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Pronk Poppenhuis: Establishing and Destabilizing Agency
Among Seventeenth-Century Burgher Wives in the Dutch Republic

by

Emily M. Gregoire

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
with a concentration in Humanities
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Abstract

This thesis shines novel light on the Dutch *pronk poppenhuis*, as a microcosm which models the simultaneously destabilization and establishment of agency among the Baroque burgher wives who commissioned them. Closely discussing seventeenth-century Dutch female ambitions, this article will explore the ways in which these housewives were both taught to behave appropriately in Dutch society and how they then displayed obedience to those values. I concurrently argue that the commissioning of and interaction with the *pronk poppenhuis*, particularly *Pronk Poppenhuis De Patronella Dunois*, simultaneously represents and perpetuates the growth of agency within the commissioner. This will be done through close inspection of the commissioner along with the wide variety of foreign and costly materials included in *Pronk Poppenhuis de Patronella Dunois*. Research conducted on still life paintings from the same period and region provide relevant supplemental evidence along with various other theories to address understudied elements of the dollhouse. This thesis provides vital encouragement to return to seventeenth-century Dutch artifacts, particularly those denoted as toys, in order to better understand larger social and cultural expectations and ambitions through microcosmic objects representing lived in spaces. Finally, this thesis provides a platform for further research into under-explored subjects of female agency in seventeenth-century Netherlands.

Chapter 1: Introducing the Pronk Poppenhuis

The *pronk poppenhuis*, or “dollhouse for show” in Dutch, is generally examined as a tool for training submissive behavior in a soon-to-be wife or regarded as a boastful display of foreign objects alluding to the Dutch prominence in global trade.¹ Although these are both fruitful ways to dissect the pronk poppenhuis, these explanations fail to examine the ways in which these miniaturized homes represented the destabilization and establishment of agency among the women who commissioned them. I instead argue for a deeper inspection of the elements in these dollhouses, the owners of these structures, and the societal requirements involved in their commissioning. This is done in an effort to better understand the industriousness of female ambitions in this time, and how the pressures of Dutch society molded the levels of agency they were allowed to experience. Closely analyzing the many parts of *Pronk Poppenhuis de Petronella Dunois*, this thesis provides insight into the societal expectations placed upon the seventeenth-century Dutch housewife, illuminating a more holistic perception of female agency during the seventeenth century. This pronk poppenhuis shows particularly well how burgher housewives displayed the level of industriousness and the keeping of an orderly home that was required by all under the Dutch Republic’s government. Furthermore, this study urges for the examination of such miniatures as microcosms of cultural structures rather than dismissing them by way of alternative immature connotations surrounding toys and collectibles. This study instead addresses this item for play as a piece of fine art, highlighting the ways in which the

¹ Moseley-Christian, Michelle. 2010. “Seventeenth-Century Pronk Poppenhuisen: Domestic Space and the Ritual Function of Dutch Dollhouses for Women.” *Home Cultures* 7 (3): 341–63. Page 342.

commissioner was simultaneously victim to, and supporter of the strict expectations epicentral to her religion and community. Thus, through her commissioning and display of *Pronk Poppenhuis de Petronella Dunois*, the commissioner shows her ability to gain greater agency through the proper playing of her designated role.

Through that establishment and concurrent destabilization of agency among the burgher housewives, these pronk poppenhuis validate themselves as much more than a simple collection of expensive goods. The structures and each miniature object in its interior should rather be considered as artifacts which must be closely examined to gain a holistic view of the Dutch housewife's impact during the seventeenth century, as well as the impact that the society had on these women who managed their construction. Each room, each doll, and each piece of decoration was carefully selected by the woman who commissioned her own pronk poppenhuis.² This assembly becomes a direct reflection of the values and ambitions of the Dutch Burgher wife showcasing the things which they held pride in. What these women undoubtedly displayed to the public was their industriousness and orderliness, in a variety of forms, which would be ideally revealed in these pronk poppenhuis through the massive array of careful design embellished with expensive and rare foreign goods.³ This dollhouse was not simply a place of storage for miniaturized foreign items, but instead illuminated so much more: the enormous impact of trade, religion, and social monitoring related to the paradoxical destabilizing and establishing of agency among the Dutch housewife.

² Moseley-Christian, Michelle. 2010. "Seventeenth-Century Pronk Poppenhuisen: Domestic Space and the Ritual Function of Dutch Dollhouses for Women." *Home Cultures* 7 (3): 341–63. Page 347.

³ *Ibid*, Page 351.

The pronk poppenhuis of Petronella Dunois is the focus of this study. Proprietorship of the pronk poppenhuis was one of the first instances where a European woman could own property that was legally entitled to her independently.⁴ The exorbitant cost of these commissions meant that ownership of these structures not only proved the wife's cultural and social awareness, but it offered a sense of financial security for these women, should their family ever become bankrupt, or worse, they become widowed. Understanding the financial security, impressions on social reputation, and freedom that this fabrication brings to the women who own them, grants greater access to discerning how this altered the experience of the commissioners of these dollhouses.

Scholars concentrating in Dutch studies of the seventeenth century who have examined the pronk poppenhuis tend to lean towards the more limited explanations of female submissiveness, believing that these pronk poppenhuis were simple toys meant for conditioning the proper wife for her husband. Many scholars studying seventeenth-century Dutch culture alike agree, suggesting that these dollhouses were tools that husbands and the Dutch Republic's government encouraged wives to commission in hopes that it would reinforce the appropriate structures and processes of the ideal ordered Dutch household.^{5 6} It might also be more initially clear to look at the vast number of foreign materials incorporated into the pronk poppenhuis and make connections to the Netherlands' very well-known prosperity in worldwide trading. I agree with the scholars who recognize these dollhouses as microcosms, and gratefully use their

⁴ Moseley-Christian, Michelle. 2010. "Seventeenth-Century Pronk Poppenhuis: Domestic Space and the Ritual Function of Dutch Dollhouses for Women." *Home Cultures* 7 (3): 341–63. Pages 344-47.

⁵ Broomhall, Susan. n.d. "Hidden Women of History: Petronella Oortman and Her Giant Dolls' House." *The Conversation*. Accessed March 22, 2021. Page 342.

⁶ *Ibid*, Pages 344-47.

examinations of materials inside the structure to formulate speculations about Dutch foreign trade and cartography.⁷ It is my aim, however, to challenge these initial explanations of the pronk poppenhuis which fail to go deeper into the subjects that have been less explored in Dutch literature, such as agency among housewives.

Commissioning of these pronk poppenhuis and the materials which they contain tell a rich story of the cultural ambitions and levels of agency among the seventeenth-century Dutch housewife. Acting as a microcosm of the ideal Dutch home, these cabinets directly portray both the expectations the Dutch wife had pressed upon her, thus gaining her agency along the way by portraying that miniaturized perfection of an ordered home under Calvinism to onlookers of the pronk poppenhuis.⁸ To examine the functions and elements of this microcosm, the purpose and materials of specific rooms in the *Pronk Poppenhuis de Patronella Dunois* is delved into, using examinations of the popular Dutch still life painting as supplemental research regarding the dollhouse's interior. This is in an effort to holistically examine the expectations and community involvement of the Dutch women, and how meeting those requirements granted access into higher social circles, which is illuminated in the agency these wives gained through the pronk poppenhuis. This solidifies the pronk poppenhuis as a legitimate historical artifact which can be referred to for insight into the agency of the Dutch housewife during paramount prosperity for the Dutch burghers.

⁷ Nakamura, Jun. "The Miniature Logic of the Seventeenth-Century Dutch ..." *Art in Society*, Universiteit Leiden, 2020.

⁸ Moseley-Christian, Michelle. 2010. "Seventeenth-Century Pronk Poppenhuisen: Domestic Space and the Ritual Function of Dutch Dollhouses for Women." *Home Cultures* 7 (3): 341–63. Page 352.

I examine these dollhouses recognizing that the interactions these Dutch housewives have with these artifacts follow certain theories regarding identity formation and the legitimacy of adult play. The interaction one's body has with an object in their environment plays a role in identity formation. This theory is highlighted by several scholars who note that perception is actually the result of one's body interacting with the things in its environment.⁹ I also rely on theories regarding the legitimacy of adult play as cultural representation and as a necessary part of identity formation, not to be denoted to more adolescent connotations or simple ideas of collection.¹⁰ Pairing such theories with the examination of the pronk poppenhuis helps illustrate how agency is both established and destabilized through the commissioning of and interaction with this dollhouse.

By considering the pronk poppenhuis as a legitimate microcosm of the industrious ambitions of the Dutch burgher housewife, a platform is strengthened for further examination of marginalized groups. This study attempts to properly provide a holistic understanding of the wife's paradoxical place in Dutch seventeenth-century arts and culture. Additionally, this study encourages a stricter study into the culture of toys and play in congruence with gender studies, particularly in Dutch cultural texts. By fulfilling each of these roles, the *Pronk Poppenhuis de Petronella Dunois* provides a miniaturization of Dutch ambitions through the less explored lens of the seventeenth-century Dutch burgher housewife.

⁹ Fletcher, John, and Andrew E Benjamin. 2014. *Abjection, Melancholia and Love: The Work of Julia Kristeva*. Edited by Elizabeth Grosz.

¹⁰ Heljakka, Katriina Irja. "More Than Collectors: Exploring Theorists', Hobbyists' and Everyday Players' Rhetoric in Adult Play With Character Toys." *Games and Culture* 13, no. 3 (2018): 240–59.

Chapter 2: Historical Context; Seventeenth Century Dutch Culture & Womanhood

The cultural climate in which adult dollhouses were commissioned was heavily monitored by the Dutch Republic's political leaders as well as the strict practices of Calvinism. This was a period of great prosperity thanks to the wealthy middle class known as the burghers. Each of the citizens living in the Netherlands was under strict rule and crushing pressure to conform to rigorous Calvinist standards. These standards centered around social piety and orderliness on all levels. This trickled into nearly every facet of Dutch life, even down to regulated bread making.¹¹ Furthermore, many living in the Dutch Republic were not practicing Calvinists, and still, the exacting requirements of orderliness and practiced systems impacted every citizen in the Republic.¹² The uncompromising protocols enforced in this region did not discriminate against wives, sculpting them into a mold comprised of traits like piety, motherliness, tidiness, faithfulness, obedience, and above all, industriousness. Even the most notable prison in the Republic's government and in most of Europe, considered a tourist attraction of the time, based the majority of its "reformative" tactics in work ethic and religious fortitude.¹³ While there was an extremely high level of social control over the people; the Dutch citizenry actually experienced an unprecedented level of general wealth throughout the economic classes.¹⁴ Largely because of this people were encouraged to follow the rules because they

¹¹ Jan de Vries, *The Price of Bread: Regulating the Market in the Dutch Republic*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019.

¹² Schama, Simon. 2014. *The Embarrassment of Riches: An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age*. New York: Vintage Books, A Division of Random House, Inc.

¹³ Ibid, Page 20.

¹⁴ Harreld, Donald. 2019. "The Dutch Economy in the Golden Age (16th – 17th Centuries)." Eh.net. 2019

genuinely benefitted from them a majority of the time. The positioning of Amsterdam in a perfect port location, especially following the devastation of Antwerp, made it a hub for merchant trade, elevating the mercantile working man to heights never before seen, allowing a thriving republic in this area.¹⁵ This strong middle class facilitated the burst of art production that is seen in this period, allowing for greater quality of life, albeit that experience was still heavily tailored by their government and through a panopticon-like-effect maintained by its citizens. There was a strong notion that the population of Amsterdam was the chosen survivors of the flood who had been granted immense wealth by God to represent their semblance to the biblical narrative of Noah's ark.¹⁶ This entitlement combined with strict Calvinist pressure to express virtue through orderliness all contributed to the birth of the pronk poppenhuis.

Women were central to the pressure of maintaining and exhibiting orderliness in the Dutch Republic. They were expected to maintain the highest sense of prestige and pride inside their home, which in the Dutch Republic was considered the mother's domain. This was not because the Dutch primarily wanted to grant mothers a level of control, but rather was attributed to their supposed lack of morality, thought to be easily tempted by small vices outside of the home.¹⁷ The mother and wife was allowed a certain inflated agency inside of her home, but it was allotted only within the confinements that the larger systems the Dutch Republic imposed upon her. Living in nearly architecturally identical homes along the canal, featuring exhibition styled floor-to-ceiling windows, these wives were in charge of maintaining the image of the

¹⁵ Harreld, Donald. 2019. "The Dutch Economy in the Golden Age (16th – 17th Centuries)." Eh.net. 2019

¹⁶ Schama, Simon. 2014. *The Embarrassment of Riches: An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age*. New York: Vintage Books, A Division of Random House, Inc.

¹⁷ Moseley-Christian, Michelle. 2010. "Seventeenth-Century Pronk Poppenhuisen: Domestic Space and the Ritual Function of Dutch Dollhouses for Women." *Home Cultures* 7 (3): 341–63. Page 354.

inside of the home through their portrayed orderliness, for any curious spectators residing outside of their walls.¹⁸ These were expectations which not only involved being the perfect housewife, but also included being a citizen who fastidious with money, displayed their wealth with art, gave to only the “deserving” poor, and appeared busy and ambitious at all times. These wives often had a chair by the door (and in front of a window) to display industrious activities such as sewing, and to guard the front from unwelcomed visitors such as vagrants and scoundrels. If the burgher housewife tended closely to all of her matriarchal duties, and showed great Calvinist faith, she would be granted higher freedoms and agency than otherwise allotted to women in Europe. Traveling merchants from other areas in Europe recall in their travel journals that because the Dutch wife was remarkably pious, she was allowed more freedoms than other women in Europe, such as walking alone at night.¹⁹ After all, it was the wife’s duty to answer the door—she was the gate keeper of the home—and could be trusted to pass any messages along to the husband who likely remained in his study, the most patriarchal space in the Dutch home.²⁰ It was also her responsibility and freedom to decorate the parlor room in the full-scale home, which was the room featuring massive street-facing windows and an abundance of fine art. This is where she would select a rare array of items such as Italian paintings and Chinese porcelain to display to any passer-by who might catch a glimpse through the windows to the array of expensive, and foreign goods.²¹ Of even greater importance, the wife had executive responsibilities in hiring and purchasing help for the home, including slaves, but mostly

¹⁸ Moseley-Christian, Michelle. 2010. “Seventeenth-Century Pronk Poppenhuisen: Domestic Space and the Ritual Function of Dutch Dollhouses for Women.” *Home Cultures* 7 (3): 341–63. Page 353.

¹⁹ Schama, Simon. 2014. *The Embarrassment of Riches: An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age*. New York: Vintage Books, A Division of Random House, Inc.

²⁰ Cats, Jacob. 1993. *Huwelijk*. Amsterdam: Querido’s.

²¹ Moseley-Christian, Michelle. 2010. “Seventeenth-Century Pronk Poppenhuisen: Domestic Space and the Ritual Function of Dutch Dollhouses for Women.” *Home Cultures* 7 (3): 341–63. Page 359.

consisting of maids.²² While the husband might have a team of business employees he managed, the wife was the ultimate supervisor of the household staff. This domestic structure further reflects Dutch appreciation for a strong work ethic, especially as it relates to wives and mothers. The strict Calvinist structure of the Dutch household required rigorous rules and responsibilities for the burgher wife, thus destabilizing a sense of agency by attempting to regulate her every move. Yet, ironically, the curating and commissioning of dollhouses established agency as she was invited to make decisions and enter spaces and conversations women were otherwise barred from.

The types of women who would own these pronk poppenhuis were especially remarkable, a true testament to the Dutch people's unique climb to the peak of achievements. These women, first and foremost, were from immensely wealthy families, usually involved in political affairs, mercantile shipping and long-distance trading, or shipbuilding.²³ Because of this familial wealth, these young women often entered arranged marriage contracts with exceedingly wealthy men. These men frequently held political positions, allowing their wives involvement in the passing of laws and protocols, concurrently placing them further in the public's judgmental eye. Often times, these women achieved the title of regent, meaning they had their own place in governmental decisions, making the Republic's government unique in this addition of female perspective and influence.²⁴ This meant that while these wives had greater access to higher echelons of society, they were additionally tormented by increased pressure to conform and

²² Moseley-Christian, Michelle. 2010. "Seventeenth-Century Pronk Poppenhuisen: Domestic Space and the Ritual Function of Dutch Dollhouses for Women." *Home Cultures* 7 (3): 341–63. Page 354.

²³ Schama, Simon. 2014. *The Embarrassment of Riches: An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age*. New York: Vintage Books, A Division of Random House, Inc.

²⁴ Moseley-Christian, Michelle. 2010. "Seventeenth-Century Pronk Poppenhuisen: Domestic Space and the Ritual Function of Dutch Dollhouses for Women." *Home Cultures* 7 (3): 341–63. Page 45.

display their wealth within these factions. The pronk poppenhuis became the ideal way to express the meeting of those criteria while gaining access to restricted territories.

The large sums expended for dollhouses and other three-dimensional art objects was typical for Dutch housewives and citizens during the seventeenth century in the Netherlands, often defined as the “Dutch Golden Age”. During this period of wild success through global trade and a ruling merchant class, the Dutch people funneled money into the arts, and the pronk poppenhuis was no exception.²⁵ It is this rich history of trade and production of art that makes the Dutch still life painting a worthy supplement for the research which is lacking regarding the objects and material in the dollhouse. This notion will be explored later in this thesis by using examination of popular Dutch still life painting to inspect the dollhouse’s involvement within global trade and display of the interior home during the “Dutch Golden Age.”²⁶

Encouragement towards submissive behavior is present in most of the already minimal literature that surrounds seventeenth-century Dutch dollhouses. Although, these claims towards submissiveness, made particularly by the scholar of Dutch art history Michelle Mosely, would benefit from further expansion with more cues to female agency establishment rather than examination primarily addressing compliancy. Few scholars have even attempted to approach these dollhouses with such close attention as Michelle Mosley. Mosley provides a more specific and culturally rooted discussion than most scholars who have approached the subject.

Nevertheless, she limits her research to understanding the dollhouse as a tool that husbands used

²⁵ Harreld, Donald. 2019. “The Dutch Economy in the Golden Age (16th – 17th Centuries).” Eh.net. 2019

²⁶ Hochstrasser, Julie. 2007. *Still Life and Trade in the Dutch Golden Age*. New Haven Conn.; London: Yale University Press.

to properly groom their new wives, or as a type of courting gift once a marital arrangement was already made. Mosley argues that “manipulation of the dolls within selective, gendered, architectural spaces allowed the dollhouse owners to visualize the ideal Dutch home and ‘perform’ their appropriate role within it as productive, disciplined, and orderly wives, mothers, and domestic managers.”²⁷ This negates the immense social pressure to appear as proper and honorable citizens that was already heaped upon the Dutch during the seventeenth century. In effect, this is insinuating that yet another conforming force to teach women how to behave was needed to engage this type of behavior in new wives. Moving beyond this claim can help expose how the Dutch housewife had already been severely socially molded by the time of her marriage, while bringing other complexities of her existence to the surface of contemporary research.

²⁷ Moseley-Christian, Michelle. 2010. “Seventeenth-Century Pronk Poppenhuisen: Domestic Space and the Ritual Function of Dutch Dollhouses for Women.” *Home Cultures* 7 (3): 341–63. Abstract.

Chapter 3: Patronella Dunois & the Commissioning of the Pronk Poppenhuis

Patronella Dunois, regent and burgher wife, played an influential role in Amsterdam society's elite, acting as one of the housewives to commission one of the mere three surviving "dollhouses for show." Orphaned as a child, Patronella and her sister were left to live alone in their *ecclesia domestica*, or "house church", surviving more than comfortably on the massive riches left to them by their merchant parents.²⁸ Patronella Dunois is especially unique in her commissioning of a pronk poppenhuis because she was orphaned at a young age, and cared for by her older sister.²⁹ Raised in an *ecclesia domestica*, Patronella Dunois received the most disciplinary of religious upbringings, albeit without her parents to enforce Calvinist teachings. This ability to maintain her riches and status was a reflection on the culture of Amsterdam in totality, and a reflection on the elevated agency and freedom these women experienced in this community. Although Patronella was being raised with intense religious beliefs, she was concurrently being raised by her older sister in a matriarchal household, unconventional in both its lack of mature parenting but also the absence of a patriarchal figure in the home. This did not, however, hinder her ability to sustain and bolster her prestige, maturing to become a regent, and thus governmental agent, in seventeenth-century Amsterdam.

²⁸ Museum, Rijk. n.d. "Dolls' House of Petronella Dunois, Anonymous, C. 1676." Rijksmuseum. Accessed April 29, 2021.

²⁹ Moseley-Christian, Michelle. 2010. "Seventeenth-Century Pronk Poppenhuisen: Domestic Space and the Ritual Function of Dutch Dollhouses for Women." *Home Cultures* 7 (3): 341–63. Abstract.

In advance of her marriage to the wealthy Pieter van Groenendijck, Patronella decided that she wanted to unconventionally, especially as a woman, build one of these subjectively enormous structures. The timing of Dunois's commission was interesting under the basic notion that most pronk poppenhuis of the time, for example the most famously noted *Pronk Poppenhuis de Patronella Oortman*, were commissioned following one's marriage, whereas Dunois uniquely completed her dollhouse before her marriage, and listed it in her dowry.³⁰ This functioned as a legal agreement which increased Dunois's wealth and status in the marriage, setting the expectations for the elevated agency and matriarchal household she expected to uphold in her marriage and expected Pieter van Groenendijck would expect her to perpetuate.³¹ This was no small addition, considering that these constructions were often equally expensive as the full-size homes of their likeness, most standing at about six feet tall and requiring a foot stool for viewing. The value of these pronk poppenhuis in their entirety nearly equated the appraisal of a full-scale canal home in Amsterdam, costing nearly two thousand guilders, when the average listed income for these commissioner's households was eight thousand guilders.^{32 33} In fact, these pronk poppenhuis would often provide additional security for the entire female line following the commissioner, as it would be passed down through the women of the family, thus transferring established agency through each generation that benefits from the financial security the value of the structure provides.³⁴ Patronella Dunois designed her dollhouse with all the luxuries and

³⁰ Broomhall, Susan, and Jennifer Spinks. 2016. *Early Modern Women in the Low Countries : Feminizing Sources and Interpretations of the Past*. London: Routledge. Page 111.

³¹ Moseley-Christian, Michelle. 2010. "Seventeenth-Century Pronk Poppenhuisen: Domestic Space and the Ritual Function of Dutch Dollhouses for Women." *Home Cultures* 7 (3): 341–63. Page 347.

³² Broomhall, Susan, and Jennifer Spinks. 2016. *Early Modern Women in the Low Countries : Feminizing Sources and Interpretations of the Past*. London: Routledge.

³³ Moseley-Christian, Michelle. 2010. "Seventeenth-Century Pronk Poppenhuisen: Domestic Space and the Ritual Function of Dutch Dollhouses for Women." *Home Cultures* 7 (3): 341–63. Page 347.

³⁴ Broomhall, Susan, and Jennifer Spinks. 2016. *Early Modern Women in the Low Countries : Feminizing Sources and Interpretations of the Past*. London: Routledge. Page 112.

necessities deemed relevant to Dutch people of the seventeenth century, and her life and legacy have been expanded and maintained through the rare survival of this remarkably lavish and laboriously decorated structure.³⁵ She commissioned her pronk poppenhuis as a means to pay tribute to and portray the culture which she developed in, but to also her own wealth and cultural awareness by creating a structure which would perfectly depict the household which she intended for people to believe she would uphold. This posed as an immediate portrayal of her wealth, her matriarchal ambitions, and her place as a proper Dutch Calvinist.

In other scholarship regarding the pronk poppenhuis, these seventeenth-century dollhouses are examined particularly as a tool for encouraging submissive behavior in new wives or soon-to-be wives of the Dutch Republic. The swift labelling of the female as submissive in all areas is something this thesis aims to avoid. Mosely's work primarily proposes that the ownership and interaction with the pronk poppenhuis is a conditioning tool imposed upon the wife or soon-to-be wife by the government of the Dutch Republic and the wife's husband. This research suggests that Petronella's agency might have been destabilized because she was being thrown into the mold set out for her by the Dutch Republic and being conditioned by the pronk poppenhuis. However, this newer examination instead recognizes both sides of the coin by first agreeing with scholars of Dutch seventeenth century like Mosely.

On the other hand, this thesis argues that agency is simultaneously established through the pronk poppenhuis, signified by the granting and exercising of more extensive roles in the community by these wives through the pronk poppenhuis. Ownership of a pronk poppenhuis by

³⁵ Broomhall, Susan. n.d. "Hidden Women of History: Petronella Oortman and Her Giant Dolls' House." The Conversation. Accessed March 22, 2021

one of these Burgher wives permitted a sense of agency and self-proclaimed, while nonetheless shaping the ideal Dutch citizen by destabilizing autonomy. This novel expression of female prestige was contradictory to the intense molding that took place in Dutch culture. Likewise, through the obedience to Calvinist values and keeping of an ordered home, the burgher housewife could obtain freedoms otherwise inaccessible to her. Many travelling merchants write about the Dutch in their journals, and there is record of travelers who distinguish the Dutch women as being, “handsome without being vain, educated without being pedantic, even practiced in matters of money without being avaricious.” This paradoxical balancing act of being everything yet never too much of anything allowed burgher husbands to boast the perfection of their wives by allowing them to be involved in suspicious activities like visiting less wholesome parts of town alone, or allowing them to be present for business conversations.³⁶ In the Dutch Republic, unmarried women were thought to be animalistic, and so they were encouraged to marry as soon as possible.³⁷ In this case, the *pronk Poppenhuis de Patronella Dunois*, being constructed and curated before her marriage, allows Dunois to show her soon-to-be husband that she intends on running a strict and orderly matriarchal household. This is demonstrated through the careful curation and organization of the pronk poppenhuis, as well as the cultural awareness and skill it took to bring the cabinet to life. Through the pronk poppenhuis, Dunois’s husband had further evidence that his future wife was highly skilled at prioritizing her wifely duties, thus granting her more freedom outside of those duties that she might have not attained without first showing obedience to the normative structures of the household in the Dutch Republic. If true, this suggests that these pronk poppenhuis simultaneously worked *against* conformity, by allowing

³⁶ Schama, Simon. 2014. *The Embarrassment of Riches: An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age*. New York: Vintage Books, A Division of Random House, Inc. Page, 404.

³⁷ *Ibid*, Page 400.

owners such as Dunois the interaction with an object which encourages female decision-making, community involvement, property ownership, and true matriarchy. The *Pronk Poppenhuis De Patronella Dunois* illuminates the strict protocols placed upon Patronella by showcasing her conformity to the Calvinist standards which upheld the morals of the Dutch Republic. This is done while also exposing the roles Dunois held in community, government, and household, as a real player in each, moving beyond the study of materials and basic marital understandings and providing a deeper look into the more complex ambitions of the women who designed these impressive undertakings.

In the particular case of the *Pronk Poppenhuis de Patronella Dunois*, the roles Dunois held in her community, including political titles such as regent, aided her in the redecoration and maintenance of her pronk poppenhuis and presents the display of her intellect within political and artistic circles in burgher communities. As a regent, Patronella Dunois would have had access to the most popular local artists in Amsterdam, unusual for most women in this period.³⁸ The pronk poppenhuis and its laborious construction and curation, as well as its later redecoration, would require multiple meetings with renowned artists, providing a platform for Dunois' confidence in successful public interactions to grow. Throughout this process these dollhouses became a part of the commissioner's identity, represented through Patronella Dunois's embroidery of her initials on the linen of the linen room in her pronk poppenhuis, and a date embroidered on one of the pillows to signify year of the commission's completion. In additional cases, the personal importance of these structures to their owners is shown by the specific requests commissioners make to hold the dollhouse within the family after the

³⁸ Broomhall, Susan, and Jennifer Spinks. 2016. *Early Modern Women in the Low Countries : Feminizing Sources and Interpretations of the Past*. London: Routledge.

commissioner's death.³⁹ The personalized touches and careful attention to detail through these homes required agency to be further established in these women. This promotes full recognition of the extent to which these pronk poppenhuis both allowed greater agency within these wives' lived experiences, charging scholars to re-evaluate the true ambitions of the seventeenth-century Dutch wife.

In investigating the *Pronk Poppenhuis de Patronella Dunois*, it becomes apparent how these dollhouses concurrently conform to the standards of the Dutch Republic's government and the Calvinist culture that infiltrated the lives of even those who did not practice the faith. This conforms the perception, and thus identity of the owner to the preferences of the Dutch Republic's government. This concept of tailored perception, although noted in different terms, is illustrated by Janice Radway in her discussion on phenomenology. Within her larger discussion of phenomenology, she distinguishes literature's ability to alter our perception, under the conviction that, "perception is really a form of communication between his [or her] body and the universe."⁴⁰ Radway has established the groundwork lending evidence to identity formation through interaction with the objects in our environment. This reveals the ways in which the burgher wife's interaction in more complex dealings through the pronk poppenhuis, such as trade processes, employee duties, and spending, had a rather profound impact on this woman's agency, despite destabilizing this agency through the pressures to present the social identity of an orderly Dutch wife. This provided her an opportunity outside of the norm to flaunt her deep cultural

³⁹ Broomhall, Susan, and Jennifer Spinks. 2016. *Early Modern Women in the Low Countries : Feminizing Sources and Interpretations of the Past*. London: Routledge. Page 111.

⁴⁰ Radway, Janice A. 1978. "Phenomenology, Linguistics, and Popular Literature." *The Journal of Popular Culture* 12 (1): 88–98. Page 23.

knowledge, her intellectual capabilities, and her agency as head of the household.⁴¹ A direct finger points at the linen room of *Pronk Poppenhuis de Patronella Dunois* to illustrate matriarchal agency and cultural awareness through the pronk poppenhuis. The linen room was a very important room in the Dutch seventeenth century, considering that linen culture was well known, and the amount of linen a household owned was in direct correlation with their wealth.⁴² This was because linen would be sent out to a washer in Amsterdam, and so the less frequently one had to send their linen for cleaning and pressing in Amsterdam, the more linen, and thus more income they had to spare. In *Pronk Poppenhuis de Patronella Dunois*, the linen room is massive, and positioned centrally on the third floor of the structure. The large size of this room denotes its importance in Dutch culture, but it also proves the cultural awareness of the wife as a behaving and ordered Calvinist.⁴³ A clean home was a primary concern of the Calvinist wife—centering the linen room demonstrated Dunois’ virtue and faith among many other attributes.⁴⁴

Scholars outside of Dutch literature contend that signifying systems are also vital contributions to the development of identity, suggesting perhaps that the signifying systems of the Dutch Republic’s government and those of Calvinism vitally contributed to the identity of these wives. Elizabeth Grosz, feminist theorist and professor at Duke University, makes these claims of identity formation during the critique of Julia Kristeva’s theories covering abjection. Although, while Julia Kristeva does not prescribe to the idea of external objects or systems being a necessity in identity formation or destabilization in her theories regarding abjection, Grosz

⁴¹ Moseley-Christian, Michelle. 2010. “Seventeenth-Century Pronk Poppenhuisen: Domestic Space and the Ritual Function of Dutch Dollhouses for Women.” *Home Cultures* 7 (3): 341–63. Page 345.

⁴² Broomhall, Susan, and Jennifer Spinks. 2016. *Early Modern Women in the Low Countries : Feminizing Sources and Interpretations of the Past*. London: Routledge.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

attests that these physical objects and signifying systems are critical in the development of a stable identity.⁴⁵ While Kristeva is not preoccupied with stability, Grosz instead determines, “The interlocking of bodies and signifying systems is the precondition both of an ordered, [and] relatively stable identity,” suggesting that identifying with something on the outside of one’s self is vital for a stable identity.⁴⁶ The review of abjection by Grosz acts as supporting evidence for the importance of the pronk poppenhuis in identity formation. This research aids in emphasizing that the real systems of the Dutch Republic, such as their banking, educational, religious, and trade systems, as signified in the pronk poppenhuis. Non-coincidentally, all of those systems are replicated and symbolized in the pronk poppenhuis. This gives the pronk poppenhuis the ability to even morph into one of those very systems itself.

As previously noted, constructing and curating a dollhouse of this kind required travel to various countries, interaction among major societal systems, and transactions within a range of markets. The *Pronk Poppenhuis de Patronella Dunois* is possibly among the first instances in the Dutch Republic in which we see a major commission completely managed by a soon-to-be-wife.⁴⁷ The bodies of these women form interlocking bonds with the signifying systems of the Dutch community, such as the pronk poppenhuis and its rooms, first contributing to the order of this society, and secondly engaging these women in spaces they would not normally be invited to occupy. This all aids in the formation of a stable identity for these women in prestigious and male coded environments. Dunois and others would seasonally and annually redecorate the interiors of these pronk poppenhuis, representing their contemporary awareness and showcasing

⁴⁵ Grosz, Elizabeth. 2014. *Abjection, Melancholia and Love: The Work of Julia Kristeva*. Edited by John Fletcher

⁴⁶ Ibid, Page 81.

⁴⁷ Moseley-Christian, Michelle. 2010. “Seventeenth-Century Pronk Poppenhuisen: Domestic Space and the Ritual Function of Dutch Dollhouses for Women.” *Home Cultures* 7 (3): 341–63. Page 347.

their style and taste.⁴⁸ This redecorating not only confirmed their ability to remain current with the trends of the period, but it represented just how infiltrative they were in Amsterdam. This redecoration would more commonly put them in the presence of superior male craftsmen, proving to those exact men that their agency had been established through this dollhouse enough to genuinely maintain the object while reinserting themselves into these male industries following the initial construction and curation.

Gaining insight through Grosz's analysis of signifying systems points a finger at how these dollhouses were multifaceted in their abilities to create conformity while concomitantly disrupting the boundaries which kept women in certain circles. This double-edged experience granted invitation to participate in the masculine ventures and decisions of their husbands. A signifying system that is represented in the pronk poppenhuis which established the agency of the commissioner is the lying-in room. The lying-in room was essentially an as-needed birthing chamber. Yet, in *Pronk Poppenhuis de Patronella Dunois*, that signifying system of the lying-in room is always present, acting as a permanent recognition of the power and agency of the commissioner as a woman, and of Dutch housewives as a whole. Through this signification of childbearing, the matriarchy can take an epicentral role in the pronk poppenhuis that was previously temporary in the full-scale home. Another one of these signifying systems we see in *Pronk Poppenhuis de Patronella Dunois* is the mobility of the structure, and the tortoise shell exterior elements that are present on this structure. It was a common understanding by the Dutch people that, "the ideal wife could be compared to the tortoise in that she conquered the

⁴⁸ Broomhall, Susan, and Jennifer Spinks. 2016. *Early Modern Women in the Low Countries : Feminizing Sources and Interpretations of the Past*. London: Routledge. Page 111.

home/world tension though the solution of the mobile home.”⁴⁹ With that, the actual materials such as tortoise shell, and the notion that this was a miniature home which could be transported, all brought to life this signifying system of the Dutch wife acting as a tortoise. Literally, and figuratively, she had designed a home which kept everything together under her shell while acting as a mobile reference to the order she maintained in her own household.

An additional signifying system found in the general construction of the cabinet itself is the cabinet doors which have square cut outs allowing viewing into the two largest rooms of *Pronk Poppenhuis de Patronella Dunois*. These openings in the cabinet doors first signify the system of “peeping” in the Dutch. This was a common concept in Amsterdam in the seventeenth century which would involve both the looking into of neighbor’s windows, but also the designing of a space as meant to be peered into. Instead of the Dutch being resistant to this notion of being on the outside and looking in, they embraced it by featuring floor-to-ceiling windows facing the streets of their canal home, with lavishly decorated interior rooms which were visible through these windows. This activates the panopticonic notion that an environment must be created that expects to be viewed at all times, even if it is not currently under speculation. Expectation of viewing is ever-present in the *Pronk Poppenhuis de Patronella Dunois*, as Dunois curates similar systems in her dollhouse that allowing viewing into certain rooms although the “doors are closed”. It is particularly interesting how this signifying system represented in the pronk poppenhuis establishes and destabilizes agency. By encouraging this fear of being monitored, the windows of the pronk poppenhuis aid in destabilizing agency in Dunois who uses them as a reference to her confidence in onlookers seeing inside of her home.

⁴⁹ Schama, Simon. 2014. *The Embarrassment of Riches: An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age*. New York: Vintage Books, A Division of Random House, Inc. Page 389.

This destabilizes her agency because she is neglecting her own agendas and marching to the beat the Republic's systems expect her to follow. However, simultaneously this inclusion establishes senses of agency in Dunois, because whereas these windows would normally highlight the parlor room in a full-size canal home, Dunois windows instead peer into the lying-in room and the banquet hall of this structure. This is no small difference, because it situates these two particularly female coded spaces as the most influential and visible spaces. A room like the lying-in room which would normally never be visible from the street, and only visible to those inside of the home for a few months every couple of years, was now put first and foremost in Dunois's curation, adding a novel sense of permanence and visibility to this matriarchal realm that it had never before been given.

Among these systems which the commissioner of the pronk poppenhuis was intertwined in, popularity of Dutch play and games is not to be overlooked, providing insight into the mature nature of adult play in this circumstance. The history of play and toys is a vibrant one in the Netherlands, and the ability to engage in play and take leisure time to enjoy games represented the amount of wealth one had. This is another interesting paradox in the Dutch Republic and Calvinists in the Republic, because although they distained achieving one's wealth through simple generational means, they valued the Dutch man who worked so efficiently and well that he could take time off and purchase the equipment to play a game with his family or fellows. Women and children engaged in these games as well, and often had games of their own.⁵⁰ Some of these incredibly wealthy women would even construct dairy farms and role play as if they were lower class citizens living a "simple life", although their attempts at these occasions were

⁵⁰ Dunthorne, Hugh. 1991. "Games and Godliness in Old Holland." *History Today* 41 (October): 25–31.

considerably more lavish. These women are now referred to as the “Dairy Queens” and are well recognized by the cups they used, which were shaped like a cows udder, or a breast.⁵¹ Grosz supports this notion of identity claiming through object driven performance writing as she writes, “The interlocking of bodies and signifying systems is the precondition both of an ordered, relatively stable identity.”⁵² The body of the Dutch person interlocks with the object of the toy, and in this case the body of the Dutch woman interlocks with the signifying system of the Dutch society, which is the pronk poppenhuis, all to achieve an ordered and relatively stable identity. This interlocking becomes crucial to the new identity formations within these games’ players, the same way that the teacup shaped like a cow udder becomes a signifying system to the milk farms, however improperly, reshaping its drinker’s identity. This history of toys and role playing’s popularity in Baroque Dutch society displays the interest that the people had in achieving higher status identities through the ability to play and purchase equipment.

What this rich culture of play also depicts is the Dutch people’s interest in mature play, a concept legitimized by Katriina Heljakka, Doctor of Digital Culture Studies, who advocates generally for the proper research, denotation, and recognition of adult role playing objects as mature experiences beyond that of collection or adolescent play.⁵³ This is vital to note, considering that interaction with the pronk poppenhuis should never be connotated as a child’s exercise, and that understanding of “play” must evolve and mature in scholarship. I connect these theories to those of Radway and Grosz, particularly when Heljakka discovers that, “the uses of

⁵¹ Martin, Meredith S. 2011. *Dairy Queens : The Politics of Pastoral Architecture from Catherine de Medici to Marie-Antoinette*. Massachusetts (Mass.): Harvard University Press.

⁵² Grosz, Elizabeth. 2014. *Abjection, Melancholia and Love: The Work of Julia Kristeva*. Edited by John Fletcher, Page 81.

⁵³ Heljakka, Katriina Irja. “More Than Collectors: Exploring Theorists’, Hobbyists’ and Everyday Players’ Rhetoric in Adult Play With Character Toys.” *Games and Culture* 13, no. 3 (2018): Pages 240–59.

toys at adult age represent more complex and multifaceted actions and relationships to play than the terms “collecting” and “hobbying” imply.”⁵⁴ Heljakka not only confirms that scholarship must re-evaluate the connotation of the term play, but it also supports the notion that something multifaceted is happening during this mature play. With this being said, the utmost value must be given to the maturity of the play that the seventeenth century burgher wife partakes in, having the real ability to complexify her agency. Patronella Dunois’s construction and other pronk poppenhuis cannot be understood as something a young girl used to learn about motherhood and wifery, especially being that most of the commissioners of these structures never bore children.⁵⁵ Instead, these structures were representations of the true and individual identities of each of these women, aiding them in growing their agency through the expression of themselves, while simultaneously feeling pressured to destabilize that agency through the conformity to systems represented in the pronk poppenhuis. If Dunois was in fact “playing” with her pronk poppenhuis, that play should be understood as an utterly serious examination of culture and female agency in seventeenth-century Dutch burgher life.

Interaction and play with the structures in one's environment is a factor in identity construction, but more notably a true necessity in maintaining a relatively stable identity within one's cultural spheres and one's own understanding of “self.”⁵⁶ Each of these theoretical approaches aids in the understanding of the interaction with these dollhouses as valid means for elevating a woman's status in her community, and internally, in the formation of a more stable

⁵⁴ Heljakka, Katriina Irja. “More Than Collectors: Exploring Theorists’, Hobbyists’ and Everyday Players’ Rhetoric in Adult Play With Character Toys.” *Games and Culture* 13, no. 3 (2018): Pages 240–59.

⁵⁵ Broomhall, Susan, and Jennifer Spinks. 2016. *Early Modern Women in the Low Countries : Feminizing Sources and Interpretations of the Past*. London: Routledge. Page 110.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

and complexly involved sense of agency. These claims illuminate the ways in which the pronk poppenhuis represents the ambitions of the Dutch Housewife, and Patronella Dunois specifically, but also how during commissioning and then once completed, the Dutch government's expectations continue to infiltrate identity.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Moseley-Christian, Michelle. 2010. "Seventeenth-Century Pronk Poppenhuisen: Domestic Space and the Ritual Function of Dutch Dollhouses for Women." *Home Cultures* 7 (3): 341–63. Page 358.

Chapter 4: *Pronk Poppenhuis De Patronella Dunois*; The Structure & It's Embellishments

Pronk Poppenhuis de Patronella Dunois and those of its likeness consist of collections of rooms inside of a large cabinet, shining light on the ways the burgher housewife met societal expectations of constant business and Calvinist requirements of cleanliness and orderliness.⁵⁸ Dunois' construction, first crafted separately in 1676 in France and then gradually decorated in Holland by Petronella herself, includes a peat room, a linen room for the servants to do the majority of the chores, a nursery, a lying-in room, a banquet hall, a wine cellar, a kitchen, and finally the most important room in Dutch seventeenth-century construction, the parlor room.⁵⁹ This particular pronk poppenhuis included designated spaces for dolls designed to look like slaves, also noted as the peat room.⁶⁰ Inside of these rooms not designated for slaves or servants, we find dense decoration, even to the point of the ceilings being heavily embellished with fine oil paintings. In the kitchen (middle room of the first floor) and linen room (middle room third floor), we find more servant-style dolls.⁶¹ These dolls are cued as servant dolls because of their simple clothing styles, and less complexly painted faces, with slightly darker complexions than the more lavishly dressed dolls in other rooms. The kitchen also contains a great deal of what can be assumed to represent Irish silver.⁶² This structure and its interior make up the pronk poppenhuis.

⁵⁸ Moseley-Christian, Michelle. 2010. "Seventeenth-Century Pronk Poppenhuisen: Domestic Space and the Ritual Function of Dutch Dollhouses for Women." *Home Cultures* 7 (3): 341–63, Page 355.

⁵⁹ Museum, Rijk. n.d. "Dolls' House of Petronella Dunois, Anonymous, C. 1676." Rijksmuseum. Accessed April 29, 2021.

⁶⁰ Steijn, Jordy. 2013. "Dutch Slavery: Our Dark Past." *DutchReview*. July 20, 2013.

⁶¹ Society, National Geographic. 2013. "Dutch Dollhouse." National Geographic Society. July 25, 2013..

⁶² *Ibid*.

The peat room, also understood as the slave's quarters, is distinguished by the small size of the room, and the presence of peat and woven baskets. This room is further recognized as the slave's quarters because it includes the least decorated doll, dressed comparatively simple and having the darkest complexion, with barely any details featured on the doll's face. It is important to note that this peat room had a multitude of symbolism to the Dutch people, as the peat room further displayed another source of Dutch pride. This room signified their resiliency against the European wide firewood shortage, through their proper cultivation of burnable peat, which provided a much-needed heat source in the home, but also sent a global message of the Dutch's insistence on survival and success.⁶³ The inclusion of these rooms and the real-life implications and functionality of each room and doll that inhabits it support the bolstered cultural awareness of what a well-kept home required. It was a necessity for the housewife to maintain strict order over the help in order for the household matriarchy to remain strong, and this is prominently displayed for guests of Dunois and commissioners alike to see through her pronk poppenhuis in the peat room.

Jun Nakamura, PhD candidate of Dutch and Flemish printmaking, also forefronts research on the pronk poppenhuis in his examination of the materials and embellishments of the dollhouse in relation to the prominent trade cultural of the Dutch Republic.⁶⁴ Although trade was extraordinarily important to the Dutch, and the pronk poppenhuis, I contend that this inspection neglects to fully discuss the female role involved in the commissioning of these pieces. This study by Nakamura better captures the entirety of the dollhouse as a physical structure than

⁶³ Zeeuw, J.W. 1978. *PEAT and the DUTCH GOLDEN AGE*. Afdeling Agrarische Geschiedenis, Landbouwhogeschool.

⁶⁴ Nakamura, Jun. 2019. *It's a Small World: The Dollhouse in the Seventeenth-Century Netherlands*. www.leidenartsinsocietyblog.nl. Accessed March 22

others on the pronk poppenhuis, but it also takes a closer look at how culture can be understood through these objects improperly labelled as “collections”. Nakamura takes us through single objects in these few surviving dollhouses of the seventeenth-century Dutch Republic, relating each of these items to a facet of global trade, further expanding upon the Netherland’s place in seventeenth-century global economy, and how these foreign items were then represented once imported safely back to Amsterdam.⁶⁵ Although, in taking this more global and trade economy focused approach, expansion is limited regarding complex connections pointing towards the female’s role in the Dutch Republic. Considering the deep inspecting of items by Nakamura, meanwhile applying the lesser explored lens of female ambitions during the time, creates an opportunity to discuss conceptualizations of destabilizing and establishing agency in burgher housewives.

The exaggeration of matriarchal spaces and lack of patriarchal spaces plays an important role in the Dutch household, and for the Dutch mother, made explicitly apparent in the pronk poppenhuis. In many ways sought to mimic that exact structure the family lived in, including the same rooms you might find in a full-scale canal home, as well as the cost of building. The lying-in room was the room in which the wife gave birth and recovered post-delivery.⁶⁶ This lying-in room in the *Pronk Poppenhuis de Patronella Dunois* is also exceedingly embellished, providing an accurate representation of how the actual lying-in room of a Dutch home would appear, giving weight to the mother’s important role as child-bearer in seventeenth-century Dutch culture. It is no exaggeration to say that not a single matriarchal detail of the decorations was

⁶⁵ Nakamura, Jun. “The Miniature Logic of the Seventeenth- Century Dutch ...” *Art in Society*, Universiteit Leiden, 2020.

⁶⁶ Moseley-Christian, Michelle. 2010. “Seventeenth-Century Pronk Poppenhuisen: Domestic Space and the Ritual Function of Dutch Dollhouses for Women.” *Home Cultures* 7 (3): 341–63. Page 347.

overlooked by these Burgher wives during the pronk poppenhuis's commissioning.⁶⁷ What this dollhouse did *not* have were patriarchal spaces, particularly the husband's study, which was a room commonly featured in any full-scale canal home in Amsterdam. This lack of male designated space further emphasizes the creation as representing the matriarchal power of these women, and the agency they held through maintaining a strong and well-kept household. In the kitchen (middle room first floor) of *Pronk Poppenhuis de Patronella Dunois* there is even a little dog present. The presence of a domestic animal was very important in the Dutch culture, being that they advocated seriously to own pets and treat them as children, simulating the maintaining of larger responsibilities. Patronella included items as specific and symbolic as the home pet, so it is safe to assume that she did not simply overlook patriarchal spaces, but rather chose to neglect their inclusion in leu of taking more time to represent her ability to maintain an orderly home under Calvinist standards of the Dutch Republic. The expression of this orderliness would gain her greater freedoms in her marriage, and the pronk poppenhuis uses its individual inclusions and functionality of spaces to show the matriarchal force and power of the home she intends to uphold. These dollhouses functioned as large show pieces, depicting the perfect miniaturized household which the owner of the pronk poppenhuis would use as a representation of her own industriousness, both expressing a following of and simultaneous warping of the many standards surrounding levels of agency these wives were allowed to have in the Netherlands.^{68 69}

⁶⁷ Blanc, Jan. 2020. *Dutch Golden Age(S): The Shaping of a Cultural Community*. Turnhout: Brepols.

⁶⁸ Moseley-Christian, Michelle. 2010. "Seventeenth-Century Pronk Poppenhuisen: Domestic Space and the Ritual Function of Dutch Dollhouses for Women." *Home Cultures* 7 (3): 341–63. Page 355.

⁶⁹ Museum, Rijk. n.d. "Dolls' House of Petronella Dunois, Anonymous, C. 1676." Rijksmuseum. Accessed April 29, 2021.

Pronk poppenhuis of the seventeenth century put special emphasis into the parlor room.⁷⁰ This room, both in the full-scale home and the pronk poppenhuis, would boast an abundant art collection. The typical pronk poppenhuis would impress its viewers by showcasing an array of foreign goods in this parlor room. Chinese and Japanese porcelain, Turkish rugs, and French stylized hand crafted miniature furniture embellished the parlor room of Dunois' pronk poppenhuis.⁷¹ Virtually no expense was spared in these dollhouses which represented something that was paramount to the Dutch culture in totality – a proper and ordered home under the direction of an ambitious and capable wife and mother.⁷² Specifically, the *Pronk Poppenhuis de Patronella Dunois* acts as a direct look into the ambitions of the seventeenth-century housewife of the Dutch Republic.

Intense embellishment and decoration of *Pronk Poppenhuis de Patronella Dunois* and those of its likeness, particularly the parlor room of each, holds symbolism well supplemented by research done on Dutch still life paintings of the seventeenth century. Like still life painting of the time, the parlor rooms of the pronk poppenhuis are packed with foreign expensive items, all carrying various symbolisms, providing explanation for each of these items that is not present in research regarding the pronk poppenhuis. The paintings on the walls of the parlor room in the pronk poppenhuis have a layered message, first beginning with their obvious religious connotation. There are seven miniature oil paintings crammed onto the walls of this small space, and of the three on the back facing wall, two of them are obvious depictions of Madonna and

⁷⁰ Moseley-Christian, Michelle. 2010. "Seventeenth-Century Pronk Poppenhuisen: Domestic Space and the Ritual Function of Dutch Dollhouses for Women." *Home Cultures* 7 (3): 341–63. Pages 344-45.

⁷¹ Broomhall, Susan. n.d. "Hidden Women of History: Petronella Oortman and Her Giant Dolls' House." *The Conversation*. Accessed March 22, 2021

⁷² Moseley-Christian, Michelle. 2010. "Seventeenth-Century Pronk Poppenhuisen: Domestic Space and the Ritual Function of Dutch Dollhouses for Women." *Home Cultures* 7 (3): 341–63. Page 352.

Child. These miniaturized paintings were meant to mimic the popularized Italian oil paintings of the time, relating this inclusion to that of a foreign item in a still life painting, meant to boast the wealth of the commissioner who might not be able to have those foreign items in true full-scale in the home, but can have them painted and displayed as a type of fabricated ownership of the same concept. In this case, Patronella is boasting her ability to pack her home with fine Italian oil paintings, although she most likely had not traveled to Italy to retrieve them.⁷³ In relation to the burgher wife being a Calvinist, this feature of the pronk poppenhuis can key researchers into the importance of practicing religion in a social and cultural manner during the seventeenth century in the Dutch Republic. In actuality, a true Calvinist would have preferred white-washed walls and the destruction of all iconographies.⁷⁴ However, a Calvinist wife in the Dutch Republic is often caught in the paradoxical crossfire between what it actually means to be a faithful Calvinist, and what can show society how faithful she might be, and she often chooses the later. In that case, in a Calvinist context, such paintings would be unlikely to have religious significance, yet they would still invoke the sophistication of opulence regarding Italian high art. In the same stroke, this wife is displaying that if she were to choose any fine Italian paintings, she would majority chose those with religious connotation, resituating her in the eyes of the Republic and her husband as a good Calvinist wife.

A collection of various teapots is also commissioned for this room, one silver and the other two Chinese porcelain. Teapots were a common subject in the still life paintings of the Dutch during this period, in celebration that the Dutch were still able to obtain small amounts of

⁷³ Schama, Simon. 2014. *The Embarrassment of Riches: An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age*. New York: Vintage Books, A Division of Random House, Inc. Page 304.

⁷⁴ “Art: Calvinist Iconoclasm - Annenberg Learner.” 2019. Annenberg Learner. 2019.

expensive Japanese tea during a global Chinese and Japanese tea shortage.⁷⁵ This Chinese porcelain in the parlor room had various symbolism attached to its presence, another being the ability of the Dutch to open new trade routes between the Dutch East India Company into the Asian trade routes. Prior to this agreement between the Chinese and Dutch, Chinese porcelain, noted for its beautiful blue streaks featured on top of a white base, was secluded to the collections of royal families, until the Dutch trade company made this item accessible to higher level merchants throughout the globe.⁷⁶ The expanding of the trade between the Chinese and other regions was a massive source of pride for the Dutch, but what was also important to the Dutch was this newfound ability to own yet another thing that seemed out of their reach. Therefore, the featuring of this Chinese porcelain in the parlor room of *Pronk Poppenhuis De Patronella Dunois* works on various levels to establish the wife's immense wealth in being able to own such foreign items, as well as her contemporary knowledge of trade systems and art markets during her time, but also her true pride in being a Dutch citizen. This inclusion not only points directly to the popular still lifes of the time, but it supports that these wives had deep knowledge of the trade processes and success of Amsterdam. As Dunois and commissioners of pronk poppenhuis alike assemble the complicated array of goods in their dollhouses, their agency is bolstered up as they are able to show their cultural prowess and independent decorative decision-making.

There is direct supplemental research to be provided by the popular still life painting, *Still Life with Roemer, Tipped Tazza, and Broken Glass* by Willem Claesz Heda, to the parlor room

⁷⁵Hochstrasser, Julie. 2007. *Still Life and Trade in the Dutch Golden Age*. New Haven Conn.; London: Yale University Press.

⁷⁶ Ibid, Page 122.

of *Pronk Poppenhuis de Patronella Dunois*. Heda depicts disarray and the loss of virtue through the tipping and breaking of drinking glasses in his painting, meaning to act as a warning to those who over-indulge in the luxuries of life without paying proper thanks to God. This still life painting provides perspective on the objects that are present in the pronk poppenhuis, proving valuable additional documentation to these interior items.⁷⁷ On the contrary, Dunois, a citizen who would have been very aware of this trope in Dutch still life paintings of the time, arranged her parlor room in the opposite fashion, abundantly yet carefully placing miniaturized glassware all over the coffee table. This works to display her piety as well as her ability to maintain an orderly home even when it is full of guests, being that the parlor room has the second highest amount of doll figures in the structure - two men and two younger boys.⁷⁸ At first glance it might seem paradoxical that the Dutch housewife would be attempting to portray herself as pious at all turns, and yet is spending exorbitant amounts on a true abundance of items, although there is a way the wealthy Calvinists of the seventeenth century in the Dutch Republic would levee this contradiction. Many times, as long as one could actively denote that all came from the lord, they would frequently operate under the reversed notion that the wealth and abundance they owned was a portrayal of how faithful a life they were living, and if God wished to truly bless them or not.⁷⁹ In this way, we can assume that Patronella did not feel guilty for her commissioning and display of these rare and expensive goods in her pronk poppenhuis, but rather each one of these miniaturized items confirmed her high level of piety expressed externally. This is where the simultaneous destabilization and establishment of agency takes place, while the commissioner is

⁷⁷ Hochstrasser, Julie. 2007. *Still Life and Trade in the Dutch Golden Age*. New Haven Conn.; London: Yale University Press. Page 85.

⁷⁸ Museum, Rijk. n.d. "Dolls' House of Petronella Dunois, Anonymous, C. 1676." Rijksmuseum. Accessed April 29, 2021.

⁷⁹ Schama, Simon. 2014. *The Embarrassment of Riches: An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age*. New York: Vintage Books, A Division of Random House, Inc.

caught in the tug-o-war game between their own autonomous preferences, and the crushing pressure to perform obediently to both the written and unspoken laws of the Dutch Republic's government and Calvinism.

Reincorporating Radway's discussion on one's interaction with their environment forming their perception, the lying-in room can provide evidence for the established agency of Patronella Dunois. The lying-in room in the Dutch Republic of the seventeenth century was a type of birthing room that was only set up, when need be, usually positioned in the most comfortable and well heated room in the home.⁸⁰ The temporality of this room in full-scale versus the permanence of the designated matriarchal space in Dunois's curation emphasizes the importance of the matriarchy, even though Dunois herself never had children. Although Dunois did not experience childbirth herself, and even though the lying-in room was only a temporary set up in the full-size home, Dunois along with other commissioners of pronk poppenhuis were recognizing and promoting the importance of matriarchal spaces inside of their structure. The lying-in room was fore fronted on the main floor, acting as one of the two visible rooms from the cut-out windows of the closed cabinet doors. By the neglecting of emphasis on male spaces and instead highly recognizing and making permanent the previously temporary matriarchal spaces, the *Pronk Poppenhuis de Patronella Dunois* alters the perception of the commissioner, leading her to believe she has greater agency, presence, and permanence in her household, and thus her society. This communication between the Dutch Burgher wife and the pronk poppenhuis forms a perception in the wife that she can make her own decisions and lead a strong matriarchy in the home.

⁸⁰ Broomhall, Susan, and Jennifer Spinks. 2016. *Early Modern Women in the Low Countries : Feminizing Sources and Interpretations of the Past*. London: Routledge. Page 115.

The lying-in room is interesting in a variety of other ways due to its interior items. One of those inclusions is the main mantle painting on the back wall of the room, which is a Dutch still life painting of a peeled lemon. This subject matter was arguably the most popular in Dutch still life paintings of the time and showcased the Dutch artist's ability to mimic the textured skin and coiling peel of a semi-peeled lemon.⁸¹ Dunois featuring this still life of a semi-peeled lemon in the lying-in room symbolizes both her destabilization and establishment of agency through the pronk poppenhuis. It first symbolizes her destabilization of agency through her conformity to the popular trends of Dutch still-life art of the time, and through her recognition of the importance of her body as a hopefully fruitful entity. The fact that Dunois herself never had children makes this idea even more crystalline, inferring that regardless of her lack of emotional connection to a child or experience mothering, she was still made to feel the crushing importance of motherhood and order in the Dutch home. Although, the location of this painting symbolizes the establishment of her agency by situating the most important subject in Dutch art within the room in which the most important role in Dutch housewifery occurs. This positions the mother and her duties as the most important, regardless of the actual action of childbirth or mothering. The housewife mothers the entire home, all of its interior, and all who chose to enter, and she promises to do this in an orderly fashion through her commissioning and decorating of the pronk poppenhuis.

The nursery room (right room third floor) further perpetuates the importance of matriarchal spaces in *Pronk Poppenhuis de Patronella Dunois* due to its inclusion of a bed. The bed is a rather significant piece of furniture in the seventeenth century, and often times in the

⁸¹ Hochstrasser, Julie. 2007. *Still Life and Trade in the Dutch Golden Age*. New Haven Conn. ; London: Yale University Press.

Dutch Republic's canal homes the bed was the most expensive piece of furniture in the home.⁸² The nursery and the lying-in room are the only two rooms in the pronk poppenhuis that have a bed, marking the matriarchal significance and functionality of each of these rooms. There is no room present which might be noted as a bedroom for husband and wife, yet there are two spaces designated for the living and sleeping of mother and child. This representation of importance of these rooms and roles provides yet another platform for the discussion of destabilizing and establishing agency. Dunois's agency is destabilized as she creates a structure pre-marriage which makes her feel the pressure by the Dutch Republic to bare children, although she may not want to have children. However, in concert, this inclusion of a bed in the nursery and lying-in room further distinguishes the importance of the matriarchal roles in the structure and order of the home. Even if Patronella has no intent of having children, she further gains the trust of those around her through her display of motherliness in her pronk poppenhuis. She then can use this trust to gain greater agency in her marriage, which Dunois successfully attains without children, and without divorce.

Acting as one of the first possible instances in which women could own property, in addition to the author of the object being the wife herself, these pronk poppenhuis are clearly pointing to something grander scale and more inspiring: the message of female industriousness, the rise of women towards more seen and heard positions in their community, and the clear understanding of the wives' importance in these cultures. Besides taking more care to understand an expensive commission as more than a toy, we must now understand these women as more than just wives and mothers.

⁸² Schama, Simon. 2014. *The Embarrassment of Riches: An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age*. New York: Vintage Books, A Division of Random House, Inc. Page 316.

Chapter 5: Closing - Complicating Identity & Maturing the Connotation of Toy

As stated previously, in many cases, especially in modern literature, seventeenth-century Dutch dollhouses lack research which is rooted in the Dutch wife's role in the commissioning and owning of these structures. While I am pleased by the few scholars who have pioneered examinations of the seventeenth century pronk poppenhuis, I also urge for a more holistic approach to understanding these figures as legitimate references of a cultural role – the housewife. I strive for an exploration of the commissioning and design of these dollhouses to be understood through the female lens. This unique approach also allows greater insight into the women who had real influence in seventeenth-century Dutch culture. The role of the strong female in Northern Europe during this era is brought to light through close reading of the pronk poppenhuis in this way, and the burgher wife is able to be explored as the ambitious and industrious citizen she was – a true part of her community's culture.

By moving past the more immediate relationships this dollhouse fosters, this study allows for a deeper look into the ways in which females in the Dutch Republic proved their worth through appearing industrious in all ways and forms, thus forfeiting their agency, while at the same time complicating their own identity and taking their autonomy back. The pronk poppenhuis was making a legitimate exertion towards female agency and conformity all in the same stroke, demonstrating the housewife's inclusion in foreign affairs, and granting greater regard for these figures in society who were formerly limited to the labels of wife or mother.

Previously restricted to crocheting at the front window, and tending to the children and maids, forced to remain steadfast in their designated roles, dependent on both their husbands and the Dutch Republic's government for security and survival, these wives reinvented their role through using the homemaking of the pronk poppenhuis to establish agency in their daily lives.⁸³ The pronk poppenhuis created a space for a whole new realm of existence for these housewives. Labels like regent, commissioner, owner, and decision-maker were arising from the pronk poppenhuis to newly describe the women who had expressed these behaviors all along. Finally given a vehicle to demonstrate the attention they had been paying to these larger systems at hand in seventeenth-century Netherlands, these wives granted themselves a seat at the table they themselves set.

⁸³ Schama, Simon. 2014. *The Embarrassment of Riches: An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age*. New York: Vintage Books, A Division of Random House, Inc.

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