

Imagined Domesticities in Early Modern Dutch Dollhouses*

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Early modern prescriptive literature about household spatial and social ordering primarily informs us of elite male views. Few contemporary sources exist to suggest women's notions about these issues. Early modern dollhouses could shed some light on the views of both sexes, as makers, patrons, and collectors of such objects. Such artefacts have rarely been considered a source for historic perceptions of households and family in scholarly analyses. In particular, by interpreting the meanings of extant structures, their furnishings, dolls, and surrounding documentation produced by the elite Dutch women who created and collected them in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, an important female-oriented vision of the idealised early modern household emerges.

Between 1674 and 1743, a tiny group of wealthy Dutch women created and collected exquisitely crafted dollhouses. The phenomenon appears to represent, in the Netherlands, a unique form of curiosity cabinet specifically created for a small cohort of women. This essay seeks to explore what possession of dollhouses meant for the four elite Dutch women whose cabinets, furnishing and in some cases dolls, as well as surrounding documentation, are still extant.¹ It analyses how ownership was displayed, valued, and memorialized by these women, in the context of the conventions established by earlier and contemporary dollhouses in Germany.² In addition, it examines how houses could reflect the aspirations and identities of creators through demarcation of household space and notions of domesticity. The

* I would like to thank Jet Pijzel-Domisse, Heidi A. Müller, Cedric Beidatsch, and Femme S. Gaastra for both technical and translation advice during the formulation of this essay.

1 Jet Pijzel-Domisse's important text, *Het Hollandse Pronkpoppenhuis: Interieur en huishouden in de 17de en 18de eeuw* (Amsterdam: Wanders Uitgevers/Rijksmuseum, 2000) includes information about the wider evidence of women's ownership of dollhouses in the United Provinces at this period. This essay focuses on those examples where the houses and archival sources still exist to be studied today.

2 Extant British baby houses date from the mid-eighteenth century (the Tate House on display at the Victoria and Albert Museum of Childhood, for example, dates from 1760) and are therefore not used comparatively in this study. http://www.vam.ac.uk/moc/collections/dolls_houses/tatebaby/index.html

passion for collecting dolls and miniature furnishings and creating the houses for them did not begin in the seventeenth-century United Provinces, but the distinct role of female owners in that country is worthy of closer investigation.

There has been little historical or gender analysis to date on the subject of early modern dollhouses. Yet dollhouses created and owned by elite Dutch women would seem a rare primary source available for study of how women might reflect or create ideas of household spatial arrangements, dynamics, and identities. Much of the existing literature on dollhouses has been written by museum curators, whose detailed inventories and historical context of the individual miniature objects are invaluable resources for the field.³ In this context, published literature has debated appropriate preservation as well as display techniques for the surviving houses. With successive dollhouse owners continuing to add to the original designs, the complications are considerable for modern museums determining which version of the house should be displayed.⁴ Dollhouses have also drawn scholarly attention from art historians, who are interested in what the cabinets may indicate about contemporary tastes and trends in domestic furnishing and clothing. Here, dollhouses are typically presented as descriptive artefacts with authentic links to the historical realities of seventeenth-century life.⁵ Thus, art historian Shirley Glubok writes that '[t]he dollhouse reflects the solid comfort of a wealthy burgher's house

3 There is extensive recent curatorial research, for example, of the Dutch material by Jet Pijzel-Dommissie, and Heidi A. Müller for the Nuremberg material. The authoritative texts are Pijzel-Dommissie, *Het Hollandse Pronkpoppenhuis*; and Müller, *Ein Idealhaushalt im Miniaturformat. Die Nürnberger Puppenhäuser des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Nürnberg: Kulturgeschichtliche Spaziergänge im Germanischen Nationalmuseum Bd 9, 2006). Although I have cited from the definitive works by Pijzel-Dommissie on most occasions, there is an earlier Dutch literature (containing some errors, clarifications, and debate about the owners of the houses) pertaining to these houses: I. H. van Eeghen, 'De twee poppenhuis van Sara Rothe', 'Het poppenhuis van Petronella Oortman', 'Het poppenhuis van Margaretha de Ruyter', *Amstelodamum*, 40, 1953, pp. 106–11, 113–17, and 137–41; Van Eeghen, 'Het poppenhuis van Petronella de la Court', *Amstelodamum*, 1960, pp. 159–67; C. W. Fock, 'Het poppenhuis van Petronella Dunois', *Bulletin van het Rijksmuseum*, 16, 1968, 130–33.

4 See for example the special edition of *Mededelingenblad*, 1–2, 1996 containing articles from the 1995 Haarlem symposium, *Het Poppenhuis als kunstkabinet: Conserven en verantwoord presenteren*.

5 T. H. Lunsingh Scheurleer, 'The Dutch and their Homes in the Seventeenth Century', in *Arts of the Anglo-America Community of the Seventeenth Century*, ed. Ian M. G. Quimby (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1975), pp. 13–42. This is also illustrated in titles such as Flora Gill Jacobs's *A History of Doll Houses: Four Centuries of the Domestic World in Miniature*, (New York: Charles Scribner, 1953, repr. 1965).

on one of Amsterdam's canals in the late seventeenth century.⁶ In this way, Dutch dollhouses have been not infrequently cited as evidence to suggest the interior furnishings of early modern Dutch houses. Art historian Nanette Salomon has critiqued a similar trend in the perception of Dutch domestic painting for, as she argues, these works, and Jan Steen's vision of 'domesticity' particularly, 'were far from disinterested and accidental reflections of contemporary mores but rather worked actively within a social construction to fabricate the shifting terms of the norm.'⁷ For both dollhouses and paintings, visual immediacy has often been dangerously beguiling to scholars of the Golden Age.

In this essay, I want to question whether dollhouses can be read so neatly as historical mirrors providing descriptive evidence of upper-class homes and treat them instead as historical texts that offer insights in a gender analysis of early modern culture. Concerning historic dollhouses, James E. Bryan has recently argued that they 'function as virtual realities; they are representations of human environments wherein lives may be imagined, possessions held, and existence shaped in ways perhaps unavailable in full scale'.⁸ In his analysis of miniaturization in *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard has argued that the smaller the space, the more the owner can feel that they possess and control it. As he contended, 'values become condensed and enriched in miniature.'⁹ Read as an artefact of cultural history, what did possession of a dollhouse mean for its owner? What can the other materials documenting the early modern creation of dollhouses, such as their depictions in art, or recording in notebooks and inventories, reveal about the meaning and experience of ownership of these objects? How might a collection of these 'texts' be analysed to inform us about early modern concepts of domestic space and identities?

6 'The Dollhouse of Petronella de la Court', *Antiques*, 137.2, Feb 1990, 488–501, p. 489.

7 Salomon, "'There's No Place like Home': Jan Steen and Domestic Ideology", in her *Shifting Priorities: Gender and Genre in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Painting* (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2004), pp. 51–62 (p. 52).

8 James E. Bryan III, *Material Culture in Miniature: Historic Dollhouses Reconsidered* (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2003), p. 2.

9 *The Poetics of Space* (New York: Orion Books, 1974), p. 150, also cited by Bryan, *Material Culture in Miniature*, p. 21.

Didactic Texts: Child's Play and Elite Display

Dollhouses promoted a variety of social messages, aimed at differing audiences. Certainly for children, dollhouses appear to have served as didactic tools for young girls of elite families, providing them with an instructional forum for the organization of household space, and allowing them mechanisms to role-play their responsibilities as the mistress of a patrician household. Simon Schama has argued that early modern Dutch culture was obsessed with the actions of children and that analysis of their games was an activity that engaged artists and humanists alike. Both writers and painters perceived children's games as a forum for didactic messages.¹⁰ Emblem books, a popular genre in seventeenth-century Dutch culture, are an especially rich source for exploration of these ideas.¹¹ The engravings in Jacob Cats' 1628 text, *Kinderspel*, showed girls playing house with dolls, and creating an imaginary kitchen with pots, pans and utensils. Cats' commentary offered Dutch women participation in the national project through their duties to clean and manage household space, Schama has argued.¹² In this sense, patrician dollhouses were no more than a sumptuous extension of girls' pastimes of household role-playing more generally. The earliest extant Southern German examples all appear to fall into this category.¹³

One example of a Nuremberg dollhouse that was intended for the edification of children is that of Anna Köferlin, known to us now only through an pamphlet. In 1631, the childless widow from Nuremberg published a small pamphlet advertisement charging visitors to see a dollhouse that she had created. Among her claims, Köferlin suggested that the house could serve as a useful tool to demonstrate household duties and proper domestic order to young children. As her pamphlet argued:

10 *The Embarrassment of Riches: An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age* (London: Collins, 1987), p. 504.

11 John Landwehr, *Emblem and fable books printed in the Low Countries, 1542–1813: A Bibliography*, 3rd edn (Utrecht: HES, 1988).

12 *The Embarrassment of Riches*, p. 511. Schama's interpretations of the position of women in the Dutch Golden Age have not been unchallenged by feminist scholars. See for example the contributions to this field by authors in *Women of the Golden Age: An International Debate on Women in Seventeenth-Century Holland, England and Italy*, eds Els Kloek, Nicoel Teeuwen, and Marijke Huisman (Hilversum: Verloren, 1994).

13 For details of the Nuremberg houses, see texts by Leonie von Wilckens, *Das Puppenhaus: Von Spiegelbild des bürgerlichen Hausstandes zum Spielzug für Kinder* (Munich: Georg D. W. Callwey, 1978); and more recently by Müller, *Ein Idealhaushalt im Miniaturformat*.

Therefore, dear little children, study everything carefully, how all is well ordered, so that it will provide a good lesson, and when finally you have your own house and God gives you your own hearth, which will become the work of your life and love, you will be able to organize everything in your household in a proper way. Then you will understand what your beloved parents have tried to tell you: that a house that is in disorder reflects the disorder of its housekeeper's mind. Come and look at the *Kinderhaus* children, both inside and out, look and learn how everything should be arranged in a house. See the arrangement of the living-rooms, the kitchen and the bedrooms, so that you will learn lessons for the future. See how complicated a well-ordered house is. Thus, when it comes to the appropriate time, many of you will have learned how to manage each thing. Look around you, look behind you, and see how many hundreds of items have been brought together for your instruction, from bedclothes to wardrobes, tin, copper, and brass and everything correctly made, so that although very small, it could actually be used for its appropriate purpose. Every single piece that you see is absolutely necessary in a properly run home. It has living rooms, kitchen and bedrooms and even its corn loft. The stringed instruments, whether lutes or fiddles, can be played, and if you are feeling joyful, you can make them sing. You will find in a corner, arranged in order, such books as would be found in a library, and there is also an armoury where all types of weapons can be seen, pistols, rapiers, daggers and whatever else is needed. There is also armour for men and horses, and every kind of weapon of war, which will be seen with so much wonder that you might forget yourself and stand with your mouth open in amazement.¹⁴

Interestingly, what is also suggested by both the image and text of Anna Köferlin's pamphlet is that this dollhouse at least was aimed at both boys and girls. She argued that both could draw knowledge from its form, and suggested that its furnishings might appeal to both sexes.

Other dollhouses seem to have been intended quite clearly as adult possessions with little or no connection to a real or imagined juvenile audience. These houses were often made as exclusive commissioned artworks for individual collectors. One of the best documented is that of Albrecht V of Bavaria who in 1558 ordered a cabinet house to add to his collection of five miniature towns. Although Albrecht's dollhouse was destroyed by fire in 1674, it was inventoried and described on several occasions.¹⁵ Albrecht's cabinet house was included amongst a range of miniature curiosities held in his *kunstkammer*, in which 6000 different objects

14 trans. Cedric Beidatsch; original 1631 text cited in Wilckens, *Das Puppenhaus*, pp. 14–16.

15 The inventory of the cabinet made by Johann Baptist Fickler, in 1598, as part of Albrecht's *kunstkammer*, is provided in detail in Wilckens, pp. 8–12.

were documented for the 1598 inventory, and appears to have represented the ducal family in a form of idealized court.¹⁶ The fame of such Southern German miniature houses extended across Europe. Lodewijk Huygens, son of the erudite scholar Constantijn, recorded in his diary in 1652 that the Lord Mayor of London reportedly held two Nuremberg houses amongst the possessions proudly displayed to his visitors.¹⁷ Here, the interest in miniaturization intertwined with contemporary fashions for scientific collections and other kinds of curios.¹⁸ It was after all in this era that the scientific elite was marvelling at the new discoveries to be made in miniature through Van Leeuwenhoek's magnifying lenses, and that artists were experimenting with the science of visual effects to be gained from the camera obscura. It is tempting to see a continuum between the scientific pursuit of visual effect in art such as Samuel Van Hoogstraten's *perspectyfkas* of a Dutch domestic interior (late 1650s) and the appreciation of a scientific collector in the precise miniaturized art of a dollhouse.¹⁹

On some occasions, intentions could also overlap, with luxuriously appointed dollhouses being commissioned by elite patrons as presents for children.²⁰ Extant examples of the Southern German dollhouses appear to have been constructed for patrician families keen to celebrate their wealth by owning and sumptuously furnishing a cabinet house, which was then a child's object of (careful) play. Another, no longer extant, dollhouse was commissioned by Anna, the Electress of Saxony. In 1572 she ordered a model as a Christmas gift for her three daughters. The kitchen was particularly worthy of contemporary note, containing 71 bowls, 40 meat-plates, 106 other plates, 36 spoons and 28 egg-cups, all made of pewter. While the house was intended as a mirror of the wealth of the family, it also offered an instructional dimension in which the girls could be taught to present the pewter as brightly polished as silver.²¹ In these situations, the objects served several purposes

16 On Albrecht's artistic collection, see Lorenz Seelig, 'The Munich Kunstkammer 1565–1807', in *The Origins of Museums: The Cabinet of Curiosities in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Europe*, eds Oliver Impey and Arthur MacGregor (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), pp. 76–89

17 Pijzel-Dommisse, *Het Hollandse Pronkpoppenhuis*, p. 17.

18 The most detailed studies of this phenomenon remain those in *The Origins of Museums*, eds Impey and MacGregor.

19 Van Hoogstraten, *Perspective box with Dutch Interior*, National Gallery, London, and discussion in Mariët Westermann, *A Worldly Art: The Dutch Republic, 1585–1718* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), p. 84.

20 Pijzel-Dommisse, *Het Hollandse Pronkpoppenhuis*, pp. 73–74.

21 King, *The Collector's History of Dollhouses*, p. 34.

simultaneously, merging aims and interests of both adults and children. They were not only displays of affluence and didactic texts, but also objects of enjoyment to both their juvenile users and adult patrons, who like Anna Köferlin and Anna of Saxony delighted in organizing the details of their appointment.

References to dollhouses in account books and inventories can be traced, and these provide some indications as to the cost, and therefore intended use, of the individual objects. Cheaper, sometimes mass-produced, models are less well documented and seem more likely to have been intended as a child's plaything. Exquisite handcrafted items often by the leading craftsmen, designers, and artists of the day, individually detailed in notebooks, were more probably considered artworks for adult consumption in their own right. Yet even within dollhouses owned by women, miniature cupboards of dolls and furniture were located within the nursery of the dollhouses,²² as though their owners were well aware of the common understanding of the juvenile intent of such toys. Indeed it is this tension between the adult object of luxury and the evident enjoyment of a child's plaything that makes the Dutch women's dollhouses such a fascinating source for analysis of adult women's realms of fantasy.

Women Owning Dollhouses

In this essay, it is not whether individual cabinets were created initially for children or adults that is of prime interest, but instead, the interplay between adult and juvenile interests in how dollhouses were used in the hands of specific female owners in the United Provinces during the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The phenomenon of female creation and possession does not appear to be replicated among German dollhouse collectors. It is these mercantile and elite adult women who created personal visions of households for what appears to be their own amusement, who are the focus of this essay.²³ Five particularly well-documented dollhouses, owned by four women, are examined here.²⁴ Petronella de la Court's dollhouse, was created *c.* 1674, and is now in the Centraal Museum

22 Pijzel-Dommisse, *Het Hollandse Pronkpoppenhuis*, p. 24 and illustration, fig. 12, p. 23.

23 Many more are documented in inventories as Pijzel-Dommisse indicates (*Het Hollandse Pronkpoppenhuis*, pp. 18–22).

24 At least one further contemporary dollhouse, that of Maria van Egmond van de Nijenburg, exists in the Westfries Museum. However, I have been unable to obtain sufficient visual and other evidence to include it in this study. See J. Pijzel-Dommisse, 'Het poppenhuis van Maria van Egmond van de Nijenburg', *Kleinbehuisd*, eds L. Bas and V. J. Nobel (Hoorn: Stichting Vrienden van het Westfries Museum, 1998), pp. 15–18.

in Utrecht²⁵; a second example was created around 1676, for Petronella Dunois, and now stands in the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, where a third cabinet house, created between about 1686 and 1705 for Petronella Oortman, a wealthy widow, who married an Amsterdam silk merchant, Johannes Brandt, is also to be found.²⁶ The fourth and fifth dollhouses considered here belonged to Sara Rothé. She reconstituted her two extant houses from three cabinets she had bought at auction in 1743, and from other materials she sourced or specifically commissioned. One is now displayed in the Frans Hals Museum, Haarlem, and the other is held by the Gemeentemuseum in The Hague.²⁷

The women who owned elaborate houses shared a number of characteristics: they were elite, some were related, and two had no children. Petronella Dunois was the daughter of a high official at the Stadtholder's court in The Hague, and niece of Petronella de la Court.²⁸ She married the Leiden regent, Pieter van Groenendijck, in 1677. Dunois' house passed to a female cousin of her husband. Sara Rothé was born in Amsterdam in 1699, the daughter of a banker, and married a wealthy merchant, Jacob Ploos van Amstel. The couple had no children and at least one dollhouse passed to Jacob's niece Anna Margaretha in 1760.²⁹ Not all luxurious cabinets belonged to childless wealthy women however. Born in Leiden, in 1649, in a well-to-do patrician family, Petronella de la Court married Adam Oortmans, and lived in Amsterdam where Oortmans owned a brewery called The Swan. The cabinet passed to her third daughter Petronella Oortmans upon her death in 1707.³⁰ Indeed, another elite collector whose dollhouse no longer remains, Wendela Bicker, wife of the Dutch statesman Johan de Witt, also documented a fine miniature house in her account book over a twelve-year period from 1655 to 1667, while raising

25 Images of De la Court's house can be seen at: <http://www.centraalmuseum.nl/page.ocl?mode=&version=&pageid=291>

26 Images of Dunois' and Oortman's houses can be seen at: http://www.rijksmuseum.nl/aria/aria_assets/BK-14656?lang=en; and http://www.rijksmuseum.nl/aria/aria_assets/BK-NM-1010?lang=en

27 An image of the house is available on the children's information sheet at: [http://www.gemeentemuseum.nl/documents/upload/lees-verteltekst%20sara%20poppenhuis%202006%20\(web\).pdf](http://www.gemeentemuseum.nl/documents/upload/lees-verteltekst%20sara%20poppenhuis%202006%20(web).pdf)

28 Pijzel-Dommisse, trans. Patricia Wardle, *The Seventeenth-Century Dollhouses of the Rijksmuseum* (Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum, 1994), p. 42.

29 Pijzel-Dommisse, *'t Is poppe goet en anders niet* (Haarlem: Uniboek, 1980), p. 12.

30 King, *The Collector's History of Dollhouses*, pp. 104–05.

two sons and six daughters.³¹ Significantly, she was also noted by contemporaries as an exemplary cleaner and *huisvrouw*.³²

These houses mattered to their female owners in both financial and personal terms. Sizeable sums were spent on the creation and decoration of the houses, with artwork and furniture commissioned from the major contemporary manufacturers and artists. Jet Pijzel-Dommisse observes that Oortman spent a total of some 20,000 to 30,000 guilders on her house. In 1743, Rothé's notebooks show that she spent 1700 guilders on her dollhouses at a time when her total income in the preceding year had amounted to approximately 8000.³³ Dollhouses held value among a family's financial assets. Another collector, Bicker, carefully noted the depreciation of her dollhouse in accounts books spanning a twelve-year period.³⁴ Dunois' dollhouse was listed as a separate but significant contribution to her dowry.³⁵ As financial assets, the houses were significant to their owners, but these women appear to have taken a particular interest in houses that suggests that they cannot be read as mere investments. De la Court specified in her testament that the dollhouse, along with two atlases and family portraits, was to remain in her family for at least three years after her death.³⁶ Rothé kept meticulous notebooks about all her transactions, commissions, and renovations to the houses, and all the contracts and negotiations appear to have taken place directly with her, rather than her husband.³⁷ The artist Jacob Appel was commissioned to depict Oortman's house as a significant art piece in the family's possession, an image now on display

31 Pijzel-Dommisse, *Het Hollandse Pronkpoppenhuis*, p. 391.

32 For an account of Bicker in the context of her family, including her correspondence with her husband, see Herbert H. Rowen, *John de Witt, Grand Pensionary of Holland, 1625–1672* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978). Her domestic prowess is noted, p. 102 and elsewhere.

33 Pijzel-Dommisse, *Het Hollandse Pronkpoppenhuis*, p. 13.

34 Excerpts from these texts is provided in Pijzel-Dommisse, *Het Hollandse Pronkpoppenhuis*, p. 391–92.

35 Pijzel-Dommisse, *The Seventeenth-Century Dollhouses of the Rijksmuseum*, p. 30.

36 Pijzel-Dommisse, *Het Hollandse Pronkpoppenhuis*, p. 13.

37 The Gemeentemuseum holds Rothé's 1743 notebook and an inventory. This *notitieboekje* and *inventarisboekje* have both been published in Pijzel-Dommisse, *Het poppenhuis van het Haags Gemeentemuseum* (The Hague: Gemeentemuseum, 1988). The Frans Halsmuseum has another inventory made by Rothé of the miniature silver from the three dollhouses she bought at auction in 1743. This has been published in *Het Hollandse Pronkpoppenhuis*, pp. 393–96.

in the Rijksmuseum.³⁸ Female owners may have perhaps been keen to emphasize the economic significance of their houses, as an investment of symbolic and real capital value, to justify the large expenditure that they consumed while enjoying them.

Moreover, it seems that each cabinet house about which we can gather documentation was either intended by their female owners to be, or was indeed, passed down the female line to daughters, cousins, and nieces. Early modern Dutch dollhouses, at least, appear to have been considered a matrilineal inheritance.³⁹ This was true, not simply of the luxurious dowry objects such as Dunois' cabinet, handed down in the female line until 1934,⁴⁰ but also of those dollhouses that were intended as children's toys. Jet Pijzel-Dommisse, whose many works provide extensive study of the Dutch extant dollhouses, has examined evidence of the less expensive variety. These houses reveal a similar transmission of dolls and furnishings through female hands.⁴¹

The possession of dollhouses, as objects of juvenile amusement or art cabinets, could be a material statement of status and wealth for both male and female owners whether princely or burgher. They could be heirlooms worthy of special attention in accounts, inventories, marriage contracts, and wills, and in the Dutch evidence, of a particularly matrilineal succession. For their female owners, dollhouses could constitute significant economic collateral transferred between families, but one whose purpose appeared first and foremost as an object of luxury enjoyment.

Visions of the Household

Dollhouses conveyed messages of status about their owners. In the hands of these elite Dutch women, what kinds of identities did their dollhouses reveal, and to whom were these directed? By comparison to the other contemporary examples, these Dutch dollhouses do not appear openly pedagogical as was the model presented by Anna Köferlin; nor were they lavish propagandistic texts such as Albrecht V's 'idealised princely court'.⁴²

Design of dollhouse space appears to have differed between these Dutch

38 This image can be viewed on line at the Rijksmuseum website: <http://www.rijksmuseum.nl/images/aria/sk/z/sk-a-4245.z>

39 Insufficient documentation remains to determine the heritage of the German houses, beyond those cases of princely possession (personal correspondence with Heidi A. Müller).

40 Pijzel-Dommisse, *The Seventeenth-Century Dollhouses of the Rijksmuseum*, p. 30.

41 Pijzel-Dommisse, *Het Hollandse Pronkpoppenhuis*, pp. 23–24.

42 Bryan, *Material Culture in Miniature*, p. 43.

examples created by women and the Southern German models of the early modern period. Some of these distinctions may have reflected the urban and architectural contexts of the houses' construction as well as (or rather than) particular owners' wishes. For example, none of the Dutch dollhouses had areas such as stables and coach-houses, which were a consistent feature of the German models, nor the corresponding male servant dolls such as ostlers. Some of these different spatial dynamics were based on the practical realities of Dutch urban life, in which horse and carriage were perhaps less likely to be found in canal-based cities, and where the State taxed households containing male servants heavily and therefore created a highly feminized domestic service economy.⁴³ Nonetheless, a comparison of the division of household space in the Southern German cabinet houses (Table 1) with those of the contemporary Dutch houses (Table 2) reveals some other discernible trends that are less obviously attributable to reflections of local and practical realities.

From the tabulation of the rooms included in dollhouses at Tables 1 and 2, several features of significance are apparent. While each house contained a nursery room, all of the female-owned Dutch houses also contained a specific lying-in room separate to the main bedroom, and each had a linen or laundry room. The appearance of the lying-in rooms as such a consistent feature of the Dutch cabinets has been documented as a unique trait of these houses in comparison to contemporary German models or indeed the later British examples.⁴⁴ It is furthermore unusual because in the Netherlands contemporary evidence suggests that families typically created a lying-in room when the need arose, converting one of the warmest and most suitable rooms for public entertaining. The room was prepared as a visual spectacle of decoration intended for lavish receptions held in celebration of the new mother and child. Literature discussing the preparations and appropriate sumptuary decorations of such a space had a long history by the early modern period, and can be documented in women's writings to at least the fifteenth-century manual prepared for the Burgundian court by Eleanor of Poitiers.⁴⁵

43 Paul Zumthor, *Daily Life in Rembrandt's Holland*, trans. Simon Watson Taylor (New York: Macmillan, (1959) 1962), p. 135.

44 Pijzel-Dommisse, *Het Hollandse Pronkpoppenhuis*, p. 61.

45 On Eleanor de Poitiers, see Broomhall, 'Gendering the culture of honour at the fifteenth-century Burgundian court', in *Women, Identities and Communities in Early Modern Europe*, eds Stephanie Tarbin and Broomhall (Aldershot: Ashgate, forthcoming 2008), and Jacques Paviot, 'Eléonore de Poitiers, Les Etats de France (Les Honneurs de la Cour)', *Annuaire-Bulletin de la Société de l'histoire de France* (1998), 75–137.

Was this then a particularly female view of the domestic sphere, captured in its moment of most jubilant celebration for the mistress of the household? It can be argued that female owners signified their awareness of the importance of their maternal role, particularly for the creation of domesticity, through the inclusion of lying-in rooms. In doing so, the Dutch houses thus created the vision of a particular moment and atmosphere in the household.

The consistent presence of the linen room and laundry equipment in the Dutch dollhouses is equally noteworthy. Wealthy houses sent out their linen to be washed and bleached, and were then returned to the house for drying and ironing. Often this might be undertaken as little as once a year, with maids hired specifically to carry out the household part of the laundry process. The less frequently the task was performed the wealthier one was, since it required a more extensive stock of linen as this was progressively soiled through the year.⁴⁶ Where art galleries and music rooms were rooms which signified wealth in contemporary Dutch patrician homes, in their dollhouses women also added linen rooms as a particularly female view of luxury. Here, the extent and quality of the fabrics in the linen cabinet mattered in much the same way as their kitchens displayed a wealth of pewter and copper pots. Foreign travellers frequently noted the particular Dutch obsession with household cleanliness.⁴⁷ Dutch women were instructed in both art and print that the cleanliness of their household was crucial to the continued moral order of the Calvinist state. By highlighting the presence of a household function which, like the lying-in ceremony, occurred as rarely as once a year, female owners were both acknowledging social expectations about good order in the household, as well as demonstrating a vision of utopic domesticity.

Dollhouses were a space of public display for all their owners but the visions of the household that were offered to the viewer differed by social status and gender of their organizers. Certainly, the women who held the Dutch cabinets presented a luxurious picture of elite urban life. Sara Rothé's merchant husband may have been a wealthy collector of *objets d'art*, but the couple was not wealthy enough to own a porcelain display room in their own home as their dollhouse did.⁴⁸ Yet luxury in dollhouses was gender-specific. In Albrecht's cabinet, a lion and lioness inhabited

46 King, *The Collector's History of Dollhouses*, p. 116.

47 See, for example, the accounts reproduced in Zumthor, *Daily Life in Rembrandt's Holland*, pp. 136–37.

48 Valerie Jackson Douet, 'An Eighteenth Century Dutch Dollhouse', *Antiques*, 146.1 (1994), 86–93 (p. 93, n. 8).

the courtyard garden.⁴⁹ His vision was clearly sumptuous, denoting extravagant courtly splendour. For both the German and the Dutch examples intended for girls or female owners, luxury was modest in its ambition, commonly constituted by well-appointed kitchens and extensive stocks of linen.

Beyond the presence of specific rooms in the Dutch dollhouses that do not appear in the contemporary German cabinets, there were also distinctions amongst the objects to be found within the dollhouses. Albrecht's cabinet, for example, lacked logic in details of rooms that were not part of his personal realm. The second kitchen adjoining the nursery on the upper level was described as having an extravagant spit roast deer that was unlikely to be the kind of food needed for the nursery next door.⁵⁰ By contrast, Petronella Oortman's house made provisions for the sleeping arrangements of maidservants and nursery staff, even providing different fabrics for each of the maid's beds. Each servant's bedroom was carefully furnished with its own chair and chamber-pot.⁵¹ Apart from the array of baby and cleaning-oriented objects contained in the Dutch houses, the presence of foot-warmers is particularly interesting. These were a specifically female item in a culture where women traditionally sat furthest away from the fire.⁵² Dutch women's dollhouses thus contained objects that showed careful awareness of a female perspective on the household.

There were moreover sexual and moral ambiguities in a number of the early German dollhouses that were completely absent from those organized by the Dutch women. For example, in the house of Albrecht V, the 1598 inventory noted that the bathroom contained dolls representing the housekeeper and her three daughters bathing.⁵³ There are no records of Dutch houses with dolls shown in states of undress or in compromising positions, even where their houses contained washrooms and toilets. Neither were the images in the artwork within the Dutch dollhouses morally compromising. By contrast, one of the earliest extant Nuremberg houses, the 1611 cabinet now in the Germanisches National Museum, contains a frescoed scene of a garden whose amorous tone is quite different to the artistic decoration of the Dutch houses. Here, couples kiss and fondle one another as they enjoy an outdoor meal, while a nun is escorted into the distance

49 Bryan, *Material Culture in Miniature*, p. 54.

50 King, *The Collector's History of Dollhouses*, p. 32.

51 Pijzel-Dommisse, *The Seventeenth-Century Dollhouses of the Rijksmuseum*, p. 10.

52 King, *The Collector's History of Dollhouses*, p. 122.

53 Bryan, *Material Culture in Miniature*, p. 52.

by a monk.⁵⁴ The earthy tone of these German houses, as well as the greater range of male domestic servants and tasks and objects such as armoury, seems to show some intent to appeal to a male viewing audience (one indicated by Anna Koferlin in her pamphlet) even if the ‘end consumer’ was expected to be the daughter of a patrician family. This curious mixture of edification and bawdiness is absent in the later female-organized dollhouses in the Dutch Republic.⁵⁵

Social status and gender clearly both mattered to the size, proportion, furnishings, and particularities of the houses. Most owners did not have room for a menagerie of animals in their dollhouses as did Albrecht, but signalled wealth in terms understood by their burgher status, such as provisions, artwork, furnishings, and even allocated space for servants’ eating, working, and sleeping. In particular, the Dutch women who owned dollhouses seem to have paid particular attention to the organization of household space in ways that expressed their relationship, knowledge, and expectations about their role as ‘good housewives’, their responsibilities for cleanliness, and their reproductive duties.

Female Owners of Luxury Toys

It seems clear that the Dutch dollhouses were important objects of amusement and entertainment to their female owners, but in what ways were they enjoyed? How did these women reconcile their full-time duties to the household with the reality that they spent time and resources devoted to toys? In fact, female dollhouse owners acknowledged the importance of their domestic responsibilities within the very objects that distracted them from these duties. Women were aware of the conventional didactic role of dollhouses for young children and even played on this within their cabinets. Within Sara Rothé’s Haarlem house, for example, a scroll originally located in the lying-in room, reveals a poem from the popular emblem book, *Emblemata of Sinne-werck* by the moralist Johan de Brune (first published in Amsterdam, 1624). The emblematic genre was highly popular in the Dutch Republic, particularly used by didactic authors such as Cats and Brune. Early modern Dutch elite culture was highly literate in its symbols and motifs,

54 King, *The Collector’s History of Dollhouses*, pp. 44–45.

55 Klaske Muijelaar and Derek Phillips provide a provoking view of how erotic images were viewed in seventeenth-century Dutch elite culture in the chapter, ‘Erotic Images in the Domestic Interior: Cultural Ideals and Social Practices’, of their *Picturing Men and Women in the Dutch Golden Age: Paintings and People in Historical Perspective* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), pp. 139–59, although they do not address the notion of women commissioning such work.

so it seems likely that Rothé's reference to one of the foundational works of the Dutch tradition was a deliberate intellectual pun on the potential of the dollhouse to be both a mirror and an emblem.

Moreover, the choice of this particular emblem from the *Emblemata* is intriguing.⁵⁶ The illustration in the original text shows a child discarding a doll, and the accompanying text reminds the reader of the fickleness of human nature, where a child's plaything could be loved passionately but quickly cast aside.⁵⁷

All that one sees on earth
 Is doll's stuff and nothing else.
 Man, whatever he thinks about
 He enjoys like a child.
 He loves for a short time
 That which he easily throws away later.
 Such is man, as one can see,
 Not simply once, but always, a child.⁵⁸

Rothé's inclusion of the poem in her house suggested not only an intent to use the dollhouse as a site for moral instruction, but also to play with the meaning of the dollhouse as a *poppe-goed* itself. The poem signalled the house's capacity both to reflect and to reconfigure contemporary society, whose concerns were often as transient and inconsequential as a child's whim for a toy. However, the inclusion of this poem also suggested that Rothé's dollhouse could be defended as a retreat to the simple pleasures of childhood, giving it a harmless charm. This belied the significant evidence that indicates that dollhouses were not, for any of these women, a mere childish whim to be abandoned at a moment's notice. Indeed, these were

56 It was added to the second edition of Brune's work, published in 1636, and is not clearly established by his modern editor P. J. Meertens as Brune's own work, although Rothé may not have been aware of this fact. See Johan de Brune, *Emblemata of Zinne-werck*, ed. P. J. Meertens (Soest: Davaco Publishers, 1970), p. 3, n. 4.

57 An illustration of this emblem can be found in Annemarieke Willemsen, 'Kinder-Spel en Poppe-Goet: 17de-eeuwse miniatuur – gebruiksvoorwerpen en hun functie', *Antiek*, 28 (1993–94), 392–99 (p. 397, fig. 5). My thanks to Femme S. Gaastra for assistance with my translation.

58 The text of Rothé's scroll is reproduced in Pijzel-Dommisse, '*t Is poppe goet en anders niet*', pp. 9–10. 'Al wat men hier op Aerden siet/ Is poppe goet en anders niet/ De mensch, al wat hij daar van vint/ Die speelter mee, gelijk een Kint/ Hij heeft het Lief een Kortjen tijt/ Dat hij daar naar Licht van hem smijt/ Zoo is de mensch dans als men vindt/ Niet tweemals, maar altijd een Kindt.'

labours of love. It is worth observing that Rothé's key message summarizing the dollhouse's value as both moral emblem and mere plaything should be found in the household space that held so much meaning to women: the lying-in room.

Evidently there was significant personal investment in these houses. In aspects of furnishing where women might have been expected to draw upon their own sewing and embroidery skills, so they did in their dollhouses. Petronella Dunois' sheets in the linen room were embroidered with her monogram,⁵⁹ and a pincushion displays her initials and the date 1676 (the year before her marriage).⁶⁰ Petronella Oortman and her husbands' initials were intertwined on the coverlet on the lying-in bed, as well as on the napkins.⁶¹ This suggests that women felt a high degree of personal investment in the houses as well as the enjoyment that came from their involvement in the creation of its furnishings. In addition, it also diffused any potential criticisms that both collecting frivolous art objects, and the time spent in the make-believe world of the cabinet house, were inappropriate for elite women – criticisms unlikely to have been levelled at Albrecht or male art collectors with curio cabinets in Germany and the Dutch Republic. Indeed, these women precluded such criticisms by demonstrating their household skills in the very works that drew them away from concentration on their domestic duties.

Women sometimes worked together to produce the domestic furnishings of the dollhouses. In doing so, they promoted harmonious female collaboration of a kind that contemporaries would have lauded. Sara Rothé's notebook about her Hague house recorded that she had made the bed-hangings and coverlets for the lying-in room, the room with which she was most particularly occupied, with the help of her dressmaker Johanna.⁶² The Spanish rug under the tea table was made with Johanna, she noted,⁶³ and Rothé and her cousin, the widow Hoogehuisje, had made the clothes for the doll that was probably considered the most important in her house, the mother in the lying-in room.⁶⁴ Here, women contributed their

59 King, *The Collector's History of Dollhouses*, p. 116.

60 Pijzel-Dommisse, *The Seventeenth-Century Dollhouses of the Rijksmuseum*, p. 30, fig. b.

61 Pijzel-Dommisse, *The Seventeenth-Century Dollhouses of the Rijksmuseum*, p. 8, fig. b.

62 'De ses buitje valletjes om het ledicantje en de geboorduerde witte sattijne sprij die daar leijjt, heb iik genaaijt, en Johanna heeft daar ook 5 daage aan genaaijt à 6 st. daags', in Pijzel-Dommisse, ed., *Het poppenhuis van het Haags Gemeentemuseum*, p. 65.

63 'Op de vloer van de kraamkamer leijt een genaaijde Spaanse mat, die ik selfs geteekent en ten deelen genaaijt heb; ik heb voor de sij en de daagen die Johanna daaraan genaijt hat betaalt', in Pijzel-Dommisse (ed.), *Het poppenhuis van het Haags Gemeentemuseum*, p. 69.

64 'In deese kaamer sit op een stoeltje een poppetje, dat een kraamvrouwte verbeelt met een

sewing skills in the accomplishment of shared domestic tasks, just as they might have for the preparation of a lying-in room in real life. And, just as women would visit to discuss the health and progress of the newly born infant, Rothé, her cousin, and her dressmaker could attend to the progress of, and offer gifts for, Rothé's 'infant', the dollhouse.

Even the physical space within which the dollhouses were exhibited could be shared with other female domestic responsibilities. Most of the cabinets that contained dollhouses were based on the design for linen and clothing cupboards. The similarity between the cabinet that held Petronella Dunois' dollhouse and the miniature linen cabinet inside the dollhouse is striking.⁶⁵ Sometimes dollhouses and linen occupied one and the same physical space. When Sara Rothé commissioned a cabinet to house her first Hague collection of dolls and rooms, she requested that the design also incorporate room for her own gloves, handkerchiefs, and lace collars.⁶⁶ In such ways, the real and the imagined worlds of the household jostled for 'performance space'.

Luxury toys about domestic duties recall the early modern Dutch didactic and moral literature about childhood which saw elements of play as opportunities for learning. As conduct manuals such as those by Cats or Brune demonstrated, Calvinist moral texts emphasized a kind of tension between the free will of childhood and the need to learn obedience.⁶⁷ In the hands of female owners, dollhouses might be read as the struggle of elite women to manage these very same contradictory interests. They desired an expression of free will and escape into childhood concerns, but they knew that they were required to be obedient to husbands and attendant to household responsibilities.

Making Movable Permanent

Beyond the cabinet itself, notebooks and inventories composed by the female owners could preserve the memory of the fictive household even after its dispersal or re-creation by a new owner. Dollhouses existed in the textual and visual, as well

blaauwe japon en een schouwermanteltje om, dit is door nigth Hoogehuisje en mij gekleet'; 'ik heb van was klijne poppekanneelkoekjes gemaakt en die in dit boovestaande trommeltje gedaan en dit en de kraamkamer geset', in Pijzel-Dommisse, ed., *Het poppenhuis van het Haags Gemeentemuseum*, pp. 69 and 64.

65 Pijzel-Dommisse, *The Seventeenth-Century Dollhouses of the Rijksmuseum*, p. 41, fig. c.

66 Shirley Glubok, 'Glimpses of Holland's Golden Age', *The Connoisseur*, 214 (1984), 112–18 (p. 116).

67 Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches*, pp. 502–03.

as material, realm. Appels' painting of Oortman's cabinet house (around 1710) offers a curious play on the notion of representing the household being represented. It not only recorded a significant economic asset belonging to the family, but also showed the house populated not by dolls but by living people. Thus, the dollhouse through its representation on the canvas, was at once preserved as an historic artefact and came to life as a dynamic, living entity. Moreover, the cabinet was clearly shown to be set within a physical space, so that the viewer was reminded that the painted image of the dollhouse was not a dislocated artistic work about a household, but was itself also situated within the 'real' household of Oortman's own home. Just as Rothé, in her selection of the Brune emblem, reminded the viewer of the ephemeral yet material dollhouse which reflected and rejected the transience of human nature and the world, so too the visualised dollhouse of the painting offered a complex vision of the house within, one that structured and deconstructed the household beyond.

In further, less public, ways, other female owners also preserved the ever-changing interiors of their houses at a given historical moment. Many of the dollhouses were meticulously inventoried. Several women, like Wendela Bicker, compiled careful accounts and inventories about the investment that their houses represented. Sara Rothé's notebooks listed the contents of her houses as she commissioned, added or moved objects between rooms. Significantly, she embedded herself in the text of the notebook, now held in the Gemeentemuseum, using the personal pronoun as a journal of *her* contribution to the dollhouses' artistic life. The text documented the occasions when she had actually carried out the embroidery or painting herself: 'dat ik selfs met pintjes geplakt heb', she proudly wrote of one contribution to the lying-in room.⁶⁸ Importantly, it was this room that deserved her particular attention, with bed-hangings, coverlets, rugs, and the landscape on the tea table in the lying-in room all of her own creation. Rothé's written texts about the cabinets testify not only to the significance of her personal contribution to the creation of the dollhouses, but also to the significance of the dollhouses to her sense of her own identity. In every sense they were intertwined and interdependent. By writing about the dollhouses, Rothé gave the cabinets more than a passing and material presence; they also gained a sense of permanence and material history.

In conclusion, if we accept that dollhouses could provide a miniaturized forum in which to create a utopic, controlled version of the household space

68 Pijzel-Dommisse, ed., *Het poppenhuis van het Haags Gemeentemuseum*, p. 65. See also ns 60 and 61.

and its domesticity, what then can we conclude about the individual identities represented through the medium of the dollhouses, their notebooks and images, and identities and ideas about household space and relationships? It seems clear that women, like men, used the cabinet houses as a way of signalling (or inflating) their wealth and prestige, both through the very existence of the cabinet and its luxurious appointment and feature rooms such as art and porcelain galleries. Dutch women's dollhouses demonstrate ways in which the quantity and quality of those furnishings could be used as signs of the family's grandeur, particularly through linen and kitchenware. In many ways, their houses appear to present little more than the conventional values of their era reflected in early modern Dutch artworks and prints with their emphasis on the maternal, childbearing, and cleaning roles of the mistress of the house and her staff. At first glance, they may appear to indicate just how limited the aspirations of their female owners were. Dollhouses may seem to be, for owners like Rothé or Dunois, little more than infant-substitutes for childless women.

However, I would argue that such an analysis obscures an important feature of female-owned houses – the very fact that women created, collected, enjoyed, and transmitted them to future generations of women. Rudolf Dekker has observed how few ego-documents by medieval and early modern Dutchwomen are extant to provide us with a sense of women's self-image. Those women who did write often produced religious texts, such as the conversion narratives of pietistic women.⁶⁹ Given the rich investment of energy and identity they demonstrate, perhaps we can add dollhouses and their surrounding documentation as another form of ego-document which women could create as a testament to their interests and sense of self for their own era and for future generations. Female owners teased viewers of the dollhouses with their perceptive acknowledgment in various guises of the contradictory forces of desire for childish amusement on the one hand and recognition of mature responsibilities on the other, and of the contradictory nature of the dollhouse as both an insignificant object of play and an evocative mirror of human nature. And perhaps more significantly than the ideals they convey within them, the Dutch dollhouses attest to the rare opportunity for the adult mistress of an early modern Dutch townhouse to create an object of play, to take time away from everyday domestic tasks, and to escape into a utopic world. For here was a world of fantasy, where the house was always clean under the attention of the maids, disciplined children played under the care of a orderly nanny, friends and

69 Rudolf Dekker, 'Getting to the Source: Women in the Medieval and Early Modern Netherlands', *Journal of Women's History*, 10.2 (1998), 165–89 (p. 176).

neighbours enjoyed tea and conversation whilst paying their respects to the new mother, and the master of the house was rarely to be seen.

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Table 1: Rooms Listed In Contemporary Southern German Dollhouses

NAME and DATE	BASEMENT	GROUND	FIRST	SECOND
Albrecht V 1558	Stables Cattle Byre Dairy Pantry Wine Cellar Coach House	Bathroom Dressing Room Kitchen Courtyard Garden	Ballroom Parlour State Bedroom	Chapel Bedroom 2 Bedroom 3 Sewing room Kitchen 2 Nursery
1611 House	Servant Dining Room Garden	Dining /Living Room Hall Kitchen	Bedroom Upper landing area Nursery	
Stromer House 1639	Stables Stableboy's room Provisions store Perishables storeroom Night Nursery Nursery apartment Store room 1 Store room 2	Male bedroom Main hall Kitchen	Main bedroom Upper landing area Reception room	
Bäumler House Late seventeenth century	Stables Courtyard Merchant's Office	Kitchen Reception rooms Reception/ dining	Kitchen/dining Dining room Hall Main bedroom	
Kress House Late seventeenth century		Stables Ostler's room Servant eating area Provisions store Servant bedroom	Reception room Hall Kitchen	Main bedroom Upper landing Nursery

Table 2: Rooms Listed In Dutch Dollhouses

NAME and DATE	GROUND	FIRST	SECOND	THIRD
Petronella de la Court c. 1674	Kitchen Lying-in room Garden	Reception room Merchant's office Hall	Store room Nursery Bedroom Art gallery Linen room	
Petronella Dunois c. 1676	Cellar Kitchen Dining room	Lying-in room Reception room	Peat loft Linen room Nursery	
Petronella Oortman c. 1686–1705	Best kitchen Cookroom Reception room	Reception room Hall Lying-in room	Linen room Peat loft Nursery	
Sara Rothé, The Hague c. 1743	Lying-in room Garden Kitchen	Music room Hall Art collectors' room	Curio room Linen room Nursery	
Sara Rothé, Haarlem c. 1743	Kitchen Hall Dining room	Reception room Hall Doctor's room	Music room Reception room Lying-in room	Laundry Storage area Nursery

