

Dolls: the Realm of Make-Believe

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Just like Gulliver in Lilliput, a child is a giant among his toys. When a little girl takes a doll in her hands she enters a world of make-believe where she commands and possesses. Above anything else, dolls are symbols of identity. The little girl holds the doll on her lap, cuddles her or throws her away: playing is a game of power that reflects the adult world. The presence of a particular doll may give comfort and security: she has a life and a history. There is a love relationship that sometimes outlasts childhood during which the doll may be forgotten, left on the bed, cuddled, rescued or even, in later times, restored.

To play is to imitate the ways of the real world or act out different roles. A time of play is also a representation in which a doll assumes several personalities: she sleeps or eats while the child also sleeps or eats. One cannot forget that the latin word for 'to play', *ludere*, retains two different meanings; to play as a child and to perform in the theatre. A collection of dolls is a theatre in constant performance where the child does not merely observe but also interacts with dolls, being both actor and audience, changing experiences. The real world is recreated and brought to life over and over again. (Manguel 2006)

As adults, we need not put this world away. For adults, as for children, the world of make believe does not replace the real world: they exist side by side, though we know, as adults, that to play is to enjoy the gift of unmeasured ideals. Dolls make us learn about the world and 19th century French dolls, especially, take us to the everyday world of that time. Loving them today, as works of art, is an attempt to grasp this world and find our place in it.



(Three Tete Jumeau Bebe size 8, original outfits and shoes,(1886-9) Maria João Pires collection)

The second Empire under Napoleon III brought deep changes in French society, especially the rise of a middle class with a completely new ideal of living. The bourgeoisie aspired to a noble behaviour, trying hard to learn moral and aesthetic values, particularly in the education of children. Based on the models of high society, literature and magazines for the young always made strong appeals to well-mannered and morally irreproachable children.

In the second half of the nineteenth-century, French children were not kept out of adult's sight on nurseries, cared by nannies. They were well dressed little creatures, who strolled in parks, boulevards and in every fashionable place, displaying their beautiful dolls. Prisoner of social and moral conventions, middle and upper class French children only enjoyed the freedom of meeting other children or dressing as they wished by the early years of the twentieth century. In the nineteenth century, the little girl was expected to behave as her parents commanded. During this historical period, the doll market developed very fast. Already considered by nobility as models for fashion, human beauty or morals, dolls filled the children imagination with models of behaviour. During the second half of the nineteenth century, the fascination with dolls gradually extended from the privileged few of the *ancien régime* to the children of the middle class. The mid nineteenth-century extravagant French dolls were dressed in imitation of elegantly dressed adults, thus providing the little girl a model of adult behaviour.

Madame la Comtesse de Ségur '*Les Petites Filles Modèles*' (1858) presents two little sisters, Camille and Madeleine who, like many other privileged children of that time, played all day long with their dolls, learning how to dress and behave. From then on, dolls would be adopted by each generation as models for children and we can easily think of some examples, extending

through late nineteenth century to twentieth century as Mignonette, Bleurette, or even Barbie. (Odin 2007: 20-5)

One of the first educational aims of a doll in the second half of the nineteenth century was to help little girls practice sewing. Presented as ideal learning tools, the early dolls had china heads and stuffed cloth bodies. Jean Jacques Rousseau had already shown the importance of role playing in education so, this type of doll went on till early twentieth century, always showing the importance of sewing in the education of the little girls.



*(Learning sewing box with the little model doll. SFBJ (1900) (Société Française des Bebes et Jouets)
Au Bon Marché
Maria João Pires Collection*

Models or playthings, dolls completed the child/adult identity game reproducing everyday life situations. This is clearly shown in the first generation of bisque head dolls made by the Parisian firms such as Huret or Rhomer where dolls could wear both children's or adult's outfits. From the mid 1870s onwards, the Jumeau firm achieved high success producing luxurious dolls, thus getting the attention of every child of the bourgeoisie. Soon the Jumeau company was to be seen as Prince of Doll Makers. In 19th century France, the *Bebe Jumeau* acquired an important role in social status : the Bébés Jumeau displayed in exhibits in Paris from the 1880s to the late 1890s and, by means of far advanced distribution methods for the time, they became well known in Europe as well as in the USA. While the little dolls such as Mignonette had a specific role on educating children with several sewing techniques, the Bébés Jumeau had a target customer: the rich child who didn't sew for the doll, but bought expensive factory clothes to dress her.

With some exceptions, where the child also included some home made clothes in her Bébés Jumeau trousseau, most of the Bébés wore factory outfits. They evolved through decades in different models, each with an identity, all of them perfect works of art. They were meant to be luxury dolls for the upper class privileged children. The name Jumeau would become synonymous with

the doll, crossing national frontiers and magically reaching the heart of generations of children. These dolls are a unique and perfect expression of art and beauty and maybe I will come back some other time to speak a bit more about them. (Theimer 1994: 6-8)



*Emile Jumeau Déposé Bébé Jumeau in size 11 (1885-6) with original antique outfit.
Maria João Pires Collection*



*Tete Jumeau size 10 with a factory original outfit, original marked Jumeau shoes
and original box (1886-9)
Maria João Pires Collection*



Tete Jumeau size 7 and her wonderful trousseau full of all original clothes, including hats, shoes, undergarments and dolly's little books. (1886-9) Maria João Pires Collection.

Works Cited

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