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# The Role of Children in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Paintings: Social Distinction and National Identity

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The Role of Children in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Paintings:  
Social Distinction and National Identity

By

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Presented in Partial Fulfillment of  
the College of Wooster Independent  
Studies Requirements

Department of Art and Art History  
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Advisor: Tracy Cosgriff



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To my close friends and family, thank you for listening and providing humor when I needed it the most. I am so grateful to have the support of so many wonderful individuals who will answer the phone whenever I call or spend their limited moments of free time with me.

Finally, I thank my parents for their constant support and unconditional love. Thanks to both of you, I am able to take advantage of and appreciate the luxury that is higher education.

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## Introduction

All that we see here on the ground  
Are children's toys and nothing else.  
The man plays with what he finds there,  
Just like the child.  
He is amused for a short time only  
Then he easily throws it away.  
So the man therefore, as we find,  
Is not twice, but forever a child.

This quote from the popular Dutch author, Johan de Brune, uses children as a metaphor, speaking to their symbolic virtue in art from the Dutch seventeenth century and gesturing in particular to their function as passive props.<sup>1</sup> Children are ubiquitous in seventeenth-century paintings from the Dutch Republic, yet they are scarcely discussed. They appear in countless images, manuals, stories, proverbs, and prints from the century, but there is a significant gap in research on Dutch children in art. In my research, I strive to fill this gap. I argue that children in paintings participate in a kind of social regulation of the Dutch upper and middle classes, reinforcing a national identity of morality, nationalistic enterprise, and class distinction. As indicators of Dutch values and social norms, the children in images from the Dutch seventeenth century serve as objects of empire as well as reflections of an existing national Dutch identity.

### Overview of Artworks

Dutch genre paintings, which portray images of everyday life, depict a variety of images that include children. Genre images are more informative than portraits because of their rich social and cultural symbolism. In these instances, children serve not as

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<sup>1</sup> Mary Frances Durantini, *The Child in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Painting* (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1983), 191.



actors, but as cultural statements and props. Rather than categorizing by genre or subgenre, I note the differing *types* of children that can be found across varieties of images. Each of the following chapters presents a different child type in Dutch paintings from the seventeenth century: the unruly child, the model child, and the black servant child.

The unruly child, often found within scenes of chaos, typically serves as a didactic figure, a bad example. They are imagined playing games, picking pockets, sleeping, generally up to no good. Model children in Dutch painting are often seen with their mothers in serene domestic images. Some follow a lesson taught by their parent, others attentively play an instrument or play with a doll. Black servant children are most commonly found in Dutch portraiture. Typically attending to a white female sitter, the servant children may wrap a string of pearls around the woman's wrist or just stand by her side. Each of these child types is informative in their function as cultural and social statements, reinforcing contexts of the Dutch middle and upper classes by participating in existing norms presented in other cultural influences. The consistencies for each type of child found in Dutch paintings is what drew my attention to children as a theme and what ultimately drives my argument that children serve as objects of empire and national identity. The three child types presented in each chapter function differently from one another, but ultimately support the same social agenda: reinforcing a national identity of empire, morality, and social distinction for the Dutch middle and upper classes. In each example, the child serves almost as a piece of the background, rather than the primary subject, of the image.<sup>2</sup> I have specifically chosen images in which children exist amongst

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<sup>2</sup> While paintings such as Frans Hals' *Two Laughing Boys* or Judith Leyster's *Two Children with a Cat* do present children as the focal point of their respective compositions, the social

others in order to highlight how they serve as passive actors in creating and reinforcing a Dutch social identity that encourages morality, social distinction, and imperial values. Considered in the social and cultural context of the Dutch seventeenth century, children reveal the pertinence of morality, social distinction, and imperial ambitions to the identity of the middle and upper classes.

Generally speaking, the beginning of the seventeenth century witnessed a rapid increase in the number of middle-class individuals who owned paintings.<sup>3</sup> Each painting in this study would thus have belonged to a member of the middle or upper-middle class or, in one example found in my third chapter, to a member of the Dutch nobility. The six paintings I have included are by a variety of Dutch artists: Gerrit Dou, Pieter de Hooch, Jan Steen, Adriaen Hanneman, and Hendrik van der Burch. The paintings span the middle and upper classes of the Dutch Republic, creating a sense of the social climate across the upper classes of Dutch society and demonstrating an identity for these people. Dou's paintings likely would have belonged to a rather wealthy individual as Dou was one of the highest paid Dutch artists of the seventeenth century.<sup>4</sup> Artists such as Jan Steen, however, are known to have work present in the homes of extremely prominent Dutch art collectors, as well as in the residences of humbler members of the middle class.<sup>5</sup> These paintings also fall within a twenty-one-year range of one another, therefore existing rather simultaneously in Dutch seventeenth-century culture.

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insinuations in these images are not as potent as we do not see the children in relation to other social figures.

<sup>3</sup> Eric Jan Sluiter, "All Striving to Adorne their Houses with Costly Peeces' Two Case Studies of Paintings in Wealthy Interiors," in *Art and Home: Dutch Interiors in the Age of Rembrandt*, ed. Mariët Westermann (Denver: Denver Art Museum, 2001), 103

<sup>4</sup> Ronni Baer, *Gerrit Dou 1613-1675: Master Painter in the Age of Rembrandt* (Washington D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 2000), 12

<sup>5</sup> Mariët Westermann, *Amusements of Jan Steen* (Zwolle: Uitgeverij Waanders, 1997), 64-67

Finally, all of these images were produced shortly after the end of Spanish rule in Holland. Scattered throughout the creation of the first painting to the last, there was the First Dutch-Anglo War, an outbreak of the plague in Amsterdam, and the “Disaster Year” of 1672; generally the Dutch Republic was lacking stability politically and religiously.<sup>6</sup> The context of unrest for this twenty-one-year range demonstrates the need for a consistent identity for the Dutch people. As I will argue, this identity of morality, social distinction, and domain can be seen in children from Dutch paintings.

### **Literature Review**

There is wealth of information on Dutch culture, artists, and paintings from the seventeenth century and the visual symbols popular in Dutch painting are often discussed. Regarding the role of children in Dutch paintings, however, there is a significant gap. Literature on children is extremely limited, which perhaps reflects their generally passive roles. As modern day viewers and scholars, we seem to have overlooked the power that these child figures hold in contributing to a national identity for the Dutch people. In my research I hope to fill this gap, drawing attention to the marginal figures of Dutch paintings that have been overlooked in order to understand the identity of the Dutch middle and upper classes.

To date there has been only one sustained study of children in Dutch art: Mary Durantini’s *The Child in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Painting*. Durantini sections her discussion into categories of image types including children; the three primary categories are domestic images, educational images, and images of children playing. In defining

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<sup>6</sup> Leendert F. Groenendijk and Benjamin B. Roberts, “Moral Panic and Holland’s Libertine Youth of the 1650s and 1660s,” *Journal of Family History* 30, no. 4 (2005): 338

these categories, Durantini is able to discuss children specifically in Dutch images, breaking down their iconography and cultural contexts. Durantini's text makes the point that children are represented in paintings in order to make a statement about the adult figures that exist in the image with them, rather than to say something about the children themselves. I develop Durantini's argument by finding the consistencies in portrayals of children and analyzing how they reveal a specific notion of the Dutch identity.

Simon Schama dedicates a robust portion of *The Embarrassment of Riches* to children, using primary sources, iconography, and proverbial references to create a sense of why children were included in Dutch paintings. Schama focuses on the sense of moral ambiguity represented by children, illuminating the dichotomy of potential good and bad behavior. This focus on morality in children is useful for my research as I address the importance of morality to the Dutch identity. Schama's selection of documents from the seventeenth century regarding children greatly informs my interpretation of how children were linked to morality and how we see that link in Dutch paintings. Relating the various conflicts he finds in images of children to greater cultural context, Schama emphasizes the extreme didactic purpose of children in Dutch paintings. It is common (and generally agreed upon) for literature on Dutch children to describe the purpose of child figures as primarily didactic, but this didacticism makes a greater statement. In my research, I further Schama's work by considering a wider range of child types, ultimately using each type as an indication of a collective identity for the Dutch middle and upper classes.

While the topic of Dutch children is sparsely covered in art historical literature, it is fair to say that there may be even less on black servants and slave children in the Dutch Republic. Rather recently, we have seen an emergence of literature on black individuals

in Western art. Texts such as *Black African in Renaissance Europe*, edited by T.F. Earle and K.J.P. Lowe, and *Images of Black in Western Art*, by David Bindman, Henry Louis Gates Jr., and Karen C. C. Dalton, tackle the subject, opening the door to a topic which has been ignored for too long. With such expansive projects as these, however, these works fail to get specific. Bindman, Gates, and Dalton do address the trend of Dutch portraits including black servant children, but can only do so briefly as they continue their extremely large discussion of black figures in Western art. Their approach is too broad to be helpful in analyzing the Dutch identity. Focusing on the Dutch Republic specifically allows me to use a more distinct and meaningful historical lens.

Acknowledgment of children in paintings almost always addresses the topic through the lens of parenting or, in regard to black servant children, in relation to the white sitter, which as we will see only furthers the sense of children as passive actors. While the literature on children in Dutch paintings from the seventeenth century is limited, what does exist seems to articulate that children play a supporting role in Dutch images. My research takes this claim one step further, considering cultural and social contexts of the Dutch middle and upper classes in order to determine how the passive role of child figures achieves a reflection of a collective identity for the upper and middle classes of the Dutch Republic.

## **Methods**

My approach to analyzing the presence of children in Dutch seventeenth-century paintings makes use of social theory in order to assess how paintings including children both shaped and contributed to social expectations and attitudes. As I strive to identify existing attitudes within Dutch culture and society through images of children,

considering the Dutch Republic with a social historical lens is extremely important.

Doing so allows for a more thorough and meaningful understanding of the Dutch identity.

My consideration of social and cultural capital in relation to Dutch paintings requires the inclusion of Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu's *Language and Symbolic Power* and *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* also aid my research due to their discussion of class distinctions in relation to matters of language and art. Bourdieu discusses the power of language and symbols to create meaning and identity for groups.<sup>7</sup> Relating these concepts to art and taste specifically, Bourdieu notes that the meanings found in art are only accessible by those who are "culturally competent" or, in other words, familiar with the social code the art participates in.<sup>8</sup> His concept of habitus is the physical form of social and cultural capital; it is how society is manifested in individuals. I use habitus as a way of understanding the power that images of children had in Dutch society and what they meant for those depicted, those who owned paintings, and those who viewed them. I argue that a collection of cultural artifacts, specifically paintings, both shaped the Dutch middle and upper classes and reveal a social code for these classes.

I will also implement strategies set forth by Michael Camille's in *Image on the Edge*. Camille's work is especially relevant to my research in that he focuses specifically on marginalia. While in his case, Camille analyzes marginalia of medieval art such as gargoyles on cathedrals or figures in the margins of texts, the way in which Camille considers these figures in a greater context is valuable to my research. In my case, the

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<sup>7</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 221

<sup>8</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London: Routledge, 1986), 2

marginal figures I analyze are children, women, and black servants. They rarely occupy the focus of a composition, but that is not to say that they do not hold significance.

Camille's analysis of marginalia in medieval art illustrates that we can glean valuable and telling information about societies and cultures through analyzing these marginal figures and objects. The marginalia that I consider in my research reveal aspects of social distinction, seen in *A School for Boys and Girls*, morality, and imperial ambition. As Camille demonstrates through his analysis of Medieval marginalia, marginal figures can serve as indicators of greater social trends and attitudes, participating in the fortification of the status quo. Bringing Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and symbolic meaning together with Camille's focus on marginalia, the weight of my argument becomes greater, creating a sense of the social implications of Dutch paintings and the figures within them.

## **Overview of Chapters**

The focus in my first chapter is social and gender roles, specifically how images of model children reinforce these roles as a part of the Dutch identity. Analyzing two examples of model children in Pieter de Hooch's *The Bedroom* (figure 1) and Gerrit Dou's *A Maidservant in a Niche* (figure 2), this chapter evaluates how the presence of obedient children in these two images enhances aspects of social and gender distinctions as well as morality within the Dutch identity. Taking into consideration household manuals, guidebooks, and Dutch satires, among other cultural documents, I analyze how these images emphasize the restricting role of women to different Dutch viewers.

Chapter Two focuses on class distinction and morality in images of unruly children. I bring to question two images by Jan Steen which include the unruly child: *A School for Boys and Girls* (figure 3) and *The Dissolute Household* (figure 4). Focusing

greatly on the didactic power of these two paintings, I illustrate how the presence of children in the images emphasizes the strong moral aspect of the identity of the Dutch middle and upper classes. Using school books, household manuals, travel accounts and other cultural documents to understand how the separate spaces of home and school served as teaching grounds, this chapter demonstrates the integral role of morality in the Dutch identity while also reinforcing distinctions between social classes.

My final chapter considers the treatment of black servant children as indications of imperial ambitions. The two images analyzed in this chapter are *Posthumous Portrait of Mary I Stuart with a Servant* (figure 5) by Adriaen Hanneman and *The Game of Cards* (figure 6) by Hendrik van der Burch. Examining these two images as kinds of curiosity cabinets or catalogues of exoticism, I argue that the presence of black servant children contribute to a nationalistic enterprise. Comparing the treatment of black servant children to items of exotic and naturalia that were prized by the Dutch, I highlight how these children serve as props. Taking into consideration the role of exoticism in Dutch culture, these child figures reveal and contribute to the existing imperial aspect of the Dutch identity.

Scholars such as Camille have made incredible headway in including figures often overlooked in the tradition of art history, but there is much to be done in research of children in the Dutch Republic. In overlooking such figures as women, children, and people of color in our research, we subscribe to the discrimination of the very societies we study. Through the analysis of traditionally marginal and understudied figures, we bring light to their value as groups and as individuals. Not only do these marginal figures deserve to be acknowledged and removed from the margins, but they also serve as



valuable indications of the social and cultural climate of the Dutch seventeenth century. While they may be visually marginal in traditional art, these figures were in fact a part of their respective societies. They contributed to the culture and are therefore valuable in informing a full and accurate understanding of the societies in question. In refocusing our gaze and research on these marginal figures, I argue for a collective identity for the middle and upper classes of the Dutch Republic, one of moral imperative, social and gender distinction, and imperial ambition.

## I

### The Model Child: Gender Roles in the Republic

Children are rarely found alone in Dutch genre paintings. A common counterpart to a child is their mother, which makes them pertinent to my discussion. Not only are they often paired together, women and children also serve as social regulators as we will see in the paintings analyzed in this chapter, *A Maidservant in a Niche* and *The Bedroom*. Dutch historians often note the leadership held by women in the household, but tend to do so in a somewhat villainizing manner.<sup>9</sup> Themes from Erasmus' *Anti-barbarus* acknowledge the "almost absolute moral domination exercised by the Dutchwoman in her own home; a domination justified by her skill and diligence and facilitated by the men's easy-going nature. It was "an authority that easily turned into tyranny."<sup>10</sup> Language such as this contrasts a supposed tyrannical power with the "easy-going" man. The kind of villainizing discussion used in reference to women is seen for both housewives of the middle class and women of lower classes. Taking into consideration, however, Dutch cultural documents in regards to the Dutch woman, we see strong social regulation created *by men for women*, ultimately reinforcing gender roles and misogynistic tendencies of Dutch seventeenth-century society that restrict women to domestic roles. The gendered roles that are enforced, as we will see in this chapter, are patriarchal in their specificity and restriction of women; men seem to dominate the predominant spaces of daily life, creating rules and guidelines for women who are limited to their moralizing role in the domestic realm. Borrowing theoretical lenses from

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<sup>9</sup> Paul Zumthor, *Daily Life in Rembrandt's Holland*, Translated by Simon Watson Taylor, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 133

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

Bourdieu and Griselda Pollock, the social and gendered distinctions between men and women, as well as women of differing social status, become apparent through these images.<sup>11</sup> Bourdieu's concept of social codes and cultural languages lends itself to the discussion of these images as they participate in consistent attitudes across cultural documents toward women. Gerrit Dou's painting, *A Maid Servant in a Niche*, and *The Bedroom* by Pieter de Hooch present two different aspects of Dutch women in relation to behavior and the upbringing of children. They both, however, serve as examples of social regulation in regards to gender roles in the Dutch seventeenth century, participating in a cultural language of gendered restriction. These images would have been seen by a variety of viewers therefore creating multiple layers of symbolism and reinforcing societal roles that we see defined in documents beyond painting such as Dutch literature and manuals from authors like Jacob Cats and Johan van Beverwijk.

### **Domestic Scenes as a Female Genre**

Within the wealth of genre paintings that would have been purchased by the Dutch middle class, a large portion of these images portray domestic scenes. In *Wtmentheit des Vrouwelijke Geslachten* (On the Excellence of the Female Sex) by the popular Dutch author and doctor, Johan van Beverwijk, the figure of Fortuna, the goddess of fortune, is portrayed standing on a tortoise rather than a globe as is typical of her representations (figure 7).<sup>12</sup> As an animal that carries its own home on its back, the tortoise speaks to the role of the home for the Dutch people. The tortoise and its shell serve as a symbol of a mobile home, holding as much importance as the globe that it

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<sup>11</sup> Griselda Pollock, "Feminist Interventions in the Histories of Art: An Introduction," *Visions and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art* (London: Routledge, 1988), 1-17

<sup>12</sup> Simon Schama, "Wives and Wantons: Versions of Womanhood in 17th Century Dutch Art," *Oxford Art Journal* 3, no. 1, (1980): 8

replaces in this imagery of Fortuna.<sup>13</sup> Van Beverwijk also referred to the home more explicitly as the “fountain and source of republics.”<sup>14</sup> The Dutch home was considered an essential piece of the Republic and, as we will discuss further in the following chapter, is the primary source of moral education for children. Just as the Dutch home is a moral teaching ground, paintings of the home, such as *The Bedroom* and *A Maidservant in a Niche*, serve a similar role of didacticism and reinforcing social expectations and roles.

Domestic images hold great significance for gendered social regulation of the Dutch seventeenth century in that they include almost exclusively women and children. Although there is a wide variety of domestic images and genre paintings, one consistency is the presence of women and children; it is rare to find a male figure represented in these household scenes and almost impossible to find images of men participating in domestic activities. As we will discuss in following chapters, men are found in images of dissolute households, but rarely participate in the household duties that were attributed so strongly to Dutch women.<sup>15</sup> Ultimately, the subgenre of domestic genre paintings can be deemed a gendered one. These paintings portray images of women in the domestic realm, to which they belong. As the dominating figures of the domestic realm, women were expected to fulfill the role of moral educator. Some paintings show mothers teaching their children, participating in household chores, or preparing food. Others place a Dutch family around their table for a meal, going about their household and family rituals. These picturesque

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), 543, An engraving from de Brune’s *Emblemata* serves as one of the very few examples of “shared domestic roles” in which a man cares for his child while his wife rests in bed. Domestic behavior by a male individual, however, was not often a reality for Dutch burghers. The portrayal of a father tending to his child in this case is likely a reference to the Fatherly God rather than an accurate depiction of the Dutch father’s role in the home.

moments are captured in a great deal of Dutch paintings created for the Dutch middle and upper classes, so it may seem safe to assume that they are accurate representations of everyday life for a middle class family. This assumption, however, is not entirely true; it is known that these idealized domestic images were exactly that: idealized. Paintings of this sort expressed the desires of families, what they wanted to become rather than who they were in reality.<sup>16</sup> As these images do not depict reality, they serve as an ideal, a goal to be hung on the wall as a reminder of what to achieve. For women who would have viewed domestic paintings, their role of domesticity would have been repeatedly reinforced. As we will see in the sections that follow, Dutch culture fortifies their gendered roles through a range of sources. *A Maidservant in a Niche* would have held different meanings for different viewers, but it ultimately served to reinforce the gendered roles of both men and women.

### *A Maid Servant in a Niche*

In Dou's *A Maid Servant in a Niche*, a young woman gazes out toward the viewer, drawing them into a domestic moment. Her youth emanates through the rose in her cheeks, the shine of her nose, and the delicate hairs that flow from her head. She leans over the ledge of a window to pour water out of a jug, her chest suggestively presented to the viewer. As if the presentation of her chest was not sexualizing her enough, the

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<sup>16</sup> H. Perry Chapman, "Home and the Display of Privacy," *Art and Home: Dutch Interiors in the Age of Rembrandt*, (Denver: Denver Art Museum, 2001): 133. It was a common belief in the nineteenth century that Dutch art served as an accurate reflection of Dutch life. Eugene Fromentin, for example, writes on the matter in 1876 in his work *The Masters of Past Time: Dutch and Flemish Painting from Van Eyck to Rembrandt*. It is now known, according to Chapman, that Dutch paintings are not reliably naturalistic, particularly when it comes to domestic images. Artists created a dream home rather than an entirely accurate one. Chapman does not discuss this unreliable naturalism in relation to dissolute households. Considering that the dissolute household is a type of genre painting, however, it is safe to assume they were included in the nineteenth-century belief that these images portrayed real life.

roundness of her breasts is echoed in the shape of the jug in her hands. Her status is clear from her modest clothing and menial chore and her placement in the foreground of the composition indicates that she is the focal point of Dou's painting. Her eyes lock with the viewer, presenting a sort of moral test as she seems to subtly offer herself. The suggestive imagery of the maidservant participates in the misogynistic treatment of this specific social member during the seventeenth century, misogyny that categorized maidservants as promiscuous and deceitful individuals. Looking to images by Dou that include women performing similar tasks allows us to see how the sexualization of this woman in *A Maidservant in a Niche* is specific to women of her class. Dou's, *Old Woman with a Jug at a Window* (figure 8), shows an older woman performing a similar task, fully covered and eyes averted from the viewer; she is not classified as a maidservant due to her age and modesty and therefore does not pose a threat. In *A Maidservant in a Niche*, Dou participates in a specific typing of the Dutch maidservant, one that lends itself to the misogynistic treatment of this specific class of women, misogyny that constantly blames, criticizes, and deems maidservants threatening. Mischievous and sexually-charged representations of maidservants can be seen in work from other Dutch painters as well.<sup>17</sup> There is a clear pattern in the portrayal of maidservants in Dutch paintings; they are consistently a mischievous temptresses with tones of innocence. Considering the similarity to these other representations of maidservants during the Dutch seventeenth-century, Dou participates in the existing social conversation about this specific societal role of the Dutch maidservant, a conversation that ridicules these women for promiscuity and deceit.

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<sup>17</sup> Chapman, 250

This social conversation is not restricted to paintings: it also has a strong presence in other cultural documents. Household manuals, which were widely used by the Dutch middle class, instructed readers to be wary of servants, telling them that servants “need guidance and supervision.”<sup>18</sup> In the manual, *Ervarene en Verstandige Hollandsche Huysouldster*, wives were told to only hire a maidservant with great references. The manual is so specific in its instruction on the matter that it gives guidance on how to feed one’s maidservant, how to pay her, and how to best guide her work.<sup>19</sup> The amount of detail given to instruction on the management of maidservants suggests that the maidservant was seen as a real threat. An unruly maidservant would damage the reputation of a Dutch middle class family, which is expressed by Gerard de Lairese in *Groot schilderboek* in which he states that a bad family is one whose “servants go unsupervised and so steal.”<sup>20</sup> But as we see in paintings like Dou’s, the maidservant posed a sexual threat as well, “for in such intimacies lurk the seeds of domestic havoc.”<sup>21</sup> A Dutch satire entitled *The Seven Devils Ruling Present-Day Maidservants* presents Dutch maidservants as demons, highlighting their most dangerous qualities as theft and lust. As the story goes, the devil sends these demons into Dutch homes “to lure Dutch women to several and particular kinds of moral iniquity.”<sup>22</sup> This kind of literature contributes further to the accumulation of sources that enforce a deceitful image of the maidservant and demonstrates the general perception of her societal role.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 248

<sup>19</sup> Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches*, 457

<sup>20</sup> Chapman, 250

<sup>21</sup> Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches*, 457

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 548

These sources, however, serve as impressions of maidservants rather than concrete examples of their lifestyle or behaviors. There are a handful of examples of criminal maidservants; there is an account of a young maidservant who stole a coat, one of a girl who stole silverware, and even some of maidservants in The Hague who helped prisoners escape from jail.<sup>23</sup> These examples suggest that there may be some truth to the mischief and deceit that is referenced time and time again in cultural documents from the time, but of course these examples of maidservant crime should not convince us that *every* maidservant in *every* middle-class home was a criminal. There are instances in which the maidservant is regarded as a member of the middle-class family, “cared for during illness, often mentioned in their master’s will.”<sup>24</sup> A traveler’s account recalls a Dutch family sitting down to dinner, their maidservant seated next to her mistress and the two serving themselves before the rest. When the man of the household requested something of his servant, his wife “told [him] to go himself, and that she wanted her servant to rest...the servant supported her complaisant mistress enthusiastically...and finally convinced of his error, [the husband] apologized to his wife and stole a kiss from her.”<sup>25</sup> This kind of fraternizing between the wife and the maidservant seems to suggest that women of Dutch household may not have held such a negative view of their maidservants as the authors of the household manuals we have discussed. Of course, we cannot so swiftly generalize this one account of a housewife and maidservant as the standard for all Dutch households, but it brings to light an important issue: the male author or artist instructing the female audience.

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 460

<sup>24</sup> Zumthor, 136

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.



Gerrit Dou, in his portrayal of the maidservant, aligns himself with each of the authors of household manuals that we have discussed above in that they each create and reinforce one another's social regulation of women. In *Ervarene en Verstandige Hollandsche Huysouldster*, we see the male author discouraging gossip between wives and servants, as if the kind of fraternizing between the two individuals was threatening to the Dutch male. It seems that two females dominating the home posed a threat and therefore they must be pitted against each other.<sup>26</sup> The buildup of the blatantly negative references and attitudes toward maidservants creates a social language and expectations surrounding their social group. The effect the maidservant has is multivalent, as both men and women would have viewed the image. Men who would have seen *A Maidservant in a Niche*, likely hung in someone's home, are tested by the sexual nature of the maidservant as she seemingly offers herself to the viewer while still maintaining a sense of innocence. To the Dutch man, Dou's maidservant is a threat, not only to his fidelity and morality, but to the well-being of his entire family. Women of the household would see the image of the maidservant as a bad example, distinguishing themselves from her lower social position and sense of morality. In distinguishing the maidservant from the woman of the household, the image also discourages fraternizing between the two just as the author does in *Ervarene en Verstandige Hollandsche Huysouldster*. In the eyes of an actual maidservant who may have viewed Dou's painting, her societal role is further stereotyped by Dou, her perceived position reinforced.

Although the maidservant in Dou's painting dominates the composition, her surrounding details are not meant to go unnoticed. Behind her, we see a mother preparing

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<sup>26</sup> Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches*, 458.

bread for her son, illuminated by the light of an adjacent window. The son waits patiently, his hands pressed together, while his mother readies his food, watching him intently. The innocent moment between mother and child in the background of Dou's image contrasts the suggestive confrontation between the maidservant and the viewer in the foreground. Beside the maidservant sits a potted plant, fruits hanging from its limbs and dangling on the opposite side, a bird cage. The various details in the foreground that frame the maidservant hold significant didactic meaning. The jug that she tips over the window and into the viewer's space references a well-known metaphor that "a vessel always retains the smell of the first liquid that it contained," a metaphor created by the Roman writer Horace.<sup>27</sup> In other words, children are impressionable and their parents must teach them well from an early age. This reference relates to the interaction between mother and child in the background, serving as a didactic tool for parenting and educating children. Paired with the jug metaphor, the plant to the opposite side of the maidservant serves a similar symbolic purpose, as it is often included in images with children present as a sign of "virtuous upbringing."<sup>28</sup> These iconographical details work to enhance virtuous exchange between mother and child in the background of the image, which serves as a foil to the maidservant in the foreground. Her portrayal as a sexualized threat, which subscribes to the accepted impression of maidservants at the time, is only furthered by the idealized image of mother and child, light shining down on them through the window. To the female middle class viewer, Dou's painting reinforces the woman's role

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<sup>27</sup> Wayne Frantis, *Pieter de Hooch: A Woman Preparing Bread and Butter for a Boy* (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2007), 51

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

as moral mother, presenting the maidservant as a promiscuous member of the lower class, someone to be avoided and most definitely not emulated.

In this image, Dou presents two examples of female existence: one of domestic virtue and one of promiscuity and threat. The presence of the model child in the background of Dou's composition, paired with his virtuous mother, only enhances the threat of the maidservant, revealing the misogynist treatment of maidservants and reinforcing their role in society. *A Maidservant in a Niche* would have been viewed by middle- and upper-class women and men, but also possibly by a maidservant. To each of these members of society (man, woman, and maidservant), the image would serve a different purpose, reinforcing each of their respective roles in Dutch society. Dou's painting serves a morally didactic purpose in its warning to men and its presentation of good and bad examples of living to women, ultimately contributing to the aspect of morality within the Dutch identity.

### ***The Bedroom***

*The Bedroom* is relevant to the discussion of women and children as it presents the two in a domestic space, encouraging the gendered restrictions of Dutch seventeenth-century society. As previously discussed, the Dutch home held an essential role in Dutch culture and many paintings made by de Hooch depict this domestic aspect of Dutch life. Domestic scenes in Dutch paintings have extremely female content. The domestic role of women was ingrained in Dutch culture by such authority as Erasmus, who emphasized the Dutch woman as ruler of the household. Pieter de Hooch's work participates in the social attitude of restriction toward women that was enforced through paintings and

literature of the time. His painting reflects the social structures and limitations surrounding gender distinction in the Dutch Republic.

In *The Bedroom*, a large window draws in the sun, catching the eye of the viewer in the scattered reflective qualities throughout the scene: a jug below the window glistens, matched by a pot on the floor of tiles which similarly reflect the sunlight. As the light moves across the room from left to right, so does the viewer, noting the angelic child who stands in the doorway, smiling toward the mother across the way. Their gaze follows that of the child, across the room, passing the detailed tiles on the wall and the satiny green curtain that echoes the drapery enveloping the child's mother. The white light of the window brightens her face, revealing the soft smile that she returns to her child. The bright glistening qualities of light catch the eye, darting from the intricate thread work of the bed drapery to the hardware of the upholstered chairs framing the doorway, which leads us through another room and out of the home altogether. Feathery suggestions of trees and plants create an outdoor scape that is echoed by the landscape painting hung directly above our frame of view of the outside world. Glimpses of this outside world flash before us in streams of light, passageways, glistening details, and paintings hung on the walls. In this image, de Hooch presents a serene domestic scene, a tender moment between mother and child. This portrayal of a Dutch home holds great significance in its representation of women and the home in that it reflects the domestic restriction of women.

### **The Dutch Household**

Understanding domestic images begins with understanding the attitude toward the household in Dutch culture. The importance of the Dutch household is multifaceted,

serving as grounds for moral education as well as a platform for social display. Looking to travel accounts from the time, the Dutch home can be understood as a form of “self-display.”<sup>29</sup> In his account of Dutch culture, William Temple notes that every extra penny belonging to the Dutch family was “laid out in the fabric, adornment, or furniture of their houses...[which] have not only the riches of a family but contribute much towards the public beauty and honour of a country.”<sup>30</sup> These remarks suggest that there was distinct effort put into the Dutch home and that, as Temple claims, the social images created by these homes contribute to the greater Dutch identity, the identity of the middle and upper classes. In 1640, Peter Mundy makes similar remarks, but focuses, rather, on the importance of painting specifically:

“As for the Art off Painting and the affection off the people to Pictures, I thincke none other goe beeyonde them....All in generall striving to adorne their houses, especially the outer or street roome, with costly peeces, Butcher and bakers, not much inferiour in their shoppes, which are Fairely sett Forth, yea many tymes blacksmithes, Coblers, etts., will have some picture or tother by their Forge and in their stalle. Such is the generall Notion, enclination and delight that these Countrie Natives have to Paintings”<sup>31</sup>

These accounts demonstrate the effort and money that the Dutch middle class put into decorating their homes. Paintings, such as de Hooch’s *The Bedroom*, indicated status for the middle or upper class family they belonged to as they would hang in their homes, on

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<sup>29</sup> Martha Hollander, “Public and Private Life in the Art of Pieter de Hooch,” *Netherlands Yearbook for History of Art* 51 (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 286

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Sluijter, 104

display for visitors to see. Owning paintings and decorating one's home was a form of social display as well as fulfillment of social expectations for the middle and upper classes.

Mundy mentions the "outer or street roome," known to the Dutch as the *voorhuis*, the first room that visitors would enter and a common place for displaying paintings.<sup>32</sup> In *The Bedroom*, de Hooch includes a *voorhuis* from which the child enters the scene and in which a painting is hung. The owner of this painting may have even hung it in their own front room, awaiting the eyes of guests and members of the household, demonstrating the wealth and virtue of the household to anyone who entered. Domestic paintings were so prominent in Dutch culture due to this sense of pride that surrounded the Dutch home. The pristine image of a domestic scene informs visitors of the status of those who own it while also reinforcing the domestic virtue that it displays. In purchasing domestic images, Dutch families hoped to emulate the idealized scenes and display their wealth and therefore their participation in middle-class social expectations. Understanding the purpose and motivation behind domestic images helps shape our view of a social code for the Dutch middle class. In his portrayal of domestic bliss, de Hooch contributes to a social code, revealing the gendered regulation of middle class women.

### **Gendered Roles and Spaces**

The *voorhuis* serves as an example of the home as a form of display, functioning as a space for the outside world to see, but it also highlights gender distinctions within the home. Examining a variety of cultural documents, including paintings and literature, it becomes clear that domestic paintings are a gendered matter. As mentioned above, men

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<sup>32</sup> Hollander, 274

are almost never included in domestic images. The subgenre is female-oriented, bringing to question the attitude toward women in the images and their role in Dutch society. The role of the Dutch woman is that of the housewife, tending to cleaning and cooking, sometimes to extreme lengths as described by travelers visiting the Republic.<sup>33</sup> *The Bedroom* reflects the social normativity in the separation of domestic spaces in relation to gender, but also shows us that no space in the home belongs exclusively to women. The house itself is a very important detail in the work of Pieter de Hooch. The image gives a detailed account of the interior of an idealized Dutch home during the seventeenth century. We see the voorhuis leading into the bedroom, table and chairs, and paintings on the wall. In this painting, along with many others by de Hooch, the female figure is found inside the home, while her child seemingly enters the home from the outside. In *Houwelijk*, a guide written for women on marriage by the popular Dutch author Jacob Cats, it is clearly stated that “the man must go about his affairs on the street, while his wife must keep watch in the house, in the kitchen.”<sup>34</sup> Considering the vast exposure of the middle class to Cats’s instructional writing, it can be assumed that this concept of gendered spaces was accepted, or at least enforced by social regulators such as Cats. If his words were not enough, Johan van Beverwijk addresses the matter of gendered spheres in his instructional writing stating, “Man, all outside work is your affair; and all that occurs indoors is your wives.”<sup>35</sup> These kinds of remarks, that would have been read by members of the middle class, become a part of their social expectations, forming a rather literal gendered distinction of space. Martha Hollander relates these gendered

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<sup>33</sup> Zumthor, 137-138

<sup>34</sup> Hollander, 280-281

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 281

distinctions of space to a variety of works by Pieter de Hooch, claiming that his paintings present the same declaration of public and private spheres as respectively male and female, that Cats and van Beverwijk made.

Using Hollander's concept to examine *The Bedroom*, we can notice the mother inside, tending to her household chores, so distinctly removed from the outside male world. As Hollander puts it, "the world of women is portrayed as an interior world open to masculine influence."<sup>36</sup> The figurative "opening" to the male realm is displayed quite literally in *The Bedroom* as we see through the open doors and into the public sphere that waits outside. The inclusion of the outdoor space in this painting creates "a more fluid relationship between the feminine world of domesticity and the masculine, outer world of commerce, action and influence."<sup>37</sup> This architectural feature included in de Hooch's painting quite literally opens a door between the masculine and feminine spheres, giving the woman a glimpse of the public world, but not necessarily giving her access.

In Cats's *Moeder*, a print is included as the frontispiece by Adriaen van de Venne in which a father is portrayed as the instructor for entering the world and the mother as the "antiworld" or instructor of the home.<sup>38</sup> The print is similar to *The Bedroom* in that it presents a domestic scene that reinforces the role of women as mother and housewife, limited to the household. In *The Bedroom* the absence of men in the image emphasizes the space as a female one and therefore the domestic duty as a female one. While there is a man present in van de Venne's print, his presence serves the same purpose as the absence of man in *The Bedroom*. The father figure in van de Venne's print works as a foil

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 285

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 283

<sup>38</sup> Schama, *Embarrassment of Riches*, 544



to his wife, highlighting her expected role as a woman. We see him seated on the left side of the image, the male side of the image, books and educational tools scattered around him as he instructs his son who stands beside him. On the right side of the composition - the female side - we find the mother nursing a child, her daughters beside her performing their own domestic tasks. The distinct separation between male and female figures in this print clearly defines the expected gender roles of Dutch society, dividing even the children by their respective genders, just as we see Pieter de Hooch doing in *The Bedroom* with his distinction of space.

While the absence of a male figure in *The Bedroom* marks the domestic realm as belonging to women, de Hooch's painting does not leave the male presence out of the composition all together. As men were the financial providers for their families, the Dutch house could not belong exclusively to women, and of course men existed within their own homes. The overwhelming female aspect of domestic images in Dutch genre painting emphasizes the domestic duty of women, but it does not give women complete dominance over the household. In *The Bedroom*, we see multiple paintings on the wall of de Hooch's imagined home. The one presented to us most clearly, portrays a natural landscape, serving as a window to the outside world just as the *voorhuis* does. In this way, the public sphere intervenes on the private. Encroaching in on the domestic life of the mother in *The Bedroom*, the outside world and male presence hold their own through the presence of the public realm as well as the male economies that funded the household.

The matter of children in domestic paintings provides valuable insights on the role of women and children in Dutch society. In *The Bedroom*, we find the child in the midst of entering the room from the outside, suggested by the open front door and the hand of

the child on the door leading from the voorhuis inside. Unlike the mother, who is so distinctly removed from the outside realm in both her positioning the composition and her preoccupation with interior domestic activities, the child bridges the distance between inside and outside, straddling the “fluidity” that is created by the public aspect of the voorhuis. Unlike the children in van de Venne’s print from *Moeder*, the child’s gender in de Hooch’s painting is rather ambiguous. De Hooch’s child cannot be categorized as female or male or domestic or public like those in van de Venne’s print. The ambiguity of gender explains the child’s existence between public and private space in the image, as they stand in the transitional space of the doorway. It is suggested through this ambiguity that the child has the ability to enter the public sphere, an ability that de Hooch suggests the mother does not have. This liminal space may even suggest the transition to adulthood that this child will someday experience, a transition that the mother must prepare her child for, as is her domestic duty.

The assault of paintings, books, prints, etc., that reinforce the role of women in Dutch society creates a strong sense of the social and cultural expectations imposed on women by men. With their respective presentations of mother and child, *The Bedroom* and *A Maidservant in a Niche* illuminate the social system of the Dutch middle and upper classes which gave women just one accepted path of existence. Dou’s painting presents the ambivalent maidservant who exists as a caution to both men and women as well as the model mother and child that we see repeated in de Hooch’s image. Together, these two paintings present two types of womanhood in the Dutch Republic: one good and one bad. Not only do Dou and de Hooch demonstrate to their viewers the ideal role of the Dutch middle-class woman, they present domesticity as the only acceptable option.

## II

### The Unruly Child: Morality and Class Distinction

While genre paintings may depict the Dutch every day, it is dangerous to assume that these paintings are direct and accurate translations of life in the Dutch Republic. There is, however, a great deal of insight to be gleaned from Dutch genre paintings when we bring a critical eye. Focusing specifically on two works by the Dutch painter Jan Steen, we can place genre paintings within a middle-class dialogue of national morality. The presence of children in Steen's *A School for Boys and Girls* and *The Dissolute Household* reinforces an existing national identity of morality and class distinction for the Dutch middle and upper classes.

These images have been academically addressed and analyzed in terms of iconography and moral didacticism, but there is very little research on the presence of children in Steen's paintings. In her research on the child in Dutch painting, Durantini addresses the presence of children in Steen's unruly school scenes, claiming they are used as "criticism of the inattentive adults."<sup>39</sup> This analysis of children is an example of acknowledging children as tools of didacticism in Steen's paintings, but is it possible generalize the presence of children across different paintings types by Steen?

Both of Steen's paintings present compositionally chaotic scenes. In *The Dissolute Household* we see a middle-class family in their middle-class home. A man and woman dance and play music in the background as the rest of the adults in the scene sit around a table; one woman, asleep with her head rested on the table, is being pickpocketed by a child. Across the floor in the foreground of the image we see a variety

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<sup>39</sup> Durantini, 154

of objects seemingly thrown about. A deck of cards is scattered across the ground next to a hat that must have carelessly fallen, perhaps off the head of the man eagerly placing his leg on the lap of the woman next to him. A dog curiously sniffs a platter of food on the floor, standing in the midst of oyster shells that have fallen out of a bowl. Above the table a barrel hangs from the ceiling, drawing our attention to the landscape painting on the wall and a small monkey playing with a clock.

The painting is generally considered one of Steen's many comic scenes.<sup>40</sup> The male commentator figure, who looks over his shoulder and out of the image directly to the viewer, invites us into the scene to perhaps experience the amusement or to pass our own judgments on the vices taking place. Steen's images of dissolute households are accepted as images intended to "generate delight...[and] guarantee moral grounding."<sup>41</sup> Although this chaotic scene may be amusing and somewhat desirable, the insertion of symbolic clues and reminders of vices inform the viewer of the fate of moral decline that is sure to come for the figures in the image.

With so many minute details, *The Dissolute Household* understandably has a great deal of iconographical nuances, making an iconographic review valuable. The playing cards serve as a strong symbol of evil and "adult vices" due to their connection to gambling.<sup>42</sup> The dog, on the other hand, is often used as a symbol of obedience, as it is relatively easy to train. In this image, however, the dog is not depicted as trainable, but distracted and disobedient, much like the children as they steal from their own family.<sup>43</sup> Intermingled with these symbols, the oyster shells spread across the floor create sexual

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<sup>40</sup> Westermann, 226

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 228

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches*, 547

undertones as they were considered aphrodisiacs.<sup>44</sup> Here we have a jumble of iconographical insertions that only continue as you move through the image. Above the figures, are symbols of punishment: a leper's rattle, a crutch, and a scourging birch, which hangs precariously from the ceiling, as if these symbolic punishments have reached their tipping point.<sup>45</sup> These details work together to clearly state the moral wrongdoings of the figures in the scene. Although Steen's comical and refined portrayal of this scene may be found amusing, there are also moral implications of the actions taking place.

In Steen's *A School for Boys and Girls*, we see a similar pandemonium, but rather than presenting a middle class scene as he does in *The Dissolute Household*, Steen creates a peasant image. The barn-like structure of this schoolhouse, together with the modest clothing of the figures, strongly suggests that Steen is depicting a lower-class interior. Children are pictured throughout the composition, kneeling over benches, standing on tables; objects hang from the ceiling and fall from shelves. We see only a handful of books, most of which are splayed open or simply torn into loose pages scattered across the floor. The school teacher, who is clearly identified by his hat at the center of the image, pays no attention to his students, but sharpens his pen. Looking to the iconography tied to this figure, sharpening a pen is often related to sharpening of the mind, but in this case the pen serves as a distraction of his true purpose of sharpening the minds of the students.<sup>46</sup> To add to his inadequacy, the teacher's eyeglasses serve as a symbol of "moral deficiency and spiritual blindness."<sup>47</sup> The iconography of eyeglasses is

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<sup>44</sup> Westermann, 240

<sup>45</sup> Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches*, 392

<sup>46</sup> Durantini, 154

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 158

seen throughout Dutch images and literature in which they are used to represent deception.<sup>48</sup> Steen does not leave the teacher simply distracted, he adds these key recognizable details to truly emphasize the man's incompetence at his job. Looking just behind the teacher in his chair, there is a small group of children pointing up to an owl perched on the wall. The primary child pointing to the owl holds a pair of glasses in his hands. This references the proverb "what good are glasses and candle if the owl does not want to see."<sup>49</sup> One youth points mockingly from the owl to his teacher, clearly highlighting yet again the inattention of the adult figure.<sup>50</sup> Just as with *The Dissolute Household*, Steen creates an amusing and comical image with *A School for Boys and Girls*, but the iconography included in the image points to moral didacticism in that the symbols clearly present a bad example. Both *A School for Boys and Girls* and *The Dissolute Household* participate in a common trend in Steen's work as a painter, one of comic amusement underlined with moral implications.

### **Issue of Audience**

Beginning to analyze Steen's work is impossible without first understanding his audience and contexts of viewership. Based on known records, Jan Steen's audience during the seventeenth century falls between the middle and upper classes of the Dutch Republic. Steen had three significant collectors that we know of: Abraham van Toorenvliet, a draftsman and glass painter, Petronella de la Court, who came from a prominent Leyden family, and Hendrick Bugge van Ring, a catholic investor.<sup>51</sup>

According to an inventory taken in 1667, Bugge van Ring had the largest number of

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 158-159

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 161

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 161

<sup>51</sup> Westermann, 63-64

paintings by Steen: his collection was comprised of 237 paintings, six of which were by Steen.<sup>52</sup> Aside from these three prominent “determined collectors,” many of the individuals who owned paintings by Steen were simply middle-class people.<sup>53</sup> Of the named owners, some were doctors, merchants, or bakers; a bookseller, innkeeper and soap manufacturer were also listed as having owned artwork by Steen.<sup>54</sup> We know from the formerly mentioned inventory of Hendrick Bugge van Ring that five of his paintings by Steen were spread out between three rooms in his home, and that the sixth was placed in the *salet*, a grand reception room in the house.<sup>55</sup> As for the more modest middle-class individuals, we can assume they hung Steen’s work much like the painting seen in Steen’s *The Dissolute Household*: in common living spaces or a *voorhuis* as discussed in Chapter One.

### **The Dissipated Domestic Scene**

In the previous chapter, we discussed images of serene domestic moments in which mother and child subscribe to their rightful roles. The discussion of such perfect and peaceful domestic scenes brings us to the opposite end of the spectrum to a subgenre attributed to Jan Steen himself: the dissolute household.<sup>56</sup> Rather than a pristine image of a flawless domestic scene, the dissolute household is a chaotic jumble of immoral activities, a “catalogue of domestic vices.”<sup>57</sup> Adults are either drinking, dancing, or have already surpassed their limits as they are asleep, head rested on a table. Items are scattered across the room, music is being played, women are dancing, and children are

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<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 64-65

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 67

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 64

<sup>56</sup> Westermann, 227

<sup>57</sup> Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches*, 391

misbehaving. This is the type of image seen in *The Dissolute Household* and its visual history can be sourced back to sixteenth-century sources such as comic images of tavern scenes and peasants, domestic allegories by Maerten de Vos, and later paintings of interiors by artists like Pieter de Hooch.<sup>58</sup> Steen draws elements from these Dutch traditions, creating a unique domestic subgenre. The chaotic qualities of the dissolute household are similar to those of peasant household or tavern images, while portrayals of the domestic are seen with de Vos and de Hooch. Combining the chaos of a peasant or tavern scene with the domesticity of de Vos and de Hooch, Steen contributes his own element to the subgenre: the middle-class family in their middle-class home. These chaotic scenes create a strong sense of the moral imperative of the middle- and upper-class identity. Paired with serene domestic image such as *The Bedroom* and *A Maidservant in a Niche*, the dissolute household serves as a contrast to the ideal moral Dutch family.

### **The Role of the Household**

The fixation on the domestic in Dutch genre painting can be attributed to the relationship between the Dutch middle class and their households. As discussed in Chapter One, the Dutch home served as a form of social display. The weight placed on the domestic aspect of Dutch culture can be seen in domestic literature such as *The Experienced and Knowledgeable Hollands Household*, a household manual for Dutch families. The manual focused so specifically on the importance of cleanliness that it included a precise chore schedule for the Dutch housewife, listing weekly cleaning tasks

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<sup>58</sup> Westermann, 226



organized by day of the week.<sup>59</sup> The fact that household manuals were so specific and also well distributed throughout the middle class demonstrates the importance placed on the Dutch home, which is reflected in domestic images as well. This kind of household literature also serves as a player in social regulation alongside domestic paintings, creating social expectations just as Steen does.

Looking to accounts from travelers visiting the Dutch Republic, we see the lengths Dutch women went to keep their homes clean and uphold the integrity of their family and their role as domestic caretakers as we saw in Chapter One. A foreigner recalled a story of a hearty servant woman lifting a man over her shoulder and carrying him through the home after noticing the mud on his shoes.<sup>60</sup> Another visitor stated that “Dutchwomen pride themselves on the cleanliness of their house and furniture to an unbelievable degree. They never seem to stop washing and scrubbing all the wooden furniture and fittings, even the benches and floorboards, as well as the stairs.”<sup>61</sup> This fixation on cleanliness was a matter of pride in many senses. Firstly, women had a duty to uphold their role as manager of the home. While their husbands dominated the public sphere in order to earn money for their families, the wife worked to structure a domestic culture of order and morality. Her societal role was to manage domestic life, to act as the “chief cleansing agent and moral, as well as mundane, laundress” of the household.<sup>62</sup> Both the effort and thought that was put into household upkeep for Dutch women is clear in accounts from outsiders and household manuals, but why was such importance placed on this aspect of Dutch life?

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 376

<sup>60</sup> Zumthor, 137-138

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches*, 400

The issue of the household brings us back to the importance of morality to the seventeenth-century Dutch identity. Care for the home was expressly related to morality because the home facilitated the raising of children. In his legend for the rag mop, van Luiken reminds his reader to “Look also, to subtle things, that seem but slight to lazy eyes, and mop them up with your own hand. The cobweb of the vile spider that hangs and sits in all the senses, where dirt and base matter gather.”<sup>63</sup> This kind of language situates the domestic role of women as a matter of moral duty; a clean home meant a clean conscience. Such literature brings to light the relationship between domestic upkeep and moral integrity in Dutch homes; in cleaning the cobwebs and dirt with “your own hand,” one cares for every sense of their being. While this connection between a clean floor and moral fortitude seems rather fragile, when the home is put in perspective as a tool for shaping the younger generation, the moral role of the household becomes more significant. Formal education was a key venue for shaping the morality of children, but children were not considered fit for school until they were “successfully weaned from mischief through the example of domestic virtue.”<sup>64</sup> This focus on domestic virtue demonstrates that the major source of moral education came from the home and from Dutch parents, and that household and school go hand-in-hand.

The attention to parenting in the Dutch Republic was very prominent. Opinions on raising children were public and widespread and parents had a variety of resources to promote their best efforts in upbringing. A great deal of paintings by Dutch artists such as Nicolaes Maes, Quinn Brekelenkam, and Pieter de Hooch show mothers nursing their babies, attesting to the common belief that wet nurses were problematic and mothers

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 382

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 558

should nurse their own children.<sup>65</sup> Nursing carried particular weight due to the belief that it implicated both physical and moral results in children.<sup>66</sup> “Acquired traits” of children were believed to be formed during nursing, and after that, the moral fate of the child was entirely up to their parents.<sup>67</sup> This attention to parenting was prevalent as soon as a child was born. Efforts of model parents are found in paintings such as Caspar Netscher’s *A Lady Teaching a Child to Read* (figure 9) and Cornelis de Man’s *The Reading Lesson* (figure 10). In both paintings, parents attentively oversee the instruction of their children, guiding them through books in a calm domestic setting. These paintings serve as examples of the diligence and thoughtfulness that must go into parenting and specifically, the place for education and molding of children in the domestic sphere. Dutch literature also reinforced the importance of parenting in the home. Authors such as Blankaart and van Beverwijk shared their opinions and advice with their middle class audience; van Beverwijk in his *Schat der Gezonheid* deterred parents from being too harsh in punishing their children and Blankaart in *Verhandeling* even suggested songs and games to assist in toilet training.<sup>68</sup> Moral guide books such as these were a kind of recipe for the instruction of virtue. Just like Steen’s paintings, this kind of literature on parenting tips and tricks was received by the Dutch middle class, becoming a part of the social code of the middle class and contributing to expectations for raising children.

While these methods held great importance for parents, the influence of parenting went beyond just the proactive efforts of adults. The proverb “as the old sing, so pipe the young” was a common festive theme in painting and serves as an indication of the

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<sup>65</sup> Durantini, 20

<sup>66</sup> Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches*, 539

<sup>67</sup> Durantini, 20

<sup>68</sup> Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches*, 557

importance placed on leading by example.<sup>69</sup> In a print by Luiken, popularly known as the *Poppegoed Print*, we see mini pots and pans for children to play house, mimicking the adult figures in their lives. Children, primarily girls, played with dolls and dollhouses as well to learn through imitation and practice domestic virtues.<sup>70</sup> These traditions of play center around the mimicry of and preparation for adulthood, an image that is shaped by the very adults in the lives of each child. This form of imitative play demonstrates that there was extreme moral pressure on parents to act as model Dutch individuals for their children. Not only were they to actively instruct their children, parents were expected to lead by example. Together with cultural opinions on nursing, images of parental instruction, and literature on parenting, the instructional and imitative forms of play demonstrate the importance of parenting and the home. The domestic upbringing of children was of great concern to those living in the Republic which is because of the implications children held for the national moral identity of the middle class.

The household was a major source of influence in the shaping Dutch children whose morality was essential, not only for their own pride and well-being, but also for the sake of the Republic.<sup>71</sup> Van Beverwijck addresses the importance of parenting in his book *Schat der Gezonheid* stating that “Republics that set most store by their good citizens give most attention to the upbringing of their children,” and that “the depravity of

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<sup>69</sup> Durantini, 5

<sup>70</sup> Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches*, 558. Interpretation of doll play is muddled. Schama simply writes that dollhouses were used as a means of imitation of domestic virtue, but Durantini discusses at some length the contradictory interpretation of doll play in paintings. She references Jan Luiken’s distaste for adults playing with children and their toys, dolls specifically. Durantini also references Brekelenkam’s painting *Woman Making Lace* along with an image by Cornelis Dusart, presenting two interpretations of doll play: one of imitation and virtue and one of implied luxury and sexual overtones. See Durantini 249-254

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 561

republics proceeds from the inattention and oversight of their good upbringing.”<sup>72</sup>

Statements like these reinforce the essential role of morality and were prominent in Dutch culture and literature, putting a great deal of pressure on parents to raise moral children who would, in turn, contribute to a kind of national kinship. Parents were reminded by authors like van Beverwijck of the fact that the future of the Republic was in the hands of their children, and therefore in their very own hands as they raise these children; they were burdened with a responsibility to uphold the moral identity of the Republic.

### ***The Dissolute Household***

Situating Jan Steen’s domestic representations within the context of the Dutch household highlights the symbolic role of the children. As discussed above, the domestic sphere in middle-class culture was a crucial space for instilling moral values. A variety of sources from paintings like Caspar Netscher’s *A Lady Teaching a Child to Read* to household manuals like *The Experienced and Knowledgeable Hollands Household* that have been discussed above demonstrate the importance of the household as grounds for raising moral citizens. Beyond emphasizing this importance, these middle class documents also collectively create a cultural style and code for the Dutch middle class that Steen’s *The Dissolute Household* participates in. He strays from the model image of Dutch life, creating a scene of pandemonium. As mentioned previously, Steen’s image is packed with iconographical references as a way of encoding a specific belief system of morality. These references highlight the immoral activities taking place in front of the viewer and the impending consequences. Steen also makes a proverbial reference to the

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 495

saying “opportunity makes the thief” with the child stealing from his sleeping mother.<sup>73</sup>

With these iconographical and proverbial nuances, Steen participates in the cultural code of the Dutch middle class, both reinforcing and contributing to the societal regulation and style.

Although *The Dissolute Household* does portray one immoral activity after the other, it also exudes an air of charm and amusement. Viewers witness a fun-filled scene of freedom from rules and expectations. The viewer recognizes, however, the impending consequences that are sure to come for such behavior. Steen is known for creating such comic or amusing images, but his works serve a greater purpose than amusement alone. In 1713, a man by the name of Cornelis van Dyck wrote about Steen’s painting in a sale catalogue calling it “an extraordinary beautiful piece...representing the dissolute household, in which one sees the life of the World, and [how one] through such life comes from luxury to the Begging bag.”<sup>74</sup> As Mariet Westermann puts it: “comic painting dispenses morals even when it does not shake fingers explicitly.”<sup>75</sup> This dualistic quality of comic painting is present in *The Dissolute Household*, achieved in the extreme chaos of portraying vice after vice in a vibrant and compositionally busy manner with moral undertones. The audience is visually stimulated, but aware of the moral implications of the actions presented by Steen. His use of strong symbols and proverbial references serve a greater purpose than amusement. Although viewing the *Dissolute Household* may be an amusing experience, it is clear to viewers that it shows an example of immorality with punishment sure to come. While he may use some humor to make his

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<sup>73</sup> Durantini, 67

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 229

<sup>75</sup> Westermann, 124

point, Steen ultimately presents this moralizing message, bolstering the moral expectations of the middle-class identity.

*The Dissolute Household* stands as a cautionary image, an example of what not to do. Steen presents to his middle-class audience a familiar household scene, likely similar to their own homes. He even goes so far as to place himself in the image as a commentator figure, looking over his shoulder toward the viewer, a pipe in hand and his leg across the lap of a woman. Steen includes himself in many of his dissolute household scenes and this inclusion of the artist was a common method for comic images in general.<sup>76</sup> By looking out to the viewer, Steen invites us into the image, allowing us to pass our own judgments as we witness the various vices taking place. The inclusion of Steen as figure may serve a humorous purpose in that he recognizes his own folly, but it also distinctly addresses the potential of wrongdoing in any individual as Steen admits his own vices as a fellow middle-class man.

Addressing the middle class and participating in the symbolic language promoted by many cultural influences, Steen insinuates that the moral fate of the Republic is in their hands specifically through the presence of children in the scene. *The Dissolute Household* suggests the potential for a national moral decline in the misbehavior of these adults and particularly in the misbehavior of the children. Their presence in the image serves as a reminder of the future of the Republic; as the parents lounge around aimlessly and without moral concern, their children begin to do the same. Steen's participation in the cultural code of the Dutch middle class through proverbial and iconographical references enhances the statement that children will do as they please if no adult pays

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 227

attention to them. But, perhaps more importantly, the image works to demonstrate that children will follow the example of their parents. Without the children present in this scene, Steen's message of moral didacticism would carry much less weight. The adults in the image would still serve as a bad example of morality, resulting in moral consequences, but with children present, not only does the viewer feel the threat of hell but the threat of their beloved Republic plummeting into a pit of immoral vices. The children are quite literally the future of the Dutch Republic. The risk of moral decline is imminent in *The Dissolute Household* and the state of the middle class' moral identity will take a turn for the worse if the adults do not shape up and lead by example in order to create a future generation of morality. The middle-class family in the painting participates in a middle-class code and evokes humor, discomfort, and revulsion. They are responsible for their immorality just as the middle-class viewer is as well, carrying the moral fate of the Republic on their shoulders.

### **Education in the Dutch Republic**

The Dutch household, as we have discussed, held great importance in the shaping of Dutch youths. Children were not considered ready for a formal education until they were properly educated at home.<sup>77</sup> But Steen's representation of a schoolhouse brings to question the role of that formal education, which holds great significance in relation to the moral identity of the Dutch middle class as well as the prominence of class distinction within that identity. The Dutch schoolhouse served as a moral beacon in Dutch society and its tradition in Dutch art is one of parody and caution. The presence of education in the Dutch Republic was rather unique compared to contemporary European countries at

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<sup>77</sup> Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches*, 558



the time in that it was much more widespread. With the highest literacy rates in Europe, the Dutch Republic had a vast and accessible education system.<sup>78</sup> By the middle of the seventeenth century, almost all Dutch children could access a school within walking distance from their homes.<sup>79</sup>

While education was widely available, there was doubt from the middle and upper classes as to whether education needed to be provided for lower classes. As we will see in *A School for Boys and Girls*, this sense of doubt is reflected in the image and contributes to the aspect of social distinction in the Dutch identity. Such questions are raised in Nicholas Breton's *Cyuite and Uncyuite Life*, a conversation between two men raises such questions: "poore men that put to many unapte children to the Schoole, do nothingels, but offer them losse of time: For do you not meete many beggars that can doo these, yet you see their estate is plaine beggary?"<sup>80</sup> Peasants were thought to be of lesser intellectual competence and there was a general questioning of the worth of education for lower classes. Most children from the lower class had a rather rigidly designated future in work that did not require the education provided in Dutch schools. Due to the predetermined life of mundane work for lower classes, middle-class individuals questioned whether education was even worth the while of the lower class.

Nevertheless, education was widespread in the Dutch Republic, which could not be achieved without concerted effort and ambitions. Motivation to regulate the Dutch education system came largely from the Dutch Reformed Church. The Reformed Church

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<sup>78</sup> Donna R. Barns and Peter G. Rose, *Childhood Pleasures: Dutch Children in the Seventeenth Century* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2012): 7

<sup>79</sup> Jeroen J.H. Dekker, "Moral Literacy: The Pleasure of Learning How to Become Decent Adults and Good Parents in the Dutch Republic in the Seventeenth Century," *Paedagogica Historica* 44, no. 1-2, (2008): 139

<sup>80</sup> Durantini, 143

was not the religion of the state but the “public church” of the Republic and actually viewed the regulation of education as a job for the government.<sup>81</sup> This role of the church, however, did not mean that it had no influence in governmental regulation of public education. At the end of the sixteenth century, Church membership was extremely low. The Church then began an effort to target the youth of the Republic in order to improve numbers of faithful. As stated by a Dutch provincial synod: “If many adults are unwilling and will not listen, then one must gradually instill the true religion in the younger and tender of age.”<sup>82</sup> From 1618 to 1619, the National Synod met in Dordrecht where they solidified expectations for education in the Republic. It was here established that all school teachers must sign the Three Forms of Unity. In signing these contracts, school teachers were making a commitment to uphold and teach the Reformed doctrine, abiding by the moral and religious values of the Church.<sup>83</sup> These influences by the Church and its involvement in education ultimately demonstrate the religious presence in education. With the prominence of the Church established, in the following paragraphs we will address how the Church’s presence instills a strong sense of morality in the education of children and how this emphasis on morality contributes to the greater identity of the Dutch middle class through Jan Steen’s painting.

The Reformed Church focused a large portion of its efforts on instilling moral knowledge just as *A School for Boys and Girls* and the *Dissolute Household* do for their audiences. The religious investment seen in education makes it a matter of morality as

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 54

<sup>82</sup> Leendert F. Groenendijk, “The Reformed Church and Education During the Golden Age of the Dutch Republic,” *Dutch Review of Church History* 85 (2005): 53

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 58. Due to regional variations in public administration, these recommendations made by the National Synod were not necessarily implemented consistently across the Republic. Nevertheless, the Church had direct involvement in creating expectations for public education.

well. Church orators performed sermons “moraliz[ing] in a highly colored language, making use of puns and quoting proverbs.” Here we see the social code of the Dutch middle class in proverbial references, contributing to the collection of cultural documents that make up this code and social regulation. Denouncing activities of pleasure and luxury, sermons focused on both the proper personal behavior and decorum.<sup>84</sup> These elements of Church sermons highlight that the Church held expectations of moral correctness, admonishing vices like those that we see in Steen’s dissolute households and unruly schools. It is clear that morality was a priority for the Reformed Church and therefore, morality becomes a priority in schools as well. As discussed above, the Church made a concerted effort to impact the curriculum and the teachers present in Dutch schools.<sup>85</sup> Of course, the Church also made a great effort to instill the Reformed faith in children. Textbooks like Marnix’s *Cort begriip* were published as entry points for young children to begin reading the Heidelberg Catechism, a Protestant document meant to teach the Reformed doctrine. Children also recited prayers, read the Bible, and sang Psalms multiple times a day.<sup>86</sup> The moral aspect of the Church, however, was also translated in curricula; reading spelling, and writing exercises used books with religious and moral content and nearly every aspect of learning was cushioned by undertones of religion and morality.<sup>87</sup> The clear involvement of the Church in education reveals implications of morality due to the importance it held in religious life.

While it was a key aspect of Reformed teachings, the importance of morality was not limited to Dutch Protestants; rather it was a national concern. As we have seen in the

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<sup>84</sup> Zumthor, 83

<sup>85</sup> Groenendijk, 58

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 66-67

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

symbolic language of Steen's *The Dissolute Household*, and as we will see is the case in his *A School for Boys and Girls* as well, issues of morality were a part of the social code of the Dutch middle class. Education was intended for all children; the Church even recommended that education be free of charge for children of all classes, although this gesture did not become a reality in most cases.<sup>88</sup> As mentioned above, a great number of children in the Dutch Republic were able to attend school. Considering the religious climate during the time, many children attending these schools were not all from families of the Reformed faith, yet morality was still considered an essential aspect of education.<sup>89</sup> Student retention was extremely important to school teachers as it directly affected their pay.<sup>90</sup> Therefore, instructors would make an effort to refrain from too much emphasis on Reformed teaching.

Lessons on morality, however, were not limited to Reformed teaching, just as Dutch genre paintings were not limited to members of the Church. Young children attending school read ABC books to practice the alphabet, but also to be filled with moral and civic ideals. In Swilden's ABC book, for example, the letter N stand for Nederland, stating: "Nederland is your fatherland. Safely will you live therein / When you grow up, you too will have your household there."<sup>91</sup> This emphasis on nationality is not so slyly included in a simple lesson on the ABCs. Even during the early stages of life, a cultural language is being developed for Dutch children through books like this, shaping their view of the Republic and their roles within society and introducing students to images as

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 58

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 59, In fact, it is known that Catholic and Mennonite families would pull their children from school if they felt the curriculum included too much Reformed teaching.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 59, Schoolteacher salaries came from student fees.

<sup>91</sup> Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches*, 494

instruments of social regulation. Just as this civic responsibility is included in lessons, morality is greatly emphasized and not only through Reformed teachings. In fact, it can be assumed that teachers turned to moral insights of the extremely popular author Jacob Cats in order to find inspiration for teaching.<sup>92</sup> Writings by Jacob Cats were incredibly popular among the Dutch middle class. Nearly every middle class family owned a copy of one of Cats's works. The prominence of Cats's writing implies that he was a great influence for the social code of the Dutch middle class. Cats wrote for a variety of religious groups, illustrating that moral integrity was not strictly an emphasis for the Reformed Church, but rather a part of the social regulation and language for the entirety of the Dutch middle and upper classes.<sup>93</sup> The religious inclusivity of moral literature allows us to apply these concepts of morality to Dutch genre paintings, which also maintain rather mild religious tones.

The strong sense of national morality is reflected in the Dutch classroom. Hanging on the walls of countryside schoolhouses, among spelling charts, word tables, the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, and the Confession of Faith, one could find the "Statute." The Statute was a list of rules for children to uphold not only in the classroom, but also at home and in public life as well.<sup>94</sup> The placement of these everyday moral expectations next to the most fundamental religious guidelines and educational lessons demonstrates how the importance of morality was elevated to that of religion and literacy. Moral education was fundamental to teaching children just as religion and the liberal arts were. The importance of morality to the Dutch middle class as a whole, along

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<sup>92</sup> Groenendijk, 64

<sup>93</sup> Dekker, 137, Jacobs Cats, himself, was a Calvinist but did not write specifically for a Calvinist audience.

<sup>94</sup> Zumthor, 105-106

with the emphasis on morality in the classroom demonstrates that pressures for moral instruction came not only from the Reformed Church but from the rest of Dutch people as well. School was intended to be a place for moral teaching by influence of a Dutch identity greater than the Church.

### ***A School for Boys and Girls***

Taking into consideration the context of schooling in the Dutch Republic allows an informed analysis of Steen's *A School for Boys and Girls*. As established above, the Dutch seventeenth-century school is intended to be one of rigid rules and moral expectations. With this concept in mind, Steen's school does not align with the moral and religious uprightness that Dutch schools were intended to instill. The symbolic middle-class language that Steen participates in as a middle-class individual painting for a middle-class audience creates a school scene that defies the moral standards of Dutch education, and more generally the Dutch middle class. The iconographical details, as previously mentioned, emphasize the sense of incompetence placed on the schoolteacher in *A School for Boys and Girls*, and this incompetence is furthered when compared to scenes of orderly schools such as Steen's very own *School Teacher* (figure 11) from an unknown collection.<sup>95</sup> In this exemplary school scene, unlike in *A School for Girls and Boys*, the students are all actively working, which implies that the teacher is doing his job effectively. This effectiveness is enhanced as the teacher is seen correcting a student with a ferule in hand. Often paired with a birch branch, the ferule serves as a symbol of authority and discipline.<sup>96</sup> In *A School for Boys and Girls*, however, Steen chooses to

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 161

leave these symbols out of the image entirely. The exclusion of a ferule only emphasizes the school teacher's lack of attention and discipline. It is clear that he is not upholding the standards that were expected of Dutch schools: standards of clearly defined rules and lessons on morality, religion, and reading.

Steen's scene strays from these expectations particularly in the activities of the children in *A School for Boys and Girls*. Only two out of over twelve children are actively reading a book while the rest participate in a variety of rather reckless behaviors. One child is seen standing on a table in the background, seemingly dancing and singing a song, two children fight before him, while another sleeps in the foreground, his head rested upon his arm and hat.<sup>97</sup> These children are doing everything but learning and therefore clearly do not uphold the expectations of morality and religion that were so emphasized in Dutch schools. This kind of behavior would have been blatantly recognized as immoral by the middle-class audience thanks to the social code and regulation of the middle class formed by cultural documents such as those from Jacob Cats or van Beverwijk.

Comparing Steen's image with the ideal schoolhouse established by the Church makes clear that this school scene does not serve as a good example. This comparison invites us to consider why Steen created an image of an unruly school rather than a model one. It is possible that the unruly image is created to inspire amusement, but Durantini points out that bad examples in Dutch paintings are often used to tell moral lessons.<sup>98</sup> The various symbolic details that Steen chooses to include further this sense of didactic intention. In presenting to his audience a chaotic disorderly mess of a school, Steen

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<sup>97</sup> Zumthor, 83

<sup>98</sup> Durantini, 229

creates a kind of warning to parents and authority figures. Just as the school teacher gets distracted from his job, parents get distracted from the regimented moral teaching that was Dutch parenting. Steen's painting would likely have hung in a domestic setting in which parents would feel the weight of this comparison, reminded of their duty as moral teachers.

### **The Ape School and the Worth of Peasant Education**

*A School for Boys and Girls* does not stand alone in its portrayal of an unruly school. In fact, Steen inherits the idea from a long history of social distinction through imagery, ultimately demonstrating how *A School for Boys and Girls* participates in social distinction between peasants and the middle and upper classes. Steen's painting of a disorderly school scene traces back to depictions of apes during the Middle Ages. There were many apes included in Flemish manuscripts from the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. Because they were seen in manuscripts, the ape images only fell into the hands of the elite and were oftentimes used as satire of the intellectual elite. One of the earliest examples is seen in a series of apes playing chess from 1250.<sup>99</sup> As Janson put it: "the 'literary ape' crystallized into an image that proved extraordinarily popular: the Monkey School."<sup>100</sup> The function of apes in art is one of warning. Apes are very similar to man, but in a degenerate sense.<sup>101</sup> Humans are not meant to be apes as they lack the moral agency that makes us human and them animals. This tradition was drawn out over the years, eventually solidifying the ape as a symbol of "man's folly" in Dutch culture. The familiarity of the symbol can be seen in a quote from Erasmus's *The Praise of Folly*:

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<sup>99</sup> H.W. Janson, *Apes and Ape Lore in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (London: Warburg Institute:1952), 164-167

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 168

<sup>101</sup> Janson, 29



“an ape is an ape even if clad in purple.”<sup>102</sup> This phrase articulates that foolishness is at the core of an individual and changing that is a hopeless endeavor. Authors denouncing “man’s folly” such as Sebastian Brant, Thomas Murner, and Geiler von Kaiserberg began using ape synonymously with fool.<sup>103</sup>

Representations of lower-class life and apes together did not appear during the Middle Ages, but leaving the Middle Ages, we begin to see satirical reference to apes dressed as humans which ultimately gave the ape a new didactic purpose.<sup>104</sup> Images of ape schools eventually transform into images of peasant schools, which brings us back to *A School for Boys and Girls*.<sup>105</sup> The real significance here is that, unlike an ape school, a peasant school truly existed in the life of these artists. In creating an unruly school scene using his authority as a middle class individual and participating in the exclusive social code of the middle class, Steen is illustrating the folly of a lower class to which he and his viewer do not belong. He likens peasant children to the ape, a lesser being with no moral compass. The history of the ape school contributes to the symbolic knowledge of the Dutch middle class that Steen participates in and that his middle class audience would have understood. The exclusivity of this social code is enhanced in *A School for Boys and Girls* in that it looks down upon the peasant class using symbolic language intended for the middle class alone.

The chaos in Steen’s *A School for Boys and Girls* is reminiscent of that of a medieval ape school; the children are almost animalistic in their rowdy behavior. This similarity implies paired with the historical lineage of the ape image suggests that just as

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<sup>102</sup> Durantini, 139-140

<sup>103</sup> Janson, 168

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 168

<sup>105</sup> Durantini, 139-140

the ape school represents the folly of the upper-class man, Steen's unruly school represents the folly of the peasant class. Steen's image strongly suggests this is a school belonging to a lower class, particularly in the architecture of the building and the dress of the children. The self-mockery of the ape school is now, in the seventeenth century, the middle class pointing its finger at the mockery of the lower class. Durantini argues that the children in Steen's image are attentive and hold no blame for the disorder in the schoolhouse.<sup>106</sup> This argument becomes a problematic argument when the lens of the ape school is applied to the scene, however. Just as Erasmus insinuates in *The Praise of Folly*, these children do not stand a chance at changing their status as peasants.<sup>107</sup> While it may not be their fault, the peasant children in this scene are exactly that, just peasants and that quality remains at their core. As previously mentioned, the Dutch middle and upper classes questioned whether or not education was worth the while of peasant children, who would grow into professions that did not require formal education. This impression of peasant education is reflected in *A School for Boys and Girls*, particularly in its parallel to ape school images. The conversation regarding social status in this painting was also occurring in middle class literature such as Breton's *Cyule and Uncyule Life*, contributing to upper class attitudes toward those below them in social stature. With the knowledge that these questions were circulating paired with the historical lineage between the ape school and the unruly school, it seems that Steen is subscribing to middle-class attitude toward the Dutch lower class.

To further this class distinction, one should look back to the visual detail of *A School for Boys and Girls*. While the schoolteacher distractedly sharpens his pen, a

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<sup>106</sup> Durantini, 161

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 139

woman is seen attempting to instruct a child or two. The hat on the man's head strongly suggests that he is the teacher in the scene, so it is only fair to question the role of the woman by his side. It is possible that this woman represents another class distinction. Zumthor briefly mentions that students were often divided by social status in the schoolhouse; wealthier ones with the teacher and the poorer left with the teacher's wife or even a servant.<sup>108</sup> While there is little research beyond Zumthor's brief mention of this schoolroom hierarchy, it may hold great significance in Steen's *A School for Boys and Girls*. We see in this image a woman attempting to take charge of the instruction of the children, while the teacher himself, who should be responsible for the task, distractedly sharpens his pen. This detail emphasizes the low social status of the children if we accept Zumthor's claim. The detail also brings us back to themes from the ape school and Breton's *Cyuite and Uncyuite Life*, as in handing the children off, the teacher insinuates that peasant students are not worth his time and attention.

The portrayal of an unruly peasant school scene by a middle-class artist for a middle-class audience suggests a sense of mockery and warning. Moral didacticism is spread throughout Steen's image, but this didacticism is exclusively intended for the middle class as Steen uses his authority as a middle-class individual participating in his specific social and cultural code. This exclusivity paired with the mockery and amusement bound up in the history of the ape school highlights an intense class distinction in the Dutch social sphere. Steen reminds his fellow middle-class members of the importance of diligent parenting and moral education through this bad example, strengthening an identity of moral integrity for the Dutch people. But in the same scene,

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<sup>108</sup> Zumthor, 105

he plays with the amusement of educating the lower class, stripping their right to education and therefore their right to a moral identity that is saved for Steen's middle-class audience. In mocking the class below him, Steen seems to unify the middle class, a middle class that, using their specific symbolic language, can recognize the good from the bad.

Both of Steen's paintings considered in this chapter, *The Dissolute Household* and *A School for Boys and Girls*, participate in and reinforce the social attitudes regarding morality and class distinction. Among the myriad cultural documents seen throughout this chapter, Steen's two images support the social expectations for the middle class in that he has the authority as a middle-class individual to effectively use the symbolic language of his social class. The two scenes of chaos use children specifically to demonstrate immoral behaviors that would have resonated with Steen's audience, serving as tools for both identifying and bolstering the identity of the middle and upper classes, an identity of social distinction and morality.

### III The Black Servant Child: Exotica and Imperialism

Previous chapters have focused on exploring a national identity for the Dutch middle class. The assessment of this national identity cannot overlook the global climate in relation to the Dutch Republic as it was extremely relevant to the culture of the middle and upper classes. With trade picking up during the seventeenth century between the Republic, Asia, and South America, this sense of globalization is prominent in Dutch culture.<sup>109</sup> The Dutch Republic had also colonized parts of Africa and Indonesia and this increasing global context is attested by the inclusion of black individuals in paintings, particularly portraits.<sup>110</sup> Most paintings that include individuals of color show black children specifically. These portraits provides yet another example of children as ambivalent props, yet in the case of black servant children included in paintings we see a greater emphasis on the Republic's global domain. In this chapter I will discuss the presence of black children in Hendrik van der Burch's *The Game of Cards* and the *Posthumous Portrait of Mary I Stuart with a Servant* by Adriaen Hanneman. I argue that black servant children were considered a form of exotica and manipulated as social, visual, and intellectual foils to white individuals in Dutch paintings, ultimately participating in larger social, colonial, and imperial contexts.

#### ***Posthumous Portrait of Mary I Stuart with a Servant***

Hanneman presents a nearly glowing figure looking out to the viewer, caught in a moment of poise and grace. Light streams onto her skin from behind a brocade curtain,

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<sup>109</sup> T.H. Lunsingh Scheurleer, "Early Dutch Cabinets of Curiosity," *The Origins of Museums: The Cabinet of Curiosities in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century Europe*, ed. Oliver Impey and Arthur MacGregor (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 117

<sup>110</sup> David Bindman, Karen C. Dalton, and Henry Louis Gates eds., *Images of Black in Western Art: From the Age of Discovery to the Age of Abolition* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2010): 229

surpassing all else in the image. The radiance of this woman's pale skin is matched by the elegant glistens of her clothing and accessories: pearls and jewels delicately placed on the turban-like head dress resting on her shiny curls of hair. The jewels sparkle against the similarly radiant satin fabric of her gown. Draped across her body, a vibrant feathered tapestry pops against the fair skin and white gown of the woman, the red feathers matching her poised red lips. A full examination of the decadence presented by this woman eventually leaves the viewer to follow a path of pearls. Their eyes finally leaving her figure, they trace the pearls on her headdress, earring, necklace and finally her bracelet, which is being wrapped around her delicate wrist. Here they see a new figure, a pearl earring in his ear. The diagonal path of pearls finally ends behind this new figure, with a string of pearls falling out of a shell, making the viewer note the hazy whiteness of the background, statues and arches sitting beneath a cloudy sky. Having scanned the entire composition, the viewer comes back to the second figure, his dark skin contrasted against the white haze of classical imagery in the background. The young figure, dressed in satin, matches the color of the feathers on his counterpart's cloak. The rougher, more notable brushstrokes comprising his dark skin contrast that of the fair elegant woman to his left. Only the whites of his eyes, which stare attentively at the woman, paired with his single pearl earring can compare to her soft, smooth, almost translucent skin.

### ***The Game of Cards***

Stepping into a warm domestic moment, the viewer sees a husband and wife sitting down for a game of cards. Van der Burch illuminates the couples faces with the light from their window as they look to one another, cards in hand. Showing her card to her husband, the woman sits behind the table, the pearls of her necklace reflecting the

whiteness of her skin. Across from her, the husband sits in profile, his grand hat and vibrant red coat consume the center of the composition, his sword blatantly slung over his shoulder. Beside this interaction between husband and wife, we find a young girl with small features and rosy cheeks, her hands stroking a small dog who rests on a chair at the table and looks toward us. The dark and vibrant colors of the tapestry that hangs over the table contrasts the softness of the young girl in front of it, drawing the viewer's eye toward the back of the composition where a servant pours a glass of wine from a blue and white jug. Dressed in shimmering fabrics of yellow and orange, the servant is nearly indistinguishable, the reflective quality of his dress muting the dark features of his face. While he may be positioned in the center of the composition, the servant child holds a less dominant position than the figures surrounding him. His placement behind the table and the female figure creates a distinct separation between himself and the viewer. Ultimately, he serves as an element of the background compared to the visual vibrance of the man and woman who are seated at the table. Behind the servant whose eyes focus intently on the glass of wine, a map hangs on the large wall that closes in the composition. The light from the window passes through a bird cage and onto the map, illuminating its right side and highlighting the red and black border that unifies the color scheme of the scene. As the eyes continue to wander to the right of the composition, they take the viewer up a wooden set of stairs and out of the frame altogether, leaving this family alone to their indulgences.

### **African Presence in the Republic**

The inclusion of a black servant in van der Burch's painting confirms the fact that there were black individuals existing in the Dutch Republic, but as we have seen in

domestic genre paintings, genre images should not be read as snapshots of Dutch life. In some cases, individuals portrayed in portraits with black servants in reality did not have a servant.<sup>111</sup> Most men and women of color in the Dutch Republic were African slaves or servants working for Portuguese or Spanish merchants.<sup>112</sup> There is very little information on the actual numbers regarding African population in the Republic during the seventeenth century, but we do have scattered examples of African men and women living there.<sup>113</sup> With trade drawing merchants to the Republic from Spain and Portugal, the African slaves and servants came with their employers or masters. Slavery, however, did not technically exist in the Dutch Republic and it was illegal to enslave a Christian, complicating the arrival of slaves from Spain and Portugal as most of them were already baptized.<sup>114</sup> Finding evidence of the presence of African individuals is difficult; most examples come from criminal records. For example, a record in the archives from 1612 states that a Portuguese man and a black man stole paper; another describes a black slave named Domingos, was encouraged by a certain Liesbeth to steal from his master.<sup>115</sup> Eventually, in 1776, the matter of immigrant slaves was addressed when a law was made that slaves must be freed after living in the Republic for six months.<sup>116</sup> There are records of free black men and women in the Dutch Republic as well, many still worked as servants, but were paid for their work. However, even if freed professional opportunities

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<sup>111</sup> Bindman, Dalton, and Gates, 228

<sup>112</sup> Carl Haarnack and Dienke Hondius, “‘Swart’ (black) in the Netherlands: Africans and Creoles in the Northern Netherlands from the Middle Ages to the Twentieth Century,” *Black is Beautiful: Rubens to Dumas*, (Zwolle: Waanders Uitgevers, 2008): 92

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 92

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 98

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 92

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 98



were extremely limited.<sup>117</sup> In regards to *The Game of Cards*, the black child that van der Burch includes may not have existed. It is possible that van der Burch painted the child from a model, but it was more common for artists to base their portrayals of black figures off of those from other images.<sup>118</sup>

The second painting I consider in this chapter, a posthumous portrait of Mary I Stuart, includes a black servant child. Just as with van der Burch's image, we cannot be certain that the child in this portrait was in fact a living person. Black children are known to have been gifted to rulers in northern Europe by southern European rulers, but by the time Mary I Stuart is portrayed in this portrait, the black page had become a trend, a symbol of status that may not present reality.<sup>119</sup> There are suggestions that black individuals, or at least the idea of them, were a part of court culture for Dutch royals.<sup>120</sup> Records of the wedding of Johan Wolfert van Brederode and Louise Christina van Solms in 1638 tell that nobility occasionally dressed as Africans or "Moors" to perform fake battles.<sup>121</sup> Rembrandt attended the wedding of Johan and Louise, making sketches of the festivities which include supposed African men riding in on horses, suggesting that African individuals themselves were a part of the festivities.<sup>122</sup> The mock fighting that took place at such a celebration highlights the nobility's fascination with the foreign; African exotica was a "performance" in upper-class contexts.

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Elmer Kolfin, "Black Models in Dutch Art Between 1580 and 1800: Fact and Fiction," *Black is Beautiful: Rubens to Dumas*, (Zwolle: Waanders Uitgevers, 2008): 83

<sup>119</sup> Esther Schreuder, "'Blacks' in Court Culture in the Period 1300-1900: Propaganda and Consolation," *Black is Beautiful: Rubens to Dumas*, (Zwolle: Waanders Uitgevers, 2008): 21

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 25-27

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 28

## Catalogue of Exoticism

Jumping from one detail to the next in van der Burch's image, it is easy to note that objects in this scene play a prominent role. The home decor is notable in its excess, rather than in any objects' individual splendor. Van der Burch has created a sort of catalogue in this image, portraying one item after the other and raising the question to modern viewers, what makes these items so important? *The Game of Cards* functions similarly to that of a curiosity cabinet, falling into a greater cultural context of the Dutch middle and upper classes.

As discussed in previous chapters, home decor and art were indicators of social status and wealth. *The Game of Cards* is categorized as a genre paintings, representing, as far as we know, no real individuals in particular.<sup>123</sup> The lack of identity in this image, however, does not mean that the objects portrayed do not work to create a sense of prestige for the painting's owner. The catalogue-like style of this image, portraying one fine object after the other, demonstrates the (possibly fictional) wealth of the paintings owner while also projecting a sense of empire for the Dutch Republic more generally. It is possible that the owners of this image could afford this painting itself, but not their own servant or a large wall map. In placing these expensive and exotic items within the image, the impression of exoticism and prestige are reflected to others. Including these items not only makes a statement for the owner, but it also serves as a symbol of national pride, recognizing the far-reaching domain of the Dutch Republic. The painting essentially serves the same purpose of the map in its domestic context, expressly stated in the presence of the map within the image. As a passive figure, the servant child in this

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<sup>123</sup> W.R. Valentiner, "The Card Players by Hendrick van der Burch," *Bulletin of the Detroit Institute of Arts of the City of Detroit* 10 no. 8, (1929): 102

image becomes an ambivalent prop on the list of exotic items in the scene, contributing to the status of the painting's owner and to the national identity of the Dutch Republic.

One item of van der Burch's exotic catalogue is the printed wall map. The map in *The Game of Cards* is faint and difficult to make out, but regardless of whether it depicts the Dutch Republic or foreign lands, wall maps were an object of exoticism and national pride. Serving as an expressly exotic and intellectual object, the map creates a sense of worldliness for its owner, just as the servant child does. A prominent Dutch cartographer, Willem Blaeu, said on the topic of creating his maps: "To provide ornamentation and delight I have also depicted in the border, in addition to eight mightiest princes who in our time rule the world, as well as the principal eight cities and multiform costumes of different peoples so that many inquisitive viewers may be pleased."<sup>124</sup> Here we see that wall maps were meant to serve a greater purpose than simply an educational one: they were also matters of pleasure, but it is essential to not overlook the statement that Blaeu's audience is specifically the "inquisitive viewer." With the ornament that Blaeu includes in his borders, it is clear that he uses iconography targeted toward a specific class of people, those with the education to recognize the "eight mightiest princes...as well as the principal eight cities." Blaeu mentions the different costumes of "different peoples," referencing the inclusion of African individuals in map borders. Maps open possibilities for the representation of African figures, marking a shift toward more accurate portrayals of black figures. This is because images of Africans that came before were primarily woodblock prints, which as a technique made the articulation of darker skin tones rather

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<sup>124</sup> Elmer Kolfin, "Tradition and Innovation in Dutch Ethnographic Prints of Africans 1590-1670," *De Zeventiende Eeuw. Cultuur in de Nederlanden in interdisciplinair perspectief* 32 no. 2 (2017): 177

challenging to achieve as the grain of wood is not very forgiving.<sup>125</sup> Maps opened the way for paintings of African individuals. With their imagery of far off lands and people, wall maps served as a window to new worlds, targeted toward the curious and intellectual. In 1648, J. Hartgerts says that maps allowed Dutch individuals “to examine the strange things and acquire knowledge of exotic lands, people, states and trade without risking his life, as if he had visited them personally.”<sup>126</sup> The wall map was a luxury item, providing its owner with a sense of social status.<sup>127</sup> The presence of a wall map in a Dutch home also served as a constant reminder of the Dutch domain and national pride. The servant child in van der Burch’s image serves a similar purpose, belonging to this catalogue of exotic items, his own home likely represented as a far off land on the map behind him.

We see a similar sense of national pride and value placed on exoticism in a different cultural phenomenon of the Dutch middle and upper classes as well: curiosity cabinets. These collections are essentially physical catalogues of foreign or exotic objects displayed together, generally including items of naturalia and exotica. It was not until the establishment of a new university and the increased trade from the East and West that Dutch curiosity collections were put on the map.<sup>128</sup> An Italian collector, Ulisse Aldrovandi, with a famous collection of curiosities kept a record of significant collections across regions. In the 1590s, as trade picked up in Holland and collections became more

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<sup>125</sup> Kolfin, “Tradition and Innovation in Dutch Ethnographic Prints of Africans 1590-1670,” 173-176

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 166

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 176

<sup>128</sup> Eric Jorink, *Reading the Book of Nature in the Dutch Golden Age: 1575-1715*, (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 265

impressive in their extravagance and place of origin.<sup>129</sup> Eventually, Dutch curiosity collections gained popularity, attracting visitors such as Cosimo de Medici who made two trips between 1667 and 1669.<sup>130</sup> The major collection of Frederick Henry of Nassau included exotica, feather work objects, jewelry, and instruments, which he acquired via the governor-general Johan Maurits who lived in Brazil.<sup>131</sup> It was common to see individuals of high nobility, such as Princes of Orange, invested in collecting for their curiosity cabinets, but we also see evidence of individuals like Frederick Ruysch, a professor of anatomy whose collection focused greatly on anatomical curiosities and was visited by Cosimo de Medici on his trip to the Republic.<sup>132</sup> Collections were not limited to precious items like jewelry; the fascination with foreign lands was expansive. Johan Maurits' own collection held a number of natural items from foreign places.<sup>133</sup>

Maurits' collection was eventually stored all together at the Mauritshuis. A fresco was painted there amongst the exotic curiosities, which Jacob de Hennin describes in 1681 as "life like all the heathen and barbaric nations, male and female, moors, negroes, Brazilians, wild Papouyas, Hottentots and other savage nations, who are all God's creatures."<sup>134</sup> De Hennin's choice of words in this description is important in making the connection between curiosity cabinets and the treatment of African servants or slaves in the Dutch Republic. Referring to these foreign nations de Hennin uses words like

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 262

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 266

<sup>131</sup> Isabel Yaya, "Wonders of America: The curiosity cabinet as a site of representation and knowledge," *Journal of the History of Collections* 20 no. 2, (2008): 179

<sup>132</sup> Scheurleer, 119-120

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 118-119, Knowing they would one day deteriorate, Maurits enlisted his court painter, Albert Eckhout, to paint these items from his collection so they would last in some form within his collection.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 118

“heathen,” “barbaric,” and “savage.” His word choice is belittling and labels foreigners as less than human. Looking to descriptions of curiosity cabinets we see similar use of language. A Dutch scientist and collector, Jan Swammerdam wrote in regards to a study on the louse as a foreign object: “I present to you herewith the Almighty Finger of God the anatomy of a louse; in which you will find wonder piled upon wonder and God’s Wisdom clearly exposed in one minute particle.”<sup>135</sup> The discussion of this curiosity aligns with de Hennin’s language used to describe the people of “savage nations:” wild individuals like the louse described by Swammerdam. This impression of foreigners as wild beings gives the sense that black individuals were considered to be a sort of animal or exotic curiosity of their own to the Dutch people, much like the louse or the feathered items in Frederick Henry of Nassau’s cabinet of curiosities.

Hendrik van der Burch subscribes to this Dutch perception of black individuals as exotic objects for collection in *The Game of Cards*, particularly in choosing to portray the black figure as a child, a social type we have found to be socially ambivalent in past chapters. Creating a sort of two dimensional visual curiosity cabinet, with a Chinese porcelain or Delftware jug, the printed wall map of foreign lands, and exotic looking tapestry over the table, van der Burch catalogues a number of exotic items. The painting functions as a curiosity cabinet on a small scale, allowing someone to own a curiosity collection without having it. The black servant child falls into this list of exotic goods in his perception as a sort of savage due to his race and his passive role as a child. Contributing to van der Burch’s catalogue of exoticism, the child boosts the status and

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 120

worldliness of the paintings owner while also contributing to the concept of domain within the national identity of the Dutch middle and upper classes.

### **The Posthumous Portrait**

Adriaen Hanneman uses a similar sort of cataloguing in his portrait of Mary I Stuart. In this case, however, the catalogue is explicitly linked to a specific identity and, also unlike van der Burch's, a royal one. Commissioned by her son after her, this portrait participates in specific trends of the seventeenth century that contribute to the sort of commodification of black servant children as we saw in van der Burch's image. This painting's purpose as a posthumous portrait is to commemorate the subject's wealth and status to be remembered years after their death. Serving as a sort of visual epitaph, nearly every element of the painting should work to enhance a lasting impression of the figure. Again in this image we see a painting taking the form of a small-scale curiosity cabinet. The black servant serves as her foil, participating in a dualistic relationship of dominance and intimacy, promulgating the imperial vision of nationalistic enterprise.

The servant child in Hanneman's image serves as a striking visual foil to Mary I Stuart, participating in the trend of using black children as props in Dutch paintings and contributing to the notion of domain within the Dutch identity. As the Dutch author and artist Samuel van Hoogstraten said in his book *Inleyding tot de Hooge Schoole der Schilderkonst*: "the eye finds pleasure sometimes to add a Moor to a Maiden."<sup>136</sup> The darkness of the servant child's skin only enhances the white glow of his counterpart and focal point of the image: Mary I Stuart. Contrasting the whiteness of the sitter's skin with a child of color seems to have been a trend in portraiture. Just as van Hoogstraten stated,

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<sup>136</sup> Bindman, Dalton, and Gates, 227-228

a French fashion print noted how in style it was to have an African boy in a portrait in order to make your skin appear whiter, using him practically as a cosmetic.<sup>137</sup> Mary's servant, however, mirrors the colors of the brocade curtain, sinking into the background, serving as a backdrop, and creating a dark presence to enhance the brightness of Mary's figure. Had he been placed in front of the brocade curtain as well, the servant child would likely have been camouflaged, matching the dark tones of the curtain. With the classical statues and white clouds behind him, however, the child is visible but not nearly as crystal clear as Mary herself, which we will see is due to difference in brushwork. There is a sort of color coordinated categorization implemented here by Hanneman. The precious items of bright white, marble statues, pearls, and reflective jewels, match the brightness of Mary's skin, but cannot rival it as the whitest white in the composition. The two categories of tones, light and dark, seem to distinguish between Dutch perception of beauty and simply object. Mary is idealized with her white skin, like the white of the pearls or the white of the statues. The servant child, with his dark tones, matches the brocade curtain and less distinguishable patches of background, serving the visual purpose of contrast, making Mary's precious whites appear even more pronounced.

These distinct color choices lend themselves to the clarity of figures, but examining Hanneman's brushwork reveals some distinct differences in clarity beyond tone alone. The pristine, smooth quality of Mary's skin shows Hanneman's ability to paint flawless planes. Each lock of hair on Mary's head glistens with great attention to detail, as if Hanneman took the time to paint each strand. Turning to the servant child, this sense of pristine clarity is lost. Particularly on the child's head and neck, Hanneman's

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<sup>137</sup> Kolfin, "Black Models in Dutch Art between 1580 and 1800: Fact and Fiction," 83



hand is much more obvious. One may argue that the dark colors that comprise the child's figure may not have allowed for the level of detail we see in Mary. But, unlike earlier artists who struggled with tonal distinction in woodblocks of African individuals, Hanneman works with the forgiving and malleable medium of oil paint.<sup>138</sup> The rather distinct brushstrokes on the servant child's head and neck only further his position as an afterthought and tool; he provides a service to Mary quite literally in his job description, but also visually as a passive prop used to enhance her beauty and status.

Samuel van Hoogstraten's advice of adding "a Moor to a Maiden" may have referred to the sense of visual contrast that the servant's presence creates in the portrait of Mary I Stuart, but it may also refer to social and intellectual contrasts between the two figures. The relationship between Mary and her servant is dualistic in its sense of social distinction and intimacy. We see the servant child wrapping a string of pearls around the wrist of the royal woman. This imagery becomes a common motif in Dutch portraits, evident also in Jan Mijtens portrait of Margaretha van Raephorst (figure 12).<sup>139</sup> In Mijtens image there is a very similar contrast in tones, suppressing the servant child to the darkness of the background. The servant attentively focuses on the task at hand of wrapping a string of pearls around the sitter's wrist. The role of a servant is so obviously to serve his or her employer, but the gesture of stringing pearls in these scenarios seems rather different from the kind of service we see from the servant in van der Burch's image who pours wine at the table. Wrapping the string of pearls around Mary's wrist appears to

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<sup>138</sup> Kolfin, "Tradition and Innovation in Dutch Ethnographic Prints of Africans 1590-1670," 169, Some of the earliest images of African individuals were made with woodblock prints. The unforgiving grain of wood made shading difficult and the dark skin of the African individuals being portrayed forced artists to choose between naturalistic tonality or anatomy.

<sup>139</sup> Bindman, Dalton, and Gates, 225

be more of an intimate gesture than that of van der Burch's servant. Mary's servant is inches from touching her fair skin, looking up at her cautiously and attentively, as if one wrong move could disrupt her. Mary herself rests with confidence and ease, with no concern for her servant and an imposing sense of power. She seems to trust her servant, but as we look at the child himself staring up at Mary from below, we are also reminded of the disparity of power between the two. The dualistic impression of dominance and intimacy that Hanneman creates in this image is common in portraits that include black servant children. A portrait such as Cristóvão de Morais's of Joanna of Austria (figure 13) creates a similar relationship of both protection and power between nobility and servant, with Joanna's hand placed on the head of her servant. She holds her hand on the head of her servant in a protective manner, but his scale relative to her makes it clear that she is a figure of power in their relationship. While there is a sense of intimacy between servant and sitter in the posthumous portrait, the social distinction between the two is clear in their differing representations.

The servant included in Mary's portrait does not work alone in emphasizing her worldliness. As mentioned earlier, he is part of an exotic catalogue as we saw in van der Burch's painting. The list of exotic items that this child falls into only furthers his role as a prop, an ambivalent tool in Hanneman's image and a representation of racial discrimination in the Dutch Republic, discrimination that classified people of color as savage others. A prominent aspect of Mary's image in this painting is her outfit. She wears a good deal of featherwork on her, on her headdress and draped across her chest. Featherwork objects were a popular import from the Americas and we know their value

based on their presence in great collections like that of Frederick Henry of Nassau.<sup>140</sup> A specific example of such feather work is from the King of Denmark's collection. In an inventory taken in 1689 lists a feather cloak from Tupinamba, located on the coast of what is now Brazil, as a part of the King's collection.<sup>141</sup> Other examples of such dramatic feather pieces from Tupinamba were found in Brussels, Berlin, and Paris.<sup>142</sup> Engravings by Theodor de Bry illustrate these feather cloaks<sup>143</sup> in his travel collections, which are known to have been available in relevant Dutch book stores.<sup>144</sup> In relation to the prominence of feather cloaks within prestigious collections across Europe, the feather work draped across Mary's chest makes a clear statement about her status. The feathers dominate her costume, leaving some space for the satin and the jewel details of her dress to shine through. In their original native American context, feather cloaks were used in ceremonies and served a somewhat magical purpose.<sup>145</sup> In collecting these items, and particularly in Mary I Stuart wearing one in her portrait, the symbolic power of the feather cloak is appropriated by the westerner. In this new context, it serves a function of royal status. There is a fascination with the exotic in the dramatic presence of these feather work items, but the detail also makes a claim to Mary's prestige.

Beyond claims of Mary's status, the notion of imperial domain is present in her portrait. As we have discussed thus far, there is a sense of national pride and domain that comes along with images of exotica, demonstrating the persistence of domain in the

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<sup>140</sup> Yaya, 179

<sup>141</sup> Jean Michel Massing, "Feather Cloak," in *Circa 1492: Art in the Age of Exploration*, ed. Jay A. Levenson (Washington D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1991), 574

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 574

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>144</sup> Michiel Van Groesen, *Representations of the Overseas World in the de Bry Collection of Voyages (1590-1634)*, (Leiden: Brill, 2008): 352

<sup>145</sup> Levenson, 574

Dutch identity. A direct reference to this sense of domain is seen in the sculptures depicted in the background of the composition. While they are faint, the sculptures clearly reference imperial antiquity in their form. In making visual reference to the Roman Empire, the ideal of conquest is emphasized in this image. The statues are a part of this small scale curiosity cabinet, attributing a domain similar to that of the Roman Empire to the Dutch Republic.

Behind Mary's servant sits a rather large shell, a string of pearls spilling out from the inside. The presence of shells in paintings is a Dutch tradition rooted in collection and also contributes to this concept of creating a kind of curiosity cabinet through Hanneman's painting. The collection of exotic shells began during the Renaissance, when prominent figures like Albrecht Durer purchased shells while in the Netherlands and Erasmus, who seems to have curated the first true collection of exotic shells.<sup>146</sup> In Philibert van Borssele's poem "Strande" from 1611, we see praise of shells in regards to God's creation.<sup>147</sup> Just as de Hennin and Sammerdam wrote of their exotic items, van Borssele attributes the wonder of shells to the Creator. Paludanus' collection of curiosities, comprised of 16,500 objects, included roughly 4,000 exotic shells.<sup>148</sup> In his collection's catalogue, Paludanus wrote of his "various spiral or twisted shells, mussel shells and snail shells, medium sized, small and very small, all different in form and colour: herein can be seen God, of whose wondrous almighty power the poet has rightly said: 'Divine power sports in human matters.'"<sup>149</sup> As we saw with these previous

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<sup>146</sup> Jean Michel Massing, "The Quest for the Exotic: Albrecht Durer in the Netherlands," *Circa 1492: Art in the Age of Exploration*, ed. Jay A. Levenson, (Washington D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1991): 127

<sup>147</sup> Scheurleer, 115

<sup>148</sup> Jorink, 269

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 277

examples, the association between a natural object and God's grace aligns with the discussion of African individuals as savages or creatures, reducing them to objects. A major Dutch shell collector, Jan Govertsen, is seen in multiple portraits in the early seventeenth century, always with his shells by his side.<sup>150</sup> The commodification of this natural object seen in Govertsen's portraits is seen in that of Mary I Stuart's as well, adding to her list of exotic goods and therefore her status as an intellectual individual. Her servant is no different from the shell, serving as a tool in this image to enhance her image both visually and socially.

While Hanneman's image functions as a portrait and van der Burch's as a genre painting, both images manipulate a black servant child to create a sense of status for their patrons. In addition to the creation of status, the presence of these servant children participates in and contributes to the ideal of domain that was part of the Dutch national identity. These images serve as kinds of curiosity cabinets, illustrating the prized exoticism of people of color and imported goods and highlighting the significance that Dutch domain held as part of a national identity. Across every chapter of this project cultural and social conditions are considered in relation to various cultural documents, all of which are outcomes of global situations such as the mercantile projects of the Dutch Republic. While we may see representations of children in these paintings take different forms, they consistently serve as passive actors that reinforce the national identity of the Dutch middle and upper classes.

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<sup>150</sup> Scheurleer, 116

## Conclusion

The lack of research regarding Dutch children in art has left a valuable opportunity untouched. Considering social and cultural contexts of the Dutch Republic, analyzing the presence of children in Dutch painting reveals intricacies of the social structures and attitudes of the Dutch middle and upper class. My research demonstrates how children serve as social regulators, reinforcing an identity of morality, social and gender distinctions, and imperial ambitions.

Frans Hals' *Family Group in a Landscape* (figure 14) is a meaningful place to end my discussion. The painting presents a family standing in a natural landscape: mother, father, son, daughter, and servant. The son looks out to the viewer playfully, almost in a mischievous manner as one hand sits on his hip, the other holding a stick. With a smirk on his face, there is a sense that this child has a mischievous plan in mind, or perhaps he has just performed a trick of some sort. The ambiguity in this figure serves as a moral reminder, the potential for wrongdoing is seen in this child's face. Next to him, husband and wife are hand in hand, looking to each other as they dominate the forefront of the composition. The husband, with his large scale and dynamic movement of his legs, dominates the image. Set behind the reaching leg of her husband, the woman takes his hand, but not as an equal partner. She is set back with her daughter and servant, restricting her role. As the viewer's eye continues to move through the figures in Hals' painting, they must look back to the black servant child who stands next to the Dutch wife, but set back even further than the woman and her daughter. The servant looks to the viewer just as the son, but in a much more chilling manner. There is no mischief found on his face, no smirk. His unwavering stare separates him from the pleasant expressions of

the white individuals in the image. Hals distinguishes between each social role in his image compositionally. The recession of figures demonstrates their limited and increasingly passive roles in Dutch society: the man at the forefront, women and children receding back, and the black servant child serving as a member of the background and landscape, becoming a symbol of nationalistic identity.

Paired with the six paintings I have addressed in this project, *Family Group in a Landscape* informs us of the identity of the Dutch middle and upper classes, an identity that values morality, nationalistic enterprise, and social distinction. Images of children serve as actors in a social code. When placed in the context of household manuals and literature from the time, *The Dissolute Household* exhibits the domestic realm as the primary location for moral education, stressing how pertinent morality was to the Dutch identity. *A School for Boys and Girls* serves a similar purpose, noticed in relation to the morally-focused curriculum of Dutch schools, also participates in a social regulation beyond that of moral concern. Tracing the lineage of the image of apes in Dutch art and relating it to Steen's image of a schoolhouse reveals insinuations of class distinctions, ultimately reiterating middle- and upper-class beliefs that those of lower classes do not need to be formally educated.

Examples of the model child found in *The Bedroom* and *A Maidservant in a Niche*, we see the Dutch identity embodied in the emphasis on social and gendered roles in the Dutch Republic. Dou's portrayal of a maidservant with mother and child in the background subscribes to the discussion of maidservants and their role in Dutch literature as well as the role of Dutch women as keepers of the household. The image therefore reinforces both the gender and social roles of the women included in the image, enhanced

by the presence of the child. *The Bedroom* serves a similar purpose of reinforcement of gendered roles, specifically in its portrayal of domestic gendered space. Both of these images subscribe to existing beliefs regarding the role of women in Dutch society, seen in widely received writings from male authors such as Cats and van Beverwijck. The gendered and social roles displayed through the women and children in the model child examples prove to be oppressive in their specificity and persistent presence in Dutch culture.

In Hanneman's *Posthumous Portrait of Mary I Stuart with a Servant* and van der Burch's *The Game of Cards*, the servant child serves as piece in a kind of conceptual and artistic curiosity cabinet, revealing ideals of nationalistic enterprise. These paintings present a catalogue of exotic items, treating their respective servant children as objects and indicators of status. Using black servant children as props, van der Burch and Hanneman both create images of exoticism and larger imperial aspirations for the Republic. The fascination of the Dutch middle and upper classes with exotic items was seen in the fixation on curiosity cabinets and displays of empire. These two images from van der Burch and Hanneman includes the black servant children as a part of the display of empire and fascination with all things foreign, while also serving to enhance the image of the Dutch individuals portrayed in the paintings.

My research on Dutch genre painting addresses the presence of children in a new way, understanding how the inclusion of children in images would have informed existing aspects of the Dutch identity. While children have been briefly considered in literature on Dutch painting, there is yet to be any critical research on how their presence creates a sense of the Dutch identity of moral and national enterprise. Considering



children in paintings as more than just lessons on parenting for Dutch adults, I examine how the inclusion of these multivalent figures reveals greater social norms and expectations of the Dutch middle and upper classes. The values that children in these paintings reveal ultimately contributes to an identity of morality, imperial ambition, and social and gender distinction. My research fills a hole in art historical literature on the Dutch Republic. In closely examining the position of children in Dutch painting, this specific identity of the Dutch people is revealed.

The specific servant child in Frans Hals group portrait discussed above has recently been brought to light in modern discourse. In a Ted Talk from Titus Kaphar titled “Can Art Amend History?”, the contemporary artist discusses his experience of black figures in Western art and art history.<sup>151</sup> Kaphar brings Frans Hals’ *Family Group in a Landscape* to the forefront of his conversation, telling his audience that “there’s more written about dogs in art history than this other character here [in reference to the black servant child].” Kaphar culminates his discussion with the presentation of a recreated painting of *Family Group in a Landscape* that he painted himself, which is almost identical to Hals’ image. Picking up a paintbrush on stage, Kaphar begins to paint over the image. Mixed with linseed oil, the white paint that Kaphar adds to the image covers each of the white figures in the group portrait, but as he mentions, the oil in the paint will fade the pigment over time, revealing the figures once again. Kaphar does not intend to erase the white individuals in the image but to “shift your gaze.”<sup>152</sup> The final painting that Kaphar completes on stage is now part of the contemporary art collection at

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<sup>151</sup> Titus Kaphar, “Can Art Amend History?,” TED video, filmed April 2017, [https://www.ted.com/talks/titus\\_kaphar\\_can\\_art\\_amend\\_history](https://www.ted.com/talks/titus_kaphar_can_art_amend_history)

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 9:35

the Brooklyn Museum (figure 15). Visitors who encounter this image will first see the black servant child looking out at them, the richness of his skin enhanced by Kaphar's bold white brushstrokes that surround him. We see here a reversal of what artist's like Adriaen Hanneman did in his posthumous portrait. Rather than using the black of the servant's skin to emphasize the white of Mary I Stuart's, the white paint that covers the white individuals in Kaphar's painting enhances the black skin of the child, reclaiming the image as one that belongs to the servant, not the Dutch family. I hope that in this project I have made a similar gesture to that of Kaphar's, not only analyzing how marginal figures in Dutch art can inform our understanding of a Dutch identity, but also refocusing our gaze to these marginal individuals.

## Illustrations

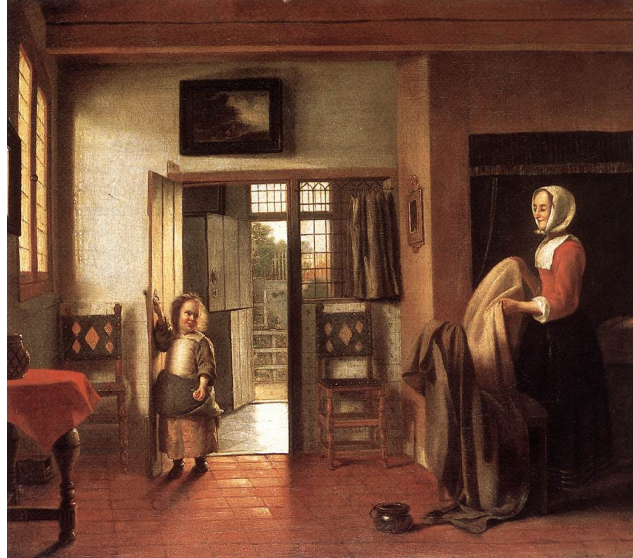


Figure 1. Pieter de Hooch, *The Bedroom*, 1658-1660. Oil on canvas. National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.



Figure 2. Gerrit Dou, *A Maidservant in a Niche*, 1660. Oil on panel. Museum Boijmans van Beuningen.



Figure 3. Jan Steen, *A School for Boys and Girl*, 1670. Oil on canvas. National Galleries Scotland.



Figure 4. Jan Steen, *The Dissolute Household*, 1660s. Oil on canvas. English Heritage, The Wellington, Apsley House.



Figure 5. Adriaen Hanneman, *Posthumous Portrait of Mary I Stuart with a Servant*, 1664. Oil on canvas. Mauritshuis.



Figure 6. Unknown artist, untitled, from van Beverwijk, *Wtnementhdeiets Geslachten*, 1643. National Library of the Netherlands, The Hague.



Figure 7. Hendrik van der Burch, *The Game of Card*, 1660. Oil on canvas. Detroit Institute of Arts.



Figure 8. Gerrit Dou, *Old Woman with a Jug at a Window*, 1660-1665. Oil on panel. Kunsthistorisches Museum.



Figure 9. Caspar Netscher, *A Lady Teaching a Child to Read*, 1670s. Oil on oak. The National Gallery, London.



Figure 10. Cornelis de Man, *The Reading Lesson*, 1621-1706. Canvas. Hoogsteder & Hoogsteder, The Hague.



Figure 11. Jan Steen, *School Teacher*, 1668. Oil on canvas. Private Collection.



Figure 12. Jan Mijtens, *Portrait of Margaretha van Raephorst, Wife of Cornelis Tromp*, 1668. Oil on canvas. Rijksmuseum.





Figure 13. Cristóvão de Morais, *Portrait of Joanna of Austria 1535-1573, daughter of emperor Charles V, 1551-1552*. Oil on canvas. Royal Museum of Fine Arts of Belgium.



Figure 14. Frans Hals, *Family Group in a Landscape, 1645-1648*. Oil on canvas. Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid.



Figure 15. Titus Kaphar, *Shifting the Gaze*, 2017. Oil on canvas. Brooklyn Museum of Art.

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