a full-time job for burgher class men and sometimes women. International trade conducted by the Dutch seafarers meant some families would go months without seeing their fathers. Education was not seen as solely the mother's duty; it was the responsibility of the whole family, often over several generations.¹⁵⁰

Despite being known for his portraits, Steen rarely painted formal likenesses. Instead, he made himself known by portraying the whole family in dramatic and expression scenes of organized chaos. De Hooch was a master of painting architecture, perspective, and texture, but all these technical skills lend to the more extraordinary skill of portraying human relationships in a single, unmoving scene. His genre scenes, like the majority of works of the time, were limited to a small canvas meant to fit on the modest walls of a burgher's home. He produced a composite image of his subjects, capturing their joyful and lascivious side, and preferred subjects that depicted people enjoying food and drink in social settings. Steen's particular virtuosity, which was seldom seen among his numerous gifted peers in seventeenth-century Holland, can be

¹⁴⁹ Steen, *The Merry Family*, 1668, Rijksmuseum, and de Hooch, *Dutch Family*, 1662, Akademie der Bildende Künste.

¹⁵⁰ Fathers were entrusted to be virtuous examples for their children to exemplify, and also to keep a firm but fair authority in the house. Duratini, *The Child in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Painting*, 75 and 91.

defined as a natural lightheartedness. The following artworks are commentaries that highlight familiar interactions in ways that are moralizing, ironic, and function as instructional visual storytelling.

Steen is hailed as a visual storyteller through his paintings, and this is especially true in one of his most well-known pieces, *The Merry Family* (figure 2). *The Merry Family* is one of a very few works that masterfully fit a chaotic and copious gathering in one frame. A large table sits in the middle of the room, covered with a heavily ornamented, colorful – and obviously expensive – cloth. A simple white cloth sits on top of it, only half-heartedly protecting the more luxurious one from splashes and stains. The eldest man sits at the head of the table, holding a viol and cheerfully raising a glass. Next to him sit two women, their proximity implying that they are his wife and her mother and signaling to the viewer this is a multi-generational family. Children fill the rest of the scene, sitting on the table, lounging on benches, leaning in from the window, and doing various activities. Notably, no one is having a meal.

Steen, like most genre scene painters, did not make scenes meant to represent real people, but fictional and realistic people and families. Steen often modeled people after his own family and children and had no problem inserting himself as well, as a method of producing realistic but fabricated scenes.¹⁵¹ Faces have distinct characteristics and yet similarities between them that suggest a family likeness. Their bulbous chins and chubby cheeks resemble those of their mother. Perhaps, Steen is presenting a family mealtime that is typical for this fictional family. The chaos and disorganization, and the tableware and crumbs left unobserved on the floor illustrate a scene of boisterous partiers. The man with the bagpipes, the father with the viol, and

¹⁵¹ Chapman et al., *Jan Steen*, 256.

the window-loiterer with the horn indicates an obnoxious cacophony of noises emanating from the family as well.

A striking and distinctive quality that sets Steen apart from other painters at the time is his ability to combine rich, earthly subject matter with the most sophisticated color scheme, nimble paint application, and accurate depictions of visual details. Steen's art exemplifies his ability to convey subtle emotions and moods. So, too, was he a master of the still-life. The beading on clothing sparkles. Fringes and feathers pick up the natural light. Creases of fabrics and leathers have their own distinct textures. The roast on the table is marbled with true-to-life veins of fat. Within this work, the water jug and metal plate are perfectly extracted from the real world.

This family provides an allegorical platform for a lesson in learned behaviors. In this picture, three generations are grouped closely around a small table in varying degrees of joviality and contentment. The paper hanging from the mantelpiece almost seems like an afterthought. It is so realistically and inconspicuously drawn that it seems a part of the scene itself. It reads, "As the old sing, so shall the young twitter."¹⁵² This maxim was a common moralistic theme and an old proverb, which cautioned the influence of the family's elders onto the young.¹⁵³ Taken literally, Steen has depicted children with various forms of wind instruments, and others are smoking and drinking. Meanwhile, the adults sing and drink, spurring the children to even worse behavior. Thus, this painting of family life also conveyed a variety of cautionary themes. As argued above, it was understood in Dutch society that family educators, particularly mothers, should be aware of the inadequacies in their children.¹⁵⁴ Families might overcome these

¹⁵² Rijksmuseum, "Het Vrolijke Huisgezin."

¹⁵³ Dekker, "A Republic of Educators," 171.

¹⁵⁴ Dekker, "A Republic of Educators," 172.

inadequacies by providing care, education, and models of domestic virtue, as well as maintaining marital harmony and faithfulness.¹⁵⁵ Family education in a domestic setting was regarded vitally necessary. Artists like Steen were less preoccupied with depicting childhood than with teaching parents in the morally proper raising of their children.

The mothers in all the previously mentioned paintings are not representing one sole virtue. They combine notions of education, religion, and domesticity all at once. This diverse role of women was understood by painters and the people buying paintings for their homes. The woman and mother in these scenes can therefore be read with many intended virtues and values of motherhood and domesticity, that, although maybe not intentional by the painter, are nonetheless present.

In some paintings, even childless women assume motherly qualities. The quaint space of *A Courtyard of a House in Delft* by Pieter de Hooch (figure 12) engages the senses: it seems quiet, warm, and fresh. It is both a brief illustration of life in seventeenth-century Holland, and an exposition of family relationships and women's roles in domestic jobs and the stability of the home. The composition is divided vertically in half. The courtyard is kept within a defined space while an arch acts as a passageway to the outside world.¹⁵⁶ The perspective and strong lines leading through the passage create a distinction between the outside and the courtyard and, therefore, a sense of privacy. The pristine brickwork of the arch juxtaposes the deteriorating brickwork of the wall to the right of the painting. The bright red tiles of the arch are opposing to the worn and discolored bricks of the building. There are two open doors in this scene: one overlapping the archway, and one to the home on the right. The latter reveals a passageway to the home's interior. Vines drape over the doorway and rickety planks form a wooden box. The

¹⁵⁵ Chapman et al., *Jan Steen*, 190.

¹⁵⁶ Franits, *Paragons of Virtue*, 86 and 108.

leaning wooden poles coming from the top of the brick wall imply that an overhang once stood there but long ago came undone.

The home may be aged and worn out, but it is still immaculately kept. On the freshly swept tiled ground lays a discarded broom, referring to a room that needs a good sweeping both physically and metaphorically.¹⁵⁷ In this picture, it takes on another symbolic meaning: a well-maintained household.¹⁵⁸ Contrary to the impeccable archway, the home may be aged and worn out, but it is still immaculately kept. It may also imply that the woman next to the child is a maid, or at the least a good housekeeper. The broom is a tool of her trade. Having accomplished all her duties, her attention is focused on the child, rosy-cheeked and content with her companion. Even more obscure in the painting is the identity of the women facing away from the viewer, who stands in the archway. Her clothing is made from darker colors than the woman beside the child and her silhouette is characterized by a rigid posture. She might be the child's mother, yet she is distanced from the happenings of the home. If she is the lady of the house, she would be responsible not just for its upkeep, but also for how her home and family were presented to the outside world.¹⁵⁹

Even with all this information, there is an air of ambiguity between the women and their relationship. The purpose of the building to the right is unknown. It is also unknown what the woman holds in her bowl or what the girl holds in her apron. A clue can be read from the tablet above the archway: "This is in Saint Jerome's vale, if you wish to repair to patience and meekness. For we must first descent if we wish to be raised."¹⁶⁰ Even with the use of text, de Hooch chooses subtle and discreet iconography. He conceals it quite literally as well since this

¹⁵⁷ Hoyle, *The Broom as Signifier*, 193–214.

¹⁵⁸ Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches*, 375–97

¹⁵⁹ Franits, *Paragons of Virtue*, 68 and 108.

¹⁶⁰ Langmuir, *The National Gallery Companion Guide*, 209.

text is slightly obscured behind leaves. The inscription suggests that the meek, patient life of domestic service leads to heaven just as surely as more overtly religious observances do. The inscription's placement within the walls of the home's private courtyard serve to represent a value felt and practiced internally, rather than one displayed to the public. It is a value that the woman is teaching the child in their daily, domestic lives.

Similar to the subjects seen in genre paintings, works like those of Cats's were meant to be instructional guides in domestic practices for women. Cats presented the ideal vision of marriage and domesticity to encourage women to strive for a life of perfect balance and to achieve a sense of duty. Genre scenes, like those of de Hooch, used these themes to present illustrations of domestic lives. These guides focused on the rearing of children and the various roles of women in the home and society. Images like *The Merry Family* (figure 2) are meant to show the lackadaisical neglect of such roles and duties to the family. Similarly, Dou's *The Dropsical Woman* (figure 10) presents the doctor as a charlatan. The satirical or morally problematic subject serves to present the opposite side of virtue and warn the contemporary Dutch viewer of the consequences of neglecting their Protestant practice.

It impossible to know for certain if the woman in the archway is the child's mother or not. But portraying that relationship for certain, one way or another, was not de Hooch's intention. The woman beside the child assumes a protecting and loving role and, and regardless of whether or not she is the mother, her adoration for the child is more than evident. The motherly role of the woman, the quiet religious morals, and the educational role she plays in the child's upbringing present her in the brightest light of Dutch virtue.

Conclusion

The capitalist economy and affluent burgher class of the Netherlands created a market for art that was successful enough to support well-known painters, including Jan Steen, De Hooch, and Van Mieris.¹⁶¹ Through the transition from commission culture to the open market, painters had a variety of potential customers to whom they needed to appeal. Protestants, Catholics, and even Jews were all probable customers.¹⁶² It could certainly be thought that the genre painting, with its ambiguity of religious subject, was a reaction to this diverse clientele. But it should be noted, too, that the genre scene, although adopted by other European cultures,¹⁶³ remained most popular in the Netherlands.¹⁶⁴ The combination of this evidence asserts that the genre scene was a reaction to a shift in values that came to a head with the onset of the Eighty Years' War. The war concluded with the Union of Utrecht, which accomplished two things: independence from Spain, and the freedom of religious worship.¹⁶⁵ Legal action to enact religious freedom was a result from a preexisting value for religious tolerance. The genre scene's consequent development and popularity, then, can be understood as a reaction to the values of the middle class – domesticity, family, and education – that was not felt as strongly in other places in Europe, but was instead unique to the intellectual Dutch culture.

The values seen in their art present a typography that is also unique among other European cultures. Motherhood and domesticity were the most common subjects for Dutch baroque genre paintings.¹⁶⁶ It is not that fathers do not appear in Dutch domestic paintings, but

¹⁶¹ Prak, Maarten, and Zanden, *Pioneers of Capitalism*, 158.

¹⁶² Prak, Maarten, and Zanden, *Pioneers of Capitalism*, 128.

¹⁶³ Price, *Dutch Culture in the Golden Age*, 258.

¹⁶⁴ Price, *Dutch Culture in the Golden Age*, 258.

¹⁶⁵ Price, *Dutch Culture in the Golden Age*, 72 and 186.

¹⁶⁶ Frantis, *Paragons of Virtue*, 1.

the expression in these paintings of universally held ideals about women and domesticity meant that men were not a meaningful aspect in these scenes.¹⁶⁷

The Merry Family (figure 2) shows the father as the immoral and ill-mannered head of the table. Similarly, the male doctor in *The Dropsical Woman* (figure 10) is a charlatan who feigns expertise. References to domestic folly abound in the Dutch Baroque,¹⁶⁸ and people like *The Dropsical Woman* warn of its outcome. Compared to women, men are quite passive in genre scenes. *The Feast of Saint Nicholas* (figure 6) includes a single man, but he passively sits in the background while the women assume the active roles of parenting and is therefore not given the prominence of which the women receive. Even in this example, another moralizing scene of vice, the women are the fulfillers of immoral behavior, and the only man in the scene sits passively in the back while the women engage their spoiled children. Even paintings that are intended as group portraits include elements associated with the genre scene. Through the doorway on the right, *Portrait of a Family playing Music* (figure 5) has a vignette of a woman accompanied by two children. In this portrait, de Hooch once again chose a genre scene to properly show domestic virtue.

Certainly, women are the dynamic characters in these scenes, whether they are performing a virtuous or moralizing role within the domestic sphere. What other style of painting could aptly reveal the valuable role of the Dutch burgher woman? Neither the landscape, the still-life, or even the portrait could portray the virtuous woman with the expressive and intimate delivery of the genre scene. It could be said that, during the seventeenth century, Dutch paintings conveyed a type of folk wisdom similar to the modern expression that “actions speak louder than words.” In the case of the genre scene, the actions of household members show their virtues.

¹⁶⁷ Frantis, *Paragons of Virtue*, 14–16.

¹⁶⁸ Chapman et al., *Jan Steen*, 256.

Painters of genre scenes repeatedly showed the woman with references to her value as the heart of the home in seventeenth-century Dutch society. Whether she is depicted as a religious teacher, a maid, a gardener, or a businesswoman, she is, above all, a mother whose very being encompassed all of these roles. The prominence of the woman is only shown, and best shown, in the domestic genre scene where she is painted with reverence for her duties, and the virtue of domesticity is depicted in all its various and wonderful forms.

Figure Gallery



Figure 1: Pieter de Hooch, *Mother's Duty* (c. 1660–1661, oil on canvas, 52.5 x 61 cm, Rijksmuseum).



Figure 2: Jan Steen, *The Merry Family* (1668, oil on canvas, 110.5 × 141 cm, Rijksmuseum).



Figure 3: Pieter de Hooch, *Interior of a Dutch House* (1658, oil on canvas, 73.6 x 63.5 in, National Gallery London).



Figure 4: Charles Le Brun, *Everhard Jabach and His Family* (1600, oil on canvas, 280 × 328 cm, The Metropolitan Museum of Art).



Figure 5: Pieter de Hooch, *Portrait of a Family Playing Music* (1663, oil on canvas, 98.7 x 116.7 cm, The Cleveland Museum of Art).



Figure 6: Jan Steen, *The Feast of Saint Nicholas* (c. 1665–1668, oil on canvas 82 x 70.5 cm, Rijksmuseum).



Figure 7: Pieter de Hooch, *Mother Nursing her Child* (c. 1674–1676, oil on canvas, 79.7 × 59.7 cm, Detroit Institute of Arts).



Figure 8: Benedetto Gennari II, *Virgin and Child* (c. 1655–1600, 97.8 cm x 84.3 cm, The Courtauld, London).



Figure 9: Frans van Mieris the Elder, *A Boy Blowing Bubbles* (1663, oil on panel. 25.2 x 18.3 cm, Mauritshuis).



Figure 10: Gerard Dou, *The Dropsical Woman* (1663, oil on wood, 86 x 67.8 cm, Louvre).



Figure 11: Pieter de Hooch, *A Woman Preparing Bread and Butter for a Boy* (c. 1660–1663, oil on canvas, 68.6 × 53.3 cm, J. Paul Getty Museum).



Figure 12: Pieter de Hooch, *Courtyard of a House in Delft*, (1658, oil on canvas, 73.5 x 60 cm, National Gallery, London).

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